

# Wild Cat Myths vs. Facts



**Myth: Wild cats kill vast numbers of livestock**

**Fact: Wild cats rarely prey on livestock**

Mortalities from illness, birthing problems, weather, poison, theft and other problems far outweigh losses to livestock growers than wild cats or other native carnivores. According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, mountain lions were responsible for zero sheep losses and bobcats were responsible for only 51 sheep losses in 2014.<sup>i</sup> At the national level, all wild cats, including mountain lions, bobcats and lynx, killed fewer cattle than domestic dogs, taking only 0.02% of U.S. cattle in 2010.<sup>ii</sup>

**Fig 1: Non-predator vs. predator mortality for Arizona cattle and sheep**

Arizona Cattle & Sheep Inventory	1,006,000
% Non-Predator Mortality	4%
% Predator Mortality	1%

A variety of effective, nonlethal methods are available to livestock owners and state wildlife agencies, including range riders, electric fencing, fladry and sanitary carcass removal can provide livestock owners the tools necessary to protect their animals while also preventing the unnecessary killing of native carnivores.<sup>iii</sup>

**Myth: Trophy hunting wild cats results in less livestock deaths**

**Fact: Trophy hunting can actually have the opposite effect and increase livestock deaths.**

Killing wild cats to reduce complaints and livestock losses can have the opposite effect. Typically, when complaints are reported, adult members of a population are killed which disrupts the species' social structure, creating a population that's younger and includes more male animals. Subadult males are more likely to attack livestock than are older animals.<sup>iv</sup> According to a recent Washington study, very heavy hunting, or 100% removal of resident adult mountain lions in one year, increased the odds of complaints and depredations in the following year by 150% to 340%.<sup>v</sup>

**Myth: An end to trophy hunting of mountain lions will lead to increased livestock losses, financially burdening the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) and Arizona taxpayers.**

**Fact: There is no indication that an end to trophy hunting of mountain lions will result in increased livestock losses or costs to AZGFD or Arizona taxpayers.**

Despite an end to trophy hunting, the number of mountain lions killed for livestock losses in California is on par with those in Arizona - around 2% of the lion population each year. The prohibition has not led to an increase in conflicts even as human and domestic animal populations grow exponentially throughout California's remaining lion habitat.

Moreover, unlike California, AZGFD does not issue depredation permits for mountain lions who injure or kill livestock.<sup>vi</sup> Instead, AZGFD allows livestock operators to liberally kill mountain lions that pose a threat to livestock. The agency requires little more than a written report from a livestock operator after they've killed a mountain lion. The agency is not burdened with costs from livestock losses, and livestock operators can and should take proactive, nonlethal steps to prevent or reduce any losses instead of having to shoulder these costs themselves.

**Myth: Hunters are the primary source of funding for conservation**

**Fact: The non-hunting public contributes the vast majority of funding for conservation**

A 2014 study found that hunters and anglers actually contribute only 6% of the funding necessary to operate federal public lands (including the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management) in the United States. The remaining 90+% comes from the non-hunting public. Furthermore, in the private sector, hunters pay approximately 12% to fund non-profit land conservation groups. The rest of the funding, nearly 88%, comes from the non-hunting public.<sup>vii</sup>

In August 2017, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released its 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation survey which showed that wildlife watchers outspent hunters by a ratio of nearly 3 to 1 in 2016.<sup>viii</sup> Wildlife watching expenditures greatly increased—by 28%—between 2011 and 2016, from \$59.1 billion to a whopping \$75.9 billion. In contrast, total expenditures by hunters decreased 30% from 2011 to 2016, from \$36.3 billion to \$25.6 billion.

**Myth: If trophy hunting and trapping of wild cats is prohibited, herds of deer, sheep, and other prey animals will be wiped out**

**Fact: Wild cats (and other predators) are not the true culprits causing prey decline**

Studies show that humans are actually the greatest source of mortality to all medium-and large-sized mammals (e.g. deer, elk, etc.) in North America, and hunting and trapping accounts for most human-caused mortality.<sup>ix</sup> In short, the predominant predators of ungulates are humans, not wild cats.<sup>x</sup> Other factors, such as drought, disease, and illnesses like chronic wasting disease and Lyme disease also harm ungulates, and their threats may be growing with a warming climate.

