

Associates Newsletter

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LAS VEGAS SITE FOR 19TH BIG GAME AWARDS

B&C Associates Program Celebrates its 25th Year

In February 1986, the Boone and Crockett Club published its first volume of the *Associates Newsletter*, which was reformatted in 1994 as a magazine and renamed *Fair Chase*. Throughout 2010, *Fair Chase* will be running excerpts from these inaugural issues. It's a chance for all of us to appreciate how far we've come in 25 years and take a look at what's changed in our hunter-conservationist world.

Twenty-five years since the article at right was published in the first issue of the *Associates Newsletter*, the ban on hunting cougars in California remains in effect. Following is a little history, as well as a quick update on the status of cougar hunting in California.

In 1972, Governor Ronald Reagan signed legislation outlawing the sport hunting of cougars for five years. The California Legislature extended the ban twice until 1986 when the 15-year moratorium on sport hunting cougars came to an end. With the passage of Proposition 117 in 1990, cougars became a "specially protected species," making cougar hunting illegal in California. This status and other statutes prohibit the Department of Fish and Game from recommending a hunting season for cougars, and it is illegal to take, injure, possess, transport, import, or sell any cougar or part of a cougar in the state of California. Cougars may be killed only 1) if a depredation permit is issued to take a specific lion killing livestock or pets; 2) to preserve public safety; or 3) to protect listed bighorn sheep.

The California Department of Fish and Game states that cougars are not threatened nor endangered in California. In fact, the lion population is relatively high in California and their numbers appear to be stable. The fact that cougars are legally classified as "specially protected species" has nothing to do with their relative abundance and does not imply that they are rare.

Cougar studies over the last 30 years have estimated population densities for different habitat types around the state. These density estimates varied from zero to 10 lions per 100 square miles, and were simply expanded to the total amount of each habitat type available. This method provides a crude estimate of between 4,000 and 6,000 mountain lions statewide. ■

CALIFORNIA COUGAR HUNTING?

Things look very good for a return of cougar hunting in California in the near future, perhaps as soon as late 1986. The Wildlife Legislative Fund reports the California Fish and Game Commission has set the administrative stage for establishing regulations for a late 1986 hunting season. This would be the final proof of another success story in wildlife management.

It is currently estimated that the California cougar population numbers between 4,000 to 5,500 animals, and is growing. There has been a 13-year moratorium on sport hunting of cougars in California, with current estimated numbers not supporting the need for continuation of the ban. Hopes of sportsmen and game officials for a possible hunting season were given a boost when Governor George Deukmejian vetoed legislation that would have extended the moratorium. Upon expiration of the moratorium, the status of cougar returns to that of pre-moratorium, "game mammals", thus setting the stage for possible resumption of hunting.

The Commission will hold a series of public hearings this spring on the subject of the resumption of cougar hunting before promulgating hunting regulations. It is expected that animal protectionists will attempt to rally public support against the proposed resumption of cougar hunting. Let us hope sportsmen also respond and loudly.