



15. How can I be safe while hiking or recreating in cougar habitat?

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife provides recommendations on its website that reflect the collective experience and wisdom of cougar experts around the country. Below are a number of steps you can take to reduce the possibility of a negative interaction with a cougar.

- Hike in small groups and make enough noise to avoid surprising a cougar.
- Keep your camp clean and store food and garbage in double plastic bags.
- Keep small children close to the group, preferably in plain sight just ahead of you.
- Do not approach dead animals, especially deer or elk; they could have been cougar prey left for a later meal.

16. How can people living in cougar country avoid attracting cougars?

If you live in cougar country there are a number of steps you can take to avoid attracting cougars to your property.

- Close or patch-up any potential cougar shelter (i.e., under porches).
- Do not feed deer or any other wildlife that cougar may prey upon.
- Try using outdoor lighting and/or motion activated lights to repel cougars. Sprinklers and commercial motion-activated inflatable scarecrows startle animals when activated.

Always work with your neighbors for a consistent solution.

17. What should I do if I see or encounter a cougar?

- 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.
- Never approach the cougar or offer it food.
- Face the cougar. Talk to it firmly while slowly backing away. 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.
- 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, clothing, and 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.

If there is a threat to public safety or property contact your WDFW regional office from 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Mon – Fri.

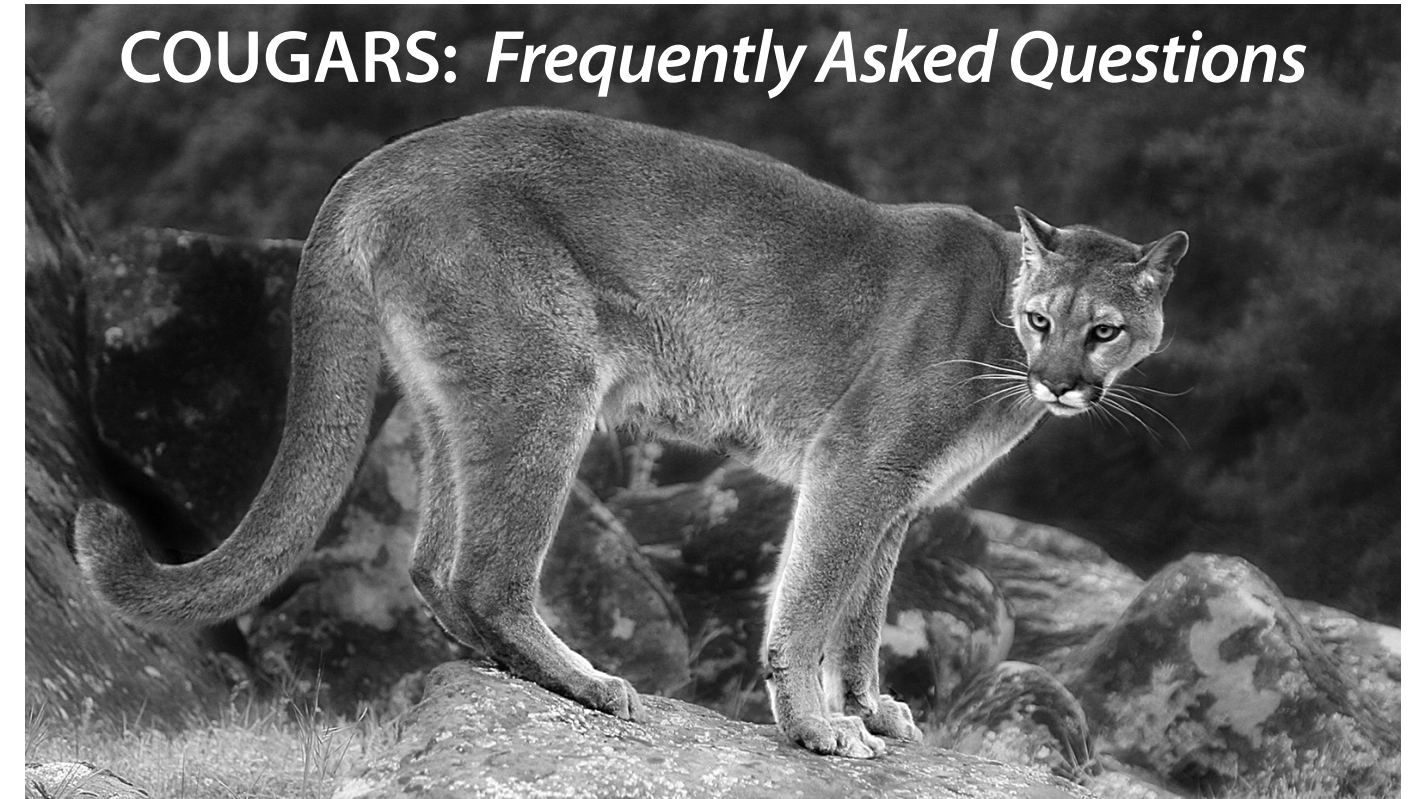
Visit: wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions for contact information.