Killing wild cats will not boost mule deer populations, and the most current and best available science on mule deer survival reflects that a lack of food is what limits their populations, as they need adequate nutrition to survive.<sup>xi</sup> That nutrition can be hindered by a variety of factors, such as habitat loss and fragmentation, oil and gas drilling or mining, changes in forage quality, disease, increased hunting and variations in hydrology caused by climate change.<sup>xii</sup>



Bighorn sheep populations are in decline in the U.S. because of trophy hunting, disease from domestic sheep,<sup>xiii</sup> resource competition by livestock and loss of habitat and safe passages.<sup>xiv</sup> A survey of over 60 peer-reviewed articles concerning predator-prey relationships between bighorn sheep and mountain lions concluded that while predator control is often politically expedient, it typically does not address the underlying issues including habitat loss, loss of migration corridors and malnutrition.<sup>xv</sup>

**Myth: Wild cats pose a significant threat to human safety**

**Fact: Wild cats rarely pose a threat to human safety and will avoid humans whenever possible**

No scientific evidence exists proving that trophy hunting wild cats makes people safer.<sup>xvi</sup> Attacks on humans from wild cats are extraordinarily rare.<sup>xvii</sup> As a result of their extensive study and analysis, a group of researchers deduced that mountain lion attacks on people are uncommon—likely only one of 150 attacks by animals on people each year—with far more attacks on humans coming from domestic animals.<sup>xviii</sup>

Over the last 120 years, there have only been approximately 200 cases of confirmed mountain lion attacks on humans throughout North America (Mexico, U.S. and Canada) and less than 30 of these have proven fatal.<sup>xix</sup> Attacks on humans from jaguars, bobcats and other wild cats are extremely rare and are caused by provocation<sup>xx</sup> or, in a handful of bobcat attacks, rabies infliction.<sup>xxi</sup> A person is many times more likely to die from a lightning strike or a vehicle collision with a deer than from a wild cat.<sup>xxii</sup>

Attacks on humans may actually be exacerbated by trophy hunting, because when adult cats are removed, subadults move into a vacancy at much higher densities.<sup>xxiii</sup> Furthermore, most encounters between humans and mountain lions go unrecorded, primarily because people fail to detect them.<sup>xxiv</sup> Ironically, a new study suggests that if mountain lions recolonized the states where they historically occurred but are now absent, fewer people would die in vehicle strikes because of burgeoning deer populations.<sup>xxv</sup>

**Myth: Trophy hunting is necessary to maintain populations of wild cats. Without trophy hunting and trapping, their populations will explode.**

**Fact: Wild cat populations are self-regulating.**

Wild cat populations are limited by the numbers of their prey. In order to survive, their populations must stay at a smaller size relative to their prey's biomass or risk starvation.<sup>xxvi</sup> They do this by regulating their own numbers. When prey populations decline, so do wild cat populations. Moreover, killing wild cats to manage their populations can cause negative effects and increase conflicts by causing social chaos within their populations.<sup>xxvii</sup> Trophy hunting can easily destabilize wild cat populations, causing increased conflicts with humans, pets and livestock.

**Myth: Trapping is a humane and selective method of wildlife management.**

**Fact: Trapping is an indiscriminately cruel hunting method.**

Traps and snares do not discriminate between species and often catch non-target animals, including wild cat kittens, pets and dissimilar endangered species.<sup>xxviii</sup> Threatened or endangered species in Arizona, such as the Mexican gray wolf, jaguar, lynx, and ocelot, could easily be trapped. Trapped animals exert themselves tremendously to break free and this struggle causes significant suffering and severe injuries, if not fatalities.<sup>xxix</sup> Most traps or snares can cause serious injury and distress, including broken legs, dislocated shoulders, lacerations, torn muscles, cuts to mouths and gums, broken teeth, fractures, amputation of digits, and even death; trapped animals endure psychological stress and/or pain, starvation, dehydration or predation.<sup>xxx</sup> Entrapped animals can suffer from hypothermia<sup>xxxii</sup> or from heat exposure particularly in hot, arid Arizona.

