

SUNY Oswego prof's suggestion to put cougars back in Adirondacks is criticized



By [David Figura, The Post-Standard](#)

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Lions and tigers and bears in the Adirondacks?

Well, maybe just lions and bears — mountain lions, that is — according to John Laundre, a SUNY Oswego biology faculty member.

Laundre, in an article published this week, suggested that a forest preserve the size of the Adirondack Mountains could accommodate the reintroduction of as many as 350 cougars.

The article, "The Feasibility of Northeastern U.S. Supporting the Return of Cougars," was published in *Oryx*, an international conservation journal. It cites the successful return of cougars to areas near cities in the western part of this country, and to similarly developed habitats in the Black Hills of South Dakota and the Big Cypress National Preserve of southern Florida.

Laundre, who is vice president of the Cougar Rewilding Foundation, challenges previous positions by wildlife biologists — particularly Rainer Brocke, a SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry biology professor. In his 1981 study, Brocke concluded that road density and resulting vehicle/cougar accidents would hurt any chance of cougars being re-introduced to the 6-million-acre Adirondacks.

Brocke, currently living in Lafayette, said Laundre "is living in a dream world."

Brocke said the Adirondacks is different from areas out west and in Florida where cougar populations have taken hold. He noted that cougars in the southern tip of Florida have not spread northward because many have been killed on roads. The ones out west, he said, have survived because of great blocks of



A caged mountain lion at the Burnett Park Zoo is shown in this 2004 photo.

J. Michael Kelly/The Post-Standard

mountainous refuges. Although these areas border municipalities, the fact remains that the cats still have a lot of space to remain pretty much free of entanglement with humans.

"In contrast, there's people spread all throughout the Adirondacks," he said.

Laundre disagrees. His group, the Cougar Rewilding Foundation, describes itself as a " non-profit, science-based, volunteer-run conservation organization dedicated to the recovery of cougars to all of their former range east of the Rocky Mountains." For more see, easterncougar.org.

"Thirty years ago, everyone thought that cougars needed to live in the most remote places. But they've demonstrated that they're as adaptable as coyotes," said the SUNY Oswego prof who has studied cougars for 20 years in Idaho and Mexico.

State Department of Conservation officials were contacted about this story, but did not respond by press time.

Cougars – which are also called a pumas, mountain lions, panthers or catamounts – are the second largest member of the cat family in North America. Jaguars are the largest. Adult male cougars average about 140 pounds, but some have been found to weigh up to 180 pounds and measure 7-8 feet long from nose to tip of tail. The females are smaller.

State-sponsored bounty programs wiped cougars out in New York by the end of the 19th century. The state's deer population at that time was also very low.

Laundre notes that white-tailed deer, in the absence of cougars who helped controlled their numbers, have recovered to "super saturation" levels in this state. Citing a 2011 state Department of Environmental Conservation report, he noted the state's deer herd has critically threatened forest regeneration through the state.

Laundre estimate that cougars annually would take about 8 percent of the Adirondack forest preserve's deer herd, which would be "sustainable" in conjunction with hunting and wildlife management practices.

Veteran deer hunter Dan Ladd, of West Fort Ann, whose website, adk-hunter.com, is dedicated to deer and turkey hunting in the Adirondacks, said in his opinion the cougars would gravitate to the foothills, where the deer and human population are the heaviest and where problems could develop. He said he's against cougars being reintroduced for "safety concerns."

Brocke said in the past cougar attacks on humans were rare, but have risen in recent years.

"They do pose a hazard to people in some parts of the west and that fact has not gone unnoticed," he said.

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