IN BRIEF

Authorizes the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to partner with wildlife groups and nonprofits when responding to mountain lion incidents if there is no imminent threat to human life.

Requires DFW to utilize nonlethal options when responding to incidents like the one that led to the fatal shooting of two mountain lion cubs by a game warden in the backyard of a home in Half Moon Bay on December 1, 2012.

THE ISSUE

Current law doesn’t clearly authorize DFW to develop partnerships with veterinarians, scientists, zoos and other individuals and organizations to work with state game wardens when mountain lions wander too close to humans. This bill is necessary since wildlife and nonprofit organizations throughout the state have the capability and experience to assist with mountain lion incidents. As an example, the Peninsula Humane Society, which rescues and rehabs injured and orphaned native wildlife, saved the lives of 1,450 wild animals last year in San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Current state regulations do not give DFW much flexibility when mountain lions venture into areas populated by humans like the incidents that resulted in the Half Moon shootings and another mountain lion shooting in Redwood City in 2011. DFW’s rules clearly state, "When evidence shows that a wild animal is an imminent threat to public safety, that wild animal shall be humanely euthanized (shot, killed, dispatched, destroyed, etc.)." Unfortunately, the way the guidelines are currently written, on-the-ground responses treat any situation where a lion "might somehow" come into contact with a human – no matter how unlikely – as a situation of "imminent threat."

BACKGROUND

On Nov. 30, 2012, two sibling mountain lion cubs were observed in a Half Moon Bay neighborhood near Burleigh Murray Ranch State Park. The lions, which DFW officials initially said weighed 25 to 30 pounds, were fatally shot after game wardens and San Mateo County sheriff’s deputies were unable to shoo them out of the neighborhood. Necropsies showed the female lions were only about four months old, weighed 13 to 14 pounds, and were starving and unlikely to survive in the wild without their mother.

Hundreds of mountain lion sightings are reported every year in California. Attacks on humans are rare. Of potential public safety incidents, many situations can be resolved without requiring the death of the lion. Unfortunately, the current policies and practices of DFW do not allow nonlethal options that both protect public safety and save the life of the lion. DFW's current rules are spelled out clearly in the department’s public safety guidelines: "When evidence shows that a wild animal is an imminent threat to public safety, that wild animal shall be humanely euthanized (shot, killed, dispatched, destroyed, etc.)." Unfortunately, the way the law and guidelines are currently written, on-the-ground responses treat any situation where a lion "might somehow" come into contact with a human -- no matter how unlikely – as a situation of "imminent threat."

THE SOLUTION

SB 132 provides DFW with the necessary tools to deal with wayward mountain lions that do not pose an immediate threat to humans. The nonlethal procedures DFW will be required to utilize include capturing, pursuing, anesthetizing, temporarily possessing, temporarily injuring, marking, transporting, hazing, relocating, and releasing.

The legislation still provides DFW with the authority to kill mountain lions if the lion can reasonably be expected to cause immediate death or physical harm to humans.

SB 132 is a 4/5 vote bill since mountain lions are “specially protected mammals” in the Fish and Game Code Section that falls under Proposition 117, approved by voters in 1990.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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