In Arizona, bobcats are trapped for the commercial fur market. While killing bobcats for their fur allows a few to profit, fur trappers deprive a far larger public that is opposed to the species' treatment as disposable commodities. When one kills a bobcat, the rest of us are unable to witness or photograph that cat in the wild. A 2017 study in Yellowstone found that a single bobcat is worth nearly 1,000 times more alive than dead.<sup>xxxii</sup>

**Myth: trapping and hounding bobcats and other native wild cats reduces the spread of rabies.**

**Fact: Rabies cases in bobcats and other native wild cats is extremely rare, and indiscriminate trophy hunting and trapping is ineffective at controlling rabies.**

Trapping wildlife fails to curtail rabies. In fact, according to a number of studies, culling practices - such as hunting or trapping - exacerbate the spread of rabies, including transmission to domestic animals and livestock from wildlife-culling efforts.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The best means to defeat rabies in wildlife populations (except for bats) is by landscape-scale, oral-rabies-vaccination programs - not through trophy hunting and trapping.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The Arizona Department of Health Services has tested tens of thousands of animals for rabies since 1999, with most testing negative. Of the animals who tested positive, Health Services data show that bats (1,238), skunks (766) and foxes (289) are the wildlife who are most likely to carry rabies. **Bobcats (59) and pumas/mountain lions (2) comprised a mere 0.03% of the wildlife who tested positive for rabies in Arizona since 1999.**

**Myth: Hound hunting does not cause stress to wild cats during the chase; the cat simply climbs a tree to escape.**

**Fact: Hound hunting causes significant stress to the wild cats being chased.**

In Arizona, it is legal to hunt mountain lions and bobcats with packs of radio-collared, trailing hounds. Trophy hunters use them to chase mountain lions and bobcats and bay them into trees or rock ledges so that the trophy hunter can shoot these cats at close range. This hunting method is unsporting, unethical and inhumane.<sup>xxxv</sup> Hounds kill kittens, and wild cats could injure or kill the hounds.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The sounds and/or sight of a pack of hounds induces stress upon wildlife, including non-target animals. This stress can have dire results, including potential harm to an individual's reproductive, digestive and immune systems.<sup>xxxvii;xxxviii</sup> Mountain lions who are *repeatedly* chased by hounds indicate a much higher stress response than ones who had been chased only once.<sup>xxxix</sup>



Hounding is not considered “fair chase” hunting by most.<sup>xl</sup> The use of hounds provides an unfair advantage to trophy hunters who rely on hounds to do the bulk of the work in finding and cornering the wild cats. In addition to chasing non-target wildlife, hounds also trespass onto private lands.<sup>xli</sup>

**Myth: Hounds used for hunting wild cats are well cared for, and treated like members of the family.**

**Fact: Hounding places dogs at serious risk of injury or even death, and hounds are often treated as nothing more than hunting equipment.**

Hounding leads to welfare problems for the dogs and creates a drain on animal sheltering resources. Viewed more as hunting equipment than beloved members of the family, hunting hounds often live in pens or are tethered outdoors. They may become lost in the chase and are sometimes never recovered. They may be struck by vehicles, die as a result of dehydration or confrontations with wildlife, or be abandoned at local animal shelters. Shelters can be overburdened with abandoned hunting dogs, particularly in rural areas during and at the end of the hunting season.