If it is an emergency, dial 911.

For more information on cougars, bears, and wolves:



Grizzly Bear Outreach Project (GBOP)
www.bearinfo.org



Cougar Biology Facts

1. What is the life cycle of a cougar?

In Washington, females generally have their first litter at two-and-one-half to three years of age. Roughly every other year, mature female cougars give birth to between one and four kittens, although two or three is typical. On average, they have one litter about every two years. A litter is usually comprised of one to three kittens that stay with their mothers 13 to 18 months while they learn the skills necessary to survive. After this time, the mother will drive them off and they will set out to establish their own home ranges.

Dispersing males in particular tend to travel long distances in search of a home range. Research has shown that abandoned kittens 8 to 10 months of age or younger cannot survive on their own.

2. Do cougars travel alone or in groups?

Cougars are generally solitary in nature. However, a female with adult-sized kittens, may be mistaken for a pack of cougars. A female is accompanied by her kittens for 13 to 18 months, at which time they may be as large or larger (for males) than their mother, thus giving the impression

that they are not solitary. Adult females and males also briefly come together for mating. When adult males come together it's usually to fight for territory, and such fights often result in the death of one of the males.

3. How large do cougars get?

Typically, adult female cougars weigh 95 to 105 pounds and adult males weigh 110 to 160 pounds. Males rarely exceed 175 pounds in Washington but there are rare documented reports in other states of males exceeding 200 pounds.

4. What and how much do cougars eat?

Cougars are *obligate carnivores*, meaning they rely on live prey to survive. In Washington, deer constitute the largest percentage of the cougar's diet. Adult cougars also prey on elk, mountain goats, moose and bighorn sheep. Adult cougars, as well as younger animals, also prey on smaller species such as coyotes, rabbits, rodents and raccoons, as well as pets and livestock on occasion. According to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, a large male cougar living in the Cascade Mountains will kill one deer or elk every 9 to 12 days, eating up to 20 pounds at a time. In contrast, an adult female with kittens can kill one deer-size prey every 4 days.

5. What effect does cougar predation have on deer, elk and other game populations?

Cougars have co-evolved with their prey over millennia and there is no evidence that predation by cougars limits the growth of healthy elk and deer populations. There are rare situations when cougars can impact a prey population's growth rate, such as when prey numbers fall to critically low levels. Most often there are a variety of other factors that interact and affect *ungulate*, or hoofed mammal, population declines such as habitat loss and fragmentation, changes in habitat quality, disease, weather, hunting, roadkills and poaching. Again, these factors can interact to contribute to a declining population, but rarely is it due solely to predation.



6. Do cougar prey on livestock?

In Washington, it is relatively rare for cougars to attack domestic livestock. Weather, disease, and feral dogs have a much greater impact on livestock than cougars. However, individual livestock producers can suffer significant losses. In general, domestic sheep, goats and llamas are much more vulnerable to predation than are cattle and horses, according to WDFW records. Livestock production practices play a key role in preventing predation: in one study, 90 percent of confirmed cougar depredations that were investigated in western Washington were the result of poor animal husbandry practices. WDFW offers some tips for reducing cougar predation on livestock on their website: wdfw.wa.gov/living/cougars.html.

7. Do cougars sometimes kill for fun?

Cougars kill prey to survive. Almost always, a cougar kills only one animal, although consuming the entire animal may take several days for deer-sized prey and as much as a week for an elk. Cougars often lightly "bury" half-consumed prey or stash it in a bush to return to the

meal later. In the rare case that multiple animals are killed, research has shown it is likely a response to the stimulus of a moving prey item. In a natural setting, prey have the opportunity to flee; but penned domestic stock that cannot flee are more vulnerable and multiple animals may be killed. This can be minimized with preventative husbandry practices.

8. How long do cougars live in the wild and how do they die?

In the wild, male cougars typically live until 10 to 12 years of age while females live somewhat longer. Cougars die from a variety of human-caused and natural factors, including sport hunting, predator control activities, collisions with automobiles, interactions with other cougars, diseases, and accidents (e.g., injuries obtained while hunting prey). Where it is permitted, sport hunting is the main cause of death for adult cougars. Where hunting is not prohibited, interactions with other cougars, disease and accidents appear to be the three most common causes of death.

