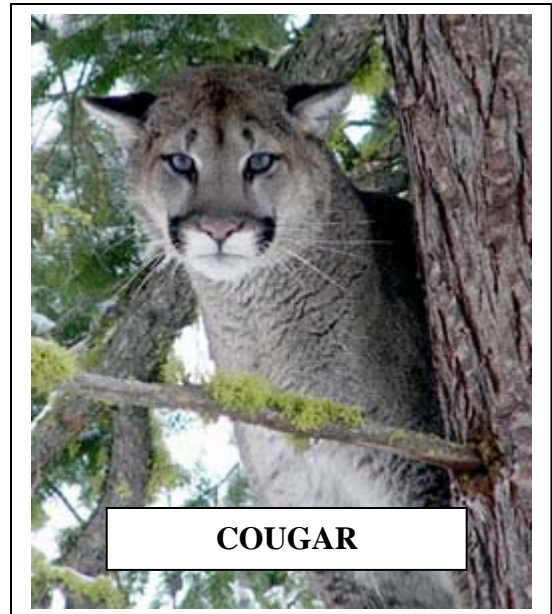


SOME COUGAR ADVICE

(Source: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife)



BOB CAT



COUGAR

Preventing Conflicts

The cougar's ability to travel long distances occasionally brings these cats into seemingly inappropriate areas, even places densely settled by humans. Such appearances are almost always brief, with the animal moving along quickly in its search of a suitable permanent home. However, where humans are encroaching on wildlife habitat, the number of cougar sightings and attacks on livestock and pets is on the rise.

Cougar attacks on humans are extremely rare. In North America, roughly 25 fatalities and 95 nonfatal attacks have been reported during the past 100 years. However, more cougar attacks have been reported in the western United States and Canada over the past 20 years than in the previous 80. In Washington, of the one fatal and fifteen nonfatal attacks reported here in the past 100 years, seven attacks occurred during the 1990s.

A high percentage of cougars attacking domestic animals or people are one- to two-year-old cougars that have become independent of their mothers. When these young animals, particularly males, leave home to search for territory of their own, and encounter territory already occupied by an older male cougar, the older one will drive off the younger one, killing it if it resists. Some young cougars are driven across miles of countryside in search of an unoccupied territory.

If you are living in cougar country, prevent a conflict with them by using the following management strategies around your property, and, if possible, encourage your neighbors to do the same.

Don't leave small children unattended. When children are playing outdoors, closely supervise them and be sure they are indoors by dusk.

Modify the habitat around your home. Light all walkways after dark and avoid landscaping with plants that deer prefer to eat. Where a deer goes, a cougar may follow. Shrubs and trees around kids' play areas should be pruned up several feet to prevent cougars from hiding behind them.

Although costly and not 100 percent effective, a chain-link or heavy woven wire fence that is 10 feet high with 3-foot extensions installed at a 65-degree angle on each post may keep cougars out of an enclosed area. To increase effectiveness, string barbed wire or four electric wires between the extensions, alternating positive and negative wires.

Don't feed wildlife and feral cats (domestic cats gone wild). This includes deer, raccoons, and other small mammals. Remember predators follow prey.

Close off open spaces under structures. Areas beneath porches and decks can provide shelter for prey animals.

Feed dogs and cats indoors. If you must feed outside, do so in the morning or midday, and pick up food and water bowls, as well as leftovers and spilled food, well before dark. Pet food and water attract small mammals that, in turn, attract cougars.

Keep dogs and cats indoors, especially from dusk to dawn. Left outside at night, small dogs and cats may become prey for cougars.

Use garbage cans with tight-fitting lids. Garbage attracts small mammals that, in turn, attract cougars.

Keep outdoor livestock and small animals confined in secure pens. For a large property with livestock, consider using a guard animal. There are specialty breeds of dogs that can defend livestock. Donkeys and llamas have also successfully been used as guard animals. As with any guard animal, pros and cons exist. Purchase a guard animal from a reputable breeder who knows the animal he or she sells. Some breeders offer various guarantees on their guard animals, including a replacement if an animal fails to perform as expected.

Cougars and Kids

Children seem to be more at risk than adults to cougar attacks, possibly because their high-pitched voices, small size, and erratic movements make it difficult for cougars to identify them as human and not prey. To prevent a problem from occurring:

- Talk to children and teach them what to do if they encounter a cougar.
- Encourage children to play outdoors in groups, and supervise children playing outdoors.
- Consider getting a dog for your children as an early-warning system. A dog can see, smell, and hear a cougar sooner than we can. Although dogs offer little value as a deterrent to cougars, they may distract a cougar from attacking a human.
- Consider erecting a fence around play areas. Keeps a radio playing when children are outside, as noise usually deters cougars.
- Make sure children are home before dusk and stay inside until after dawn.
- If there have been cougar sightings, escort children to the bus stop in the early morning. Clear shrubs away around the bus stop, making an area with a 30-foot radius. Have a light installed as a general safety precaution.

Encountering a Cougar

Relatively few people will ever catch a glimpse of a cougar much less confront one. If you come face to face with a cougar, your actions can either help or hinder a quick retreat by the animal.

Here are some things to remember:

- Stop, pick up small children immediately, and don't run. Running and rapid movements may trigger an attack. Remember, at close range, a cougar's instinct is to chase.
- Face the cougar. Talk to it firmly while slowly backing away. Always leave the animal an escape route.
- Try to appear larger than the cougar. Get above it (e.g., step up onto a rock or stump). If wearing a jacket, hold it open to further increase your apparent size. If you are in a group, stand shoulder-to-shoulder to appear intimidating.
- Do not take your eyes off the cougar or turn your back. Do not crouch down or try to hide.
- Never approach the cougar, especially if it is near a kill or with kittens, and never offer it food.
- If the cougar does not flee, be more assertive. If it shows signs of aggression (crouches with ears back, teeth bared, hissing, tail twitching, and hind feet pumping in preparation to jump), shout, wave your arms and throw anything you have available (water bottle, book, backpack). The idea is to convince the cougar that you are not prey, but a potential danger.
- If the cougar attacks, fight back. Be aggressive and try to stay on your feet. Cougars have been driven away by people who have fought back using anything within reach, including sticks, rocks, shovels, backpacks, and clothing—even bare hands. If you are aggressive enough, a cougar will flee, realizing it has made a mistake. Pepper spray in the cougar's face is also effective in the extreme unlikelihood of a close encounter with a cougar.

END OF GUIDANCE

TO READ MORE GO TO: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/cougars.htm#kids>