

**REPORT OF THE
CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST**

DATE: February 28, 2020

TO: Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

FROM: Sharon M. Tso 
Chief Legislative Analyst Council File No: 20-0002-S20
Assignment No: 20-02-0202

SUBJECT: Ending depredation permits for mountain lions

CLA RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Resolution (Koretz – Ryu – Blumenfield) to include in the City's 2019-2020 State Legislative Program SUPPORT or SPONSORSHIP for legislation and/or administrative action that would amend state law to end the issuance of depredation permits for mountain lions, and establish an indemnity fund to reimburse an individual who loses an animal to a mountain lion; Resolution further moves to support the listing of the Southern California and Central Coast Evolutionarily Significant Unit of mountain lions as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

SUMMARY

More than half of California is mountain lion habitat, including a significant area in Los Angeles County. While mountain lions are quiet, solitary, and elusive animals that typically avoid people by nature, human expansion into mountain lion habitat has led to increased mountain lion sightings and encounters. Occasionally, mountain lions prey on pets and livestock. In these cases, after a three-step process, the State may provide depredation permits that allow individuals to kill mountain lions that have been shown to prey on pets or livestock.

The Southern California mountain lion population is already dwindling as a result of human expansion into its habitat, and the issuance of depredation permits further exacerbates this problem. Mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountain Range are designated as a sensitive population by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

The Resolution recommends support or sponsorship of any legislation or administrative action that would end the issuance of depredation permits for mountain lions and establish an indemnity fund to reimburse any individual who loses an animal to a mountain lion. The Resolution further moves to support legislation or executive action that would list the Southern California and Central Coast Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) of mountain lions as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, CDFW staff revisited its policies regarding mountain lion depredation, public safety, and animal welfare. The most significant policy change required a three-step process for securing a depredation permit. Reporting parties must demonstrate that three mountain lion depredation incidents have occurred on their property, and that they have taken what CDFW have determined


to be logistically and economically feasible measures designed to reduce the potential for attracting mountain lions.

Despite changes to depredation policies, in 2018, CDFW issued 334 depredation permits statewide, a roughly 35 percent increase over the previous annual record for depredation permits—248 in 2015. These figures were lower in 2019, with CDFW issuing 198 permits, which resulted in the death of 73 mountain lions. While this represents a year-to-year reduction, the amount of permits and killings in 2019 were greater than any year from 2008–2013.

In early February 2020, P-56, a four- or five-year-old mountain lion, who is believed to have fathered four other mountain lions, was killed in the Santa Monica Mountains under a depredation permit. The small population in the Santa Monica Mountains is already facing genetic diversity problems, and recent challenges such as the Woolsey Fire have amplified concerns surrounding the population. Additional protections are necessary to ensure the survival of this population.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA), introduced in 1973, is designed to protect and recover species and ecosystems that are imperiled primarily as a result of human impacts. Under the ESA, species may be listed as either endangered or threatened. Endangered species are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. Threatened species are likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. In some cases, populations of species can be designated as ESUs, and can be afforded protection by the ESA. Typically, for a population to be an ESU, it must be substantially reproductively isolated and represent an important component in the evolutionary legacy of the species.

In 2019, the Sierra Nevada fisher population was determined to be an evolutionarily significant population, and was listed as a state threatened species. The Center for Biological Diversity and the Mountain Lion Foundation submitted a petition on June 25, 2019, which found that Southern and Central Coast mountain lions meet the criteria for an ESU, and recommended their protection under the ESA. The Fish and Game Commission is expected to vote on the matter at its April 15, 2020 meeting.


Tristan Noack
Analyst

SMT:tcjn

Attachment: Resolution

RESOLUTION

RULES, ELECTIONS & INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Los Angeles with respect to legislation, rules, regulations or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state or federal governmental body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council with the concurrence of the Mayor; and

WHEREAS, Southern California mountain lions face an increasingly difficult and uncertain future; and

WHEREAS, rodenticides, freeways, wildfires, inbreeding and unquelled development are all contributing to the untimely deaths of these apex predators; and

WHEREAS, apex predators are essential to the functioning of a healthy ecosystem by keeping prey numbers in check, weeding out slow, weak and dying animals and thereby increasing the overall health of a population, and moving herds around which keeps them from devastating any one area; and

WHEREAS, functioning and healthy ecosystems are essential to the continued health and well-being of Angelenos and human beings around the world; and

WHEREAS, the City has, through adoption of its biodiversity program, its wildlife habitat connectivity project, and other initiatives prioritized protection of mountain lions and other flora and fauna; and

WHEREAS, in 2019, new research was published in the journal, *Ecological Applications*, suggesting there is an almost one-in-four chance that mountain lions could become extinct in the Santa Monica and Santa Ana mountains; and

WHEREAS, mountain lions living in the Santa Monica and Santa Ana ranges are in genetic peril, unable to range freely and mate due to freeways and lethal traffic; and

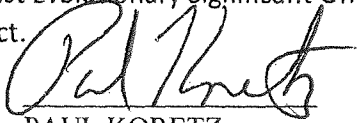
WHEREAS, P-56, one of only two remaining two male mountain lions in the Santa Monica mountains, was murdered under a misguided state law allowing property owners who have lost animals to lions to receive a depredation permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife; and

WHEREAS, the executive director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy has proposed that the State create an indemnity fund to reimburse any affected individual who loses an animal to a lion rather than allowing the killing of any more mountain lions.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, with the concurrence of the Mayor, that by the adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes in its 2019-2020 State Legislative Program SUPPORT or SPONSORSHIP of legislation and/or administrative action to amend the state law and end the issuance of depredation permits for mountain lions and establish an indemnity fund to reimburse any affected individual who loses an animal to a mountain lion.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City support legislative or executive action to support the listing of the Southern California/ Central Coast Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU) of Mountain Lions as Threatened under the California Endangered Species Act.

PRESENTED BY:



PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, 5th District



DAVID E. RYU
Councilmember, 4th District

SECONDED BY:



FEB 11 2020