

Washington State Department: Richard Poelker

I've been involved in a basic look at the cougar population in the State of Washington for the last two years. I've worked alone generally, with a few local hound men in tagging and capturing animals, but we haven't gone a long way down the road. We tagged a few cougars, all of which are dead at this time.

We've put out quite an intensive effort by going to the hound clubs with our program. They all agree that they probably wouldn't shoot a tagged animal, but the spirit of the hunt overcomes all good intentions, evidently. We're hopefully going to get into some radio tracking in the next year. We have homemade radio collars on hand that should work and we'll try to get some radio tracking done. We haven't had the response we hoped on the tagged animals. The objectives of the program was to try to estimate the population of the cougar within the state; to examine the current management program in relation to management alternatives which are available and those which are desired by sportsmen, the public, the Game Department personnel themselves; and to come up with management recommendations. We also wanted to examine the cougar harvest, the harvest reporting procedures, and the present control that we have over the current hunter take. Basically the cougar study was designed to terminate this summer. However, we plan to continue the field surveys as a minor part of an expanded cat study. We plan two more activities, one on bobcat and one on lynx. The bobcat will take about 75% of my time,

the cougar about 15%, and the lynx about 10%. We're going to switch emphasis to the bobcat. Since we couldn't differentiate when we had a strike with the hounds whether we had a bobcat or a cougar most of the captures we made with the hounds were bobcat. Tracking conditions are usually poor. The bobcat is becoming a management bonfire in our state because of high fur prices and conflicts between trappers and hound hunters.

Molini: How is the bobcat classified?

Answer: It has a dual classification as both a furbearer and a game animal, so it can be taken by licensed trappers and by sport hunters.

Question: I read your last progress report. My impression was that you had a voluntary tag return attached to the license?

Answer: We don't sell a tag. We have a mandatory reporting procedure. If you kill a cougar you have to report it within seven days to a Game Department representative. We're getting about a 45% return of harvested animals. We're probably maintaining a harvest in the neighborhood of 200-210 sport-killed cougar per year.

Question: You're getting roughly half of these back?

Answer: We're getting about half of the actual reports back. We're finding out about the others through examination of taxidermists' records because we license all taxidermists in the state and through our general hunter questionnaire.

Question: Do you enforce this?

Answer: Yes, they have been issuing citations for failure to report a cougar kill. It's a misdemeanor. It's sometimes difficult to enforce but I think several desirable management alternatives for cougar look good on paper but are very difficult to enforce, such as not killing kittens, not killing females accompanied by kittens, etc.