Cougar Management

9. What are the goals for cougar management in Washington?

WDFW's statewide goals for cougar are:

- 1) Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage cougar and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations;
- 2) Minimize threats to public safety and private property from cougars;
- 3) Manage cougar for a variety of recreational, educational and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, wildlife viewing, and photography; and
- 4) Manage statewide cougar populations for a sustained yield.

10. How many cougars are in Washington?

It is extremely difficult to estimate cougar populations because of the animal's reserved and solitary nature. Notably, annual harvest, sightings and complaint reports are poor indices of cougar numbers and trends. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, based on intensive capture and radio collaring studies of cougars in several areas of the state, estimates that there are about 1,900 to 2,100 resident adult cougars in the state.

11. Are cougars hunted in Washington State?

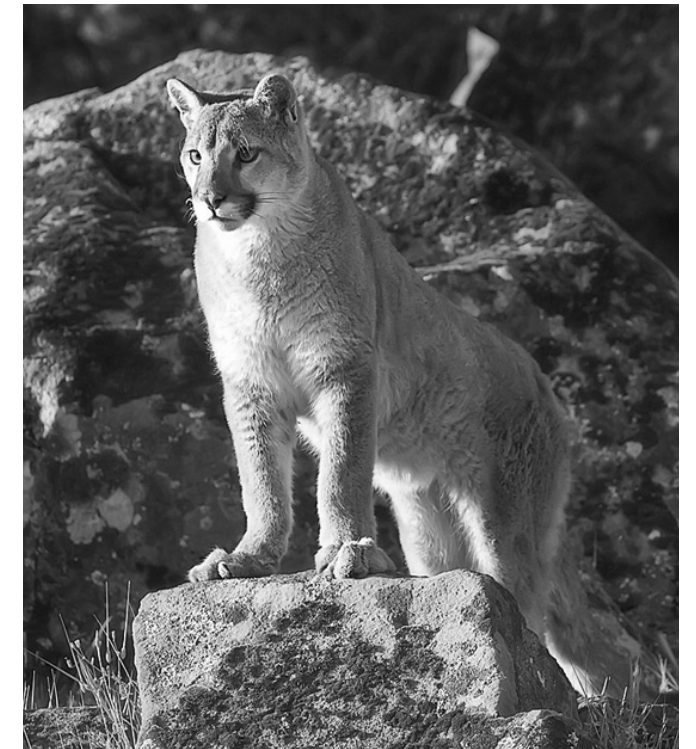
Yes. Cougars are classified as game animals and an open season and a hunting license are required to hunt them. For more information regarding hunting regulations go to the WDFW's website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/hunter/cougar/index.htm>

12. Is it legal for ranchers and farmers to kill cougars that attack their livestock or pose threats to human safety?

Yes to both situations. A property owner or the owner's immediate family, employee, or tenant may kill a cougar on that property without a permit if it is damaging domestic animals. The killing of a cougar in self-defense, or defense of another, is justified if the person taking such action has reasonable belief that the cougar poses a threat of serious physical harm, that this harm is imminent, and the action is the only reasonable available means to prevent that harm. In either case the body of any cougar must be turned over to the Department of Fish and Wildlife immediately.

13. Does cougar hunting reduce predation and human conflict?

Not necessarily. The death of a single cougar creates a territorial vacancy for other cougars to occupy. If multiple cougars are killed, multiple vacancies are created which will attract several cougars. Research has shown that younger-aged cougars will immigrate to occupy the vacancies. This may actually result in more cougars on the landscape until the social organization becomes re-established to limit the numbers.



Living with Cougars

14. Do cougars pose a significant threat to public safety?

No, cougar attacks on humans are extremely rare. In Washington there have been 18 documented cougar attacks on people since 1900. These involved 12 adults and 6 children and resulted in the death of 1 person (in 1924), 5 serious injuries, and 12 minor injuries. In comparison, domestic dogs killed 33 people in the U.S. in 2007 alone. Of the documented cougar attacks in the state, 16 have occurred since 1992, which may reflect the significant expansion of human populations, development and activity in more traditional cougar habitat in recent decades, as well as increases in cougar populations and better record-keeping.

It is important to recognize that the mere sighting of an animal does not mean that an attack is likely to occur – cougars regularly travel long distances and it is most likely that the cougar is just passing through. Nevertheless, it is always wise to take precautions while recreating in cougar country and to be prepared in case you encounter a cougar.