**Myth: Arizonans are better served working on habitat conservation rather than ending trophy hunting and trapping to protect our wild cats.**

**Fact: Ending trophy hunting and trapping of wild cats can work hand-in hand with habitat conservation.**

Habitat conservation is critical for the long-term conservation of all wildlife, especially Arizona's wild cats. Yet, trophy hunting and trapping is currently the greatest cause of death to mountain lions and bobcats in Arizona. Ending trophy hunting and trapping of wild cats in Arizona will support their ability to adapt to long-term environmental changes, including habitat

loss and fragmentation from human development, changes in prey populations, and the effects of climate change such as drought.

**Myth: Arizona's recently updated hunting guidelines protect mountain lions and bobcats from excessive killing.**

**Fact: The guidelines will continue to allow high levels of trophy hunting and trapping, as well as hounding throughout the year.**

The Arizona Game and Fish Department's recently updated hunting guidelines continue to allow high levels of trophy hunting of mountain lions, and trophy hunting and trapping of bobcats. Beginning in the 2018 hunting season, the agency is planning to limit mountain lion trophy hunting to one cat per person, per year rather than permitting unlimited bag limits (that is, as many lions as one hunter could kill in a year). The guidelines, however, do not restrict hunting quotas, allowing for unlimited numbers of mountain lion and bobcat kills in designated areas.

While the guidelines close mountain lion hunting from June 1<sup>st</sup> to mid-August each year, the agency may still allow pursuit-only seasons during these hot summer months. Trophy hunters will be able to chase mountain lions with their hounds even if they are not allowed to actually kill the cats. This is especially harmful to mother mountain lions and their kittens as these summer months overlap with their peak birthing season.

**Myth: This initiative would prevent people from protecting themselves, livestock, or property from wild cats.**

**Fact: The language of the measure contains explicit exemptions for killing a wild cat that threatens an individual's personal safety and the removal of wild cats that prey on livestock or property.**

This initiative only seeks to end unnecessary hunting and trapping of wild cats in Arizona. It does not prevent people from protecting themselves, their pets, livestock or property from wild cats should a conflict arise. While conflicts with wild cats are rare, this initiative upholds the safety needs of Arizonans and does not seek to restrict the public from taking necessary steps towards preventing imminent harm.

**Myth: Trophy hunting and trapping is a critical component of Arizona's economy.**

**Fact: Wildlife are worth more alive than dead for Arizona's economy.**

Wildlife watching in Arizona consistently generates greater economic benefits than trophy hunting and trapping. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wildlife watching expenditures totaled \$936 million in Arizona during 2011. That same year, all hunting expenditures totaled only \$338 million in Arizona.<sup>xliii</sup>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife Recreation Data: Comparison of 2011 and 2016			
	2011	2016	% Change
Wildlife Watcher Numbers	71.8M	86.0M	20%
Wildlife Watcher Expenditures	\$59.1B	\$75.9B	28%
All Hunter Numbers	13.7M	11.5M	-16%
Big Game Hunter Numbers	11.6M	9.2M	-21%
Hunter Expenditures	\$36.3B	\$25.6B	-30%

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation demonstrated that the numbers of wildlife watchers grew significantly between 2011 and 2016 by 20% from 71.8 million to 86 million, in addition to the wildlife watching expenditures which also greatly increased—by 28%—between 2011 and 2016, from \$59.1 billion to a whopping \$75.9 billion.

In contrast, participation in hunting overall declined by approximately 2 million participants in 2016. Of all categories of hunters, big game hunters declined the most with a drop of 2.4 million from 2011. Total expenditures by hunters also decreased 30% from 2011 to 2016, from \$36.3 billion to \$25.6 billion. In 2016, wildlife watchers outnumbered hunters by a ratio of more than 7 to 1, and outspent hunters by a ratio of nearly 3 to 1.<sup>xliiii</sup>

A recent 2017 study estimated a non-consumptive economic value of \$308,105 for a single bobcat in Yellowstone National Park in northwest Wyoming for one winter season, versus the average exploitive value of \$315.17 per bobcat trapped or hunted in Wyoming that same year.<sup>xliiv</sup> Moreover, the same bobcat could generate this figure again the following year, should it survive. Over its life, one bobcat could generate well over \$1 million in economic activity, shared across countless people involved in travel and tourism.<sup>xliv</sup>

