

The ECF Update

Newsletter of the Eastern Cougar Foundation

Bringing Back a Legend



June 2009

2009: No. 2



A Florida Panther. In “River Cat,” Stephen Williams tells the story of a young male panther who leaves his birthplace in southern Florida looking for a territory of his own. Will he find it?

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“Big Guy” Killed by Poacher in the Black Hills



The magnificent 180 lb male was pictured at an elk carcass on Page 9 of the June 2007 issue of *The ECF Update* (which you can download from our website). Later he was outfitted with a radiocollar. Dr. Tom Huhnerkoch of Mountain Cats Trust -



<http://mountaincatstrust.googlepages.com/mountaincatstrust> - is offering a reward of \$1000.00 for the apprehension of the killer.

Join the Eastern Cougar Foundation

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Internet. You will get your copies earlier. They will be superior, with color photos, *AND* you will be saving us postage and printing costs. Even if you want a paper copy, send us your email address anyway so we can send you alerts on issues affecting the recovery of cougars in central and eastern North America.

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<small>*Lakota word for cougar **Cherokee for cougar (Lord of the Forest)</small>		

River Cat

A Story by Stephen Lee Williams
A Young Male Panther Disperses North, Looking for a Home of His Own

It is the way of Hadjo Chopco (“Long Tail” in the Creek/Muskogee), the panther, to move over great expanses to cover the range of the females that make this place their home. It is here that my story begins, Pahayokey meaning “grassy waters” in the language of the Mayaimis, Calusas and Tequestas, the Everglades. The way before me leads by night sky to the north between the Okeechobee (“big water” in Miccosokee) and the salt waters and sands at lands end in the west.

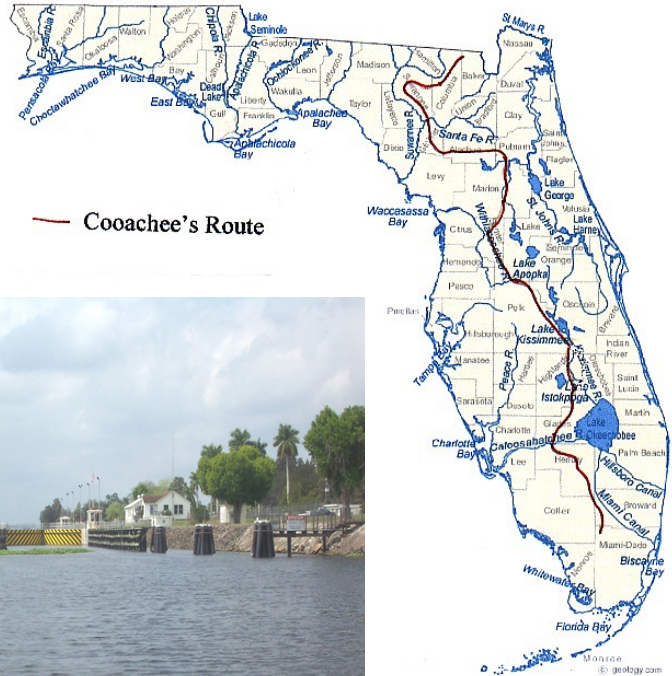
I Coachee ,Panther from the Creek/Muskogee; “Kvwake”

Moving silently here on the edge of the strand, the quiet of this place to me is telling in the mix of what comes separately from, but within the currents of the air. The movement, cries or calls—even the breath of things that are here—tells me what is unseen. To find the prey and seek a mate I am to face much that I have never before experienced. The first of these is the river *Caloosahatchee*, it must be crossed for me to move on, learn the land and live.

Ortona Lock on the Caloosahatchee River, near Coachee’s crossing place.

Only three moons ago I was driven off by my mother, in the way of our kind. From inside me comes a want to move on, but I am also driven by the awareness of a powerful presence I feel of another panther who rules these strands of cypress I move through. I know that he may even be the one bred to the female of my birthing. It has long been with him as it has now come to be with me—a time to hunt, find mates, and live—but this is his place, he is the strongest and must be avoided.

In the six seasons of my life, the loss of a brother and sister young cat has sharpened in me a keen edged wariness of new things. I pause, then with purpose move into the deepening water with a strong movement and soon reach the other side. It is there in the darkness my senses tell of the other wild things that live here. Each in its turn—by quiet, guile, strength or speed, either predator or prey—must eat. I will eat what I know, *eco* (ejo) the deer or *sukv* (suka) the hog, and *wotko* the raccoon, as I stalk and take them in the hunt. I do not eat the dead.



My night movement north, crossing open grasses melt into rest and less travel by day. Following the small streams, skirting lakes and ponds, I use what cover there is—cypress strand and heads, thick palmettos and edge to move in or along. Here I begin to cross other trails, new to me and strange. They feel hard and hot to the pads of my paw and their blackness often stretches beyond where my eyes can see. These trails are like none that I have ever known, and death is their keeper. When finding the still forms of other wild things, I know the quieting of their breath has come by the blow given by the hulking thing that hurtles along the path. Rarely stopping, it never eats what it kills. By day no animal can match its speed, in the night the piercing light of its eyes transfixes even the swiftest.

