DFG Releases Necropsy Results of Mountain Lions Shot in Half Moon Bay

December 21, 2012

The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) today released the results of necropsies performed on two mountain lions shot by DFG law enforcement staff on Dec. 1 in Half Moon Bay.

The necropsies showed the two female lions were about four months old and in poor condition. DFG biologists believe it is unlikely they would have been able to survive in the wild. The two lions weighed about 13 and 14 pounds and their stomachs were empty.

“An incident like this one requires time to gather all the facts. With the necropsy reports, I now realize these animals were smaller than assumed. I regret this unfortunate incident in Half Moon Bay for all involved,” said DFG Director Charlton H. Bonham. “The Department intends to learn from this experience. We take the safety of the public and the welfare of California’s wildlife with the utmost seriousness.”

The two lions were first reported to DFG on Nov. 30 by the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office. On the advice of DFG staff, sheriff’s deputies encouraged the lions to move out of the residential area.

The lions returned to Half Moon Bay the following day, Dec. 1. By the time wardens arrived at approximately 2 p.m., the lions were under a backyard deck and the rain was constant. Wardens were only able to see the heads and faces of the lions.

“In a perfect world we would have had further non-lethal options available. Law enforcement authorities from the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office and DFG attempted to haze the lions over a 36-hour period but were unable to move the lions out of the area. Our trained wardens work in extraordinarily difficult circumstances every day and this day was no exception,” said DFG Assistant Chief Tony Warrington.

Had the lions not been put down, it is most likely that they would have been captured and turned over to a facility for permanent housing as they were not believed to be able to survive on their own in the wild.

“Prior to the incident at Half Moon Bay, I directed the department’s leadership team to evaluate our guidelines on how we respond to interactions with mountain lions and bears and determine how we can do better,” Bonham said. “I look forward to the results of that review, which I expect to receive in January.”

As part of that review, Bonham and senior DFG leadership met recently with Mountain Lion Foundation executive director Tim Dunbar. A separate meeting between DFG leadership and several other interested stakeholders took place more recently. Bonham reaffirmed his commitment in a call to the Foundation today.

In addition to challenging conditions that field staff sometimes faces in the field, the search for ways to improve response to wildlife interactions face additional challenges.

Among those challenges is the scarcity of space in which to rehabilitate wild animals and house them in captivity. Even when suitable captive space is available, difficult decisions must be made regarding when it is appropriate to take a wild animal into permanent captivity.

Members of the media and interested stakeholders wishing to obtain copies of the necropsy report should contact Mike Taugher at mtaugher@dfg.ca.gov or the phone number listed above.

Media Contacts:
Mike Taugher DFG Communications, (916) 591-0140