**Myth: Trophy hunting and trapping of wild cats is a critical component of Arizona's heritage.**

**Fact: The majority of Arizonans do not support trophy hunting and trapping of wild cats.**

Killing mountain lions and bobcats is not in the best interest of these iconic species, nor does it represent the interests of most Arizonans. In contrast to trophy hunter interests, the majority of Arizonans disagree with trophy hunting of mountain lions and trapping of bobcats.<sup>xlvi</sup> Additionally, the majority of Americans hold positive values towards mountain lions.<sup>xlvii</sup> Most people believe mountain lions are the best representative of the Southern Rockies heritage and landscape.<sup>xlviii</sup>

According to the latest data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, only 3.7% of the population are hunters, and only 2% of the population hunt big game.<sup>xlix</sup> An even smaller percentage are trappers. Those that enjoy wildlife watching far outnumber those that trophy hunt.

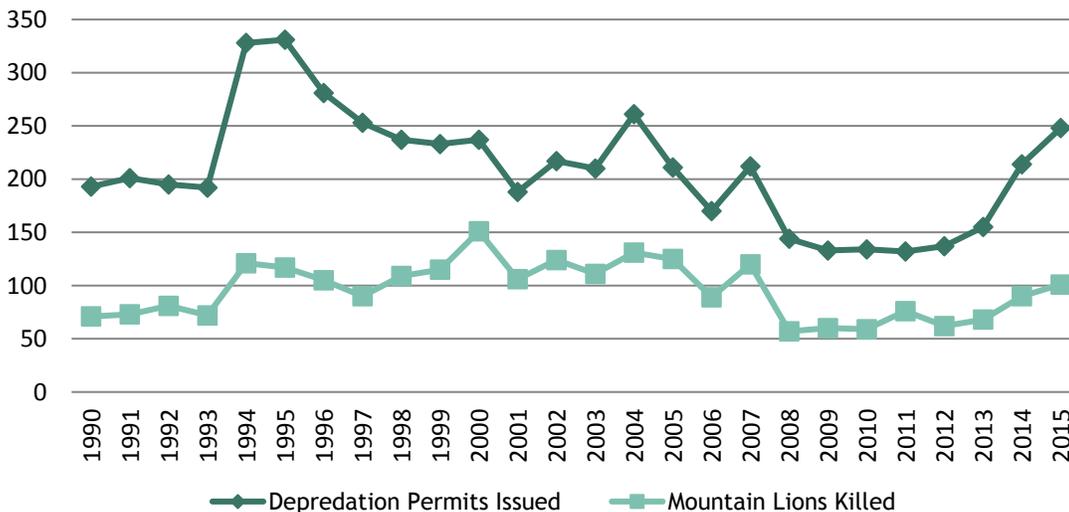
**Myth: California's mountain lion trophy hunting prohibition led to increased conflicts with people, pets and livestock.**

**Fact: There is no indication that an end to trophy hunting increased mountain lion depredations in California.**

There is no indication that an end to trophy hunting in California has increased mountain lion depredations in the state. Despite an end to trophy hunting and a dramatic increase in the number of people and domestic animals living in California, the state's current depredation numbers resemble those tracked over the last three decades, fluctuating around 200 permits issued each year. Even so, only about 2% of California's mountain lion population is killed each year through depredation permits.<sup>l</sup>

A variety of factors influence depredation numbers each year, particularly California's rapidly growing human population which has doubled since mountain lion hunting ended in the early 1970's.<sup>li</sup> Much of this growth has occurred in mountain lion territory, resulting in habitat loss and fragmentation from development.<sup>lii</sup> It has also led to a significant increase in domestic animals living in mountain lion habitat,<sup>liii</sup> especially hobby farm animals, who are vulnerable to depredation. Despite the amplified opportunity for mountain lion depredations, these numbers are not increasing.

**California Mountain Lion Depredation, 1990 to 2015**



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