For me the panther, and for all things of and touched by *HSKTMSE*, (*HESAKETVMESE*,

Creek/Muskogee) the Master of Breath, Creator, time is measured by light and darkness, coolness and heat and the passing of the sun and moon. I move further and faster by night and hunt, by day lying close to cover, rest, then rise, move on, always sensing, seeing, to hear and scent, what is there, food, danger, all that is in the present, part of the moment.

Moving alongside the river *Kissimmee* in the season of growing, I tread ever closer to the still grey forms with many unseeing eyes that never move. On the hard black surface which surround them lay the resting hulks of the killing things that run the trails of death. Passing on I come to a place where the black trail is wide and reaches as from where the sun rises to where it sets. For a time of one sun and into the night's moon I lay quiet by the trail until I could no longer wait. Leaping between the fast moving bright eyes of one and over the back of another, my side is grazed by the blow of one of them before I dive down the embankment and into the darkness on the other side.

The Suwannee River

I have to leave this place. I am pulled in the direction of cooler airs which increasingly blow toward me from above the coursing track of the sun. Finding my way between the river *Withalacoochee* and the quiet still lake *Panasoffkee* I begin to leave behind much of the danger which had come to follow me. I move on northward and into the heat of July, to follow the winding course of the river *Oklawaha*. Hunting is good, and it is easier now to avoid the lair and pathways of the two-legged thing which moves around disquietedly and so unaware of its surroundings. Underneath the rim of Payne's Prairie I waited until the black trail was near quiet and just before the sun came, leaped across in two bounds and began to make my way toward the river *Santa Fe*. The leaves begin to turn in the cool air. The prey are many now—large deer, wild hogs—all good hunting along the edge of the great oak forest and stands of pine. It is a good time in good cat country. I'm increasingly aware of my being alone though, of being the only cat here begins to enter into my consciousness.

Deep in my bone and sinew there is a sense, a memory now, always present, that I feel this is the

place from which we came and where I was meant to be again. It is the last of the season before the changes that would bring new life. The sun has little further south to reach and would soon come here from where I'd been, rising to mid-sky to stay longer and warm the earth. Something now though, pulls at me, and I turn my head to look back more often to where I had come from.

Crossing the river *Santa Fe*, I come up to and



follow below the river *Suwannee*, (echo river in the Creek/Muskogee), this time finding passage under the black killing trail, I come round to face that place so named for the warrior spirit of *Osceola*. It is a forest which extends far toward the place of the suns rising and on toward where above it lay the swamp *Okefenokee*, the land of the “trembling earth”. Only little further away lay the river *Savannah* and on from there into the mist are the ancient *Appalachian* mountains. Looking toward where the sun would set, lay the dense coastal swamps and pine forest through the land of the *Timucuas* and *Apalchee* to the rivers *Ochlockonee* then *Apalachicola* and from there on to the river *Alabama*. I am a lion of *VNEWTV*, (Aniweda from the Muskogee, meaning the whole of the North American continent in the ancient languages of the First Peoples of this land), and this is where I belong.

As I look round in this place, something takes hold of me, pulling at me, and I turn in my tracks. I know that I can stay here, but for one reason..... To be with that of my own kind and to have a mate is something that might never come to pass in this place. So it is that back there I will go again, through the “killing ground”. I have to go. The female of my kind has little reason to cross the river *Caloosahatchee*, and rarely does. I must find her.

I am Cooachee.....The Florida Panther

Steve is a native Floridian and lives in White Springs, FL. He founded the Florida Panther Society Inc. in 1994 and currently serves as President. Steve has also served on the Florida Panther Recovery Team in its development of two recovery plans since 1995. The article was printed in modified form in the Old Florida Journal (2009, Vol. 1, No. 1).

Females are the Key to Potential Cougar Colonization

By Helen McGinnis

Many people assume that sooner or later cougars will recolonize the East and Midwest. These colonizers would come from the recovered breeding populations in the Black Hills of South Dakota and the Badlands of southwestern North Dakota, and a likely, but as yet undeclared, breeding population in the northwest corner of Nebraska. But this assumption is dubious.

North and South Dakota began cougar hunting seasons in the later part of 2005. Now cougars dispersing east across the plains from the Black Hills and the North Dakota Badlands will have a difficult time getting across the Great Plains. In South Dakota, any landowner with a \$15.00 license can kill a cougar. In North Dakota, no quota is imposed on kills of cougars outside the Badlands during the cougar hunting season, which in 2008-2009 ran from August 31 to March 31. The 2010 cougar hunting season in South Dakota will likely have a higher quota, with the goal of reducing a now stable population. Surviving young males may have no need to leave the Black Hills to find a territory. If Nebraska continues to protect its cougars, it could become the only potential source of dispersers from the West.

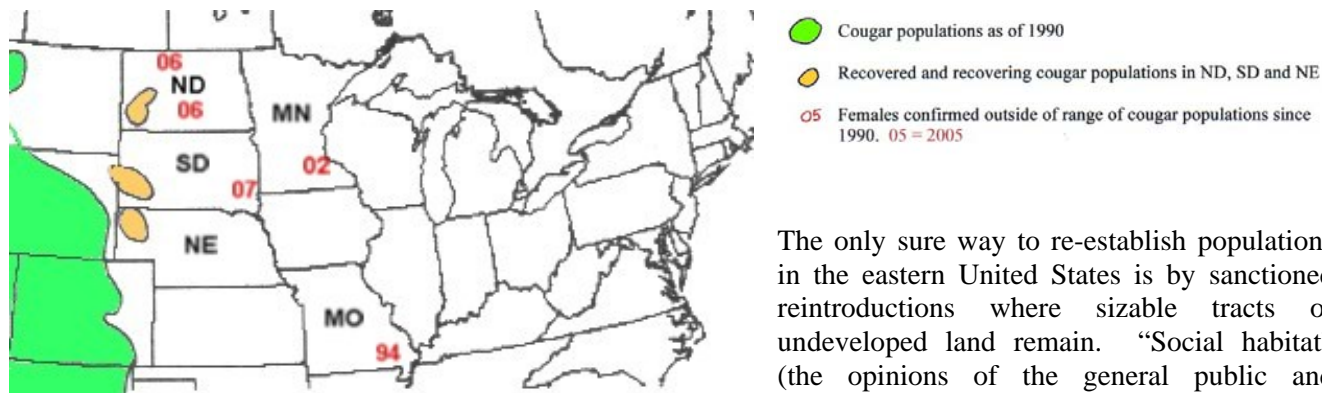
Dr. Clay Nielsen and his students at Southern Illinois University Carbondale are analyzing confirmation data accumulated by the Cougar Network. We hope that in the near future they'll be in a position to make an educated guess on the possibility that dispersers from the western edge of the Great Plains will recolonize the Upper Midwest.

Ultimately, the only cougars that count in the restoration of a population are females. In a majority of confirmations in central North America from 1990 to date, the sexes of the cougars could not be determined or are not specified. Most of those of known sex are males. Since 2000 males known or assumed to be from the Black Hills have made some spectacular journeys—to northern Oklahoma, southern Illinois, Chicago and Saskatoon—but a new population cannot develop without females. Females can disperse long distances but normally do not. Only five females have been documented east of the breeding populations of the Dakotas and Nebraska since 1990. They include:

- December 1994. Photograph of carcass and skin of small adult female killed in Carter County, Missouri¹.
- May 30, 2002. 100 lb female shot by officers of the Minnesota DNR near the Minnesota River in Bloomington, which is just south of Minneapolis-St. Paul. It had been along a trail and

snarled at people walking by. It showed no fear of the officers. It was probably the same individual that was recorded 1 ½ miles away at a deer kill at Savage in April 2002².

- October 18, 2006. Adult female shot near Lansford, Bottineau County, ND³.
- November 6, 2006: Adult female hit by vehicle and then shot near Dawson, Kidder County, ND⁴.
- December 3, 2007: Female approximately 2 years old shot near Howard, Miner County, SD. This was probably the same individual that was killing goats near Hartford, SD in September 2007^{5, 6}.



Only two of the five females were in the Midwest. The one killed in Minnesota in 2002 was probably a former captive. Wild cougars rarely if ever lie along a trail and snarl at people. The 1994 record from Missouri may have been a former captive or could have come from Arkansas. The Cougar Network’s confirmation maps show several records in Arkansas since 1990⁷. The ECF will soon post maps showing confirmations from 1900 to 1989. They include records of seven definite and likely confirmations in Arkansas between 1948 and 1978. So we have no evidence that any females have dispersed from the western edge of the Plains to the Midwest.

The most likely dispersal route for cougars born at the western edge of the Great Plains is north of the Great Lakes. These young cougars more likely will be born in central Canada than in the United States. Cougars are said to be rebounding in Saskatchewan and already are being confirmed in Manitoba. Part of that dispersal route would be through Ontario’s Boreal Forest Zone, which is not outstanding deer habitat. But all the range maps I have found by Googling show white-tailed deer populations extending continuously west to east across Ontario. The relative lack of development in northern Ontario should help the dispersers survive.

The only sure way to re-establish populations in the eastern United States is by sanctioned reintroductions where sizable tracts of undeveloped land remain. “Social habitat” (the opinions of the general public and especially deer hunters) and agency attitudes toward large carnivores such as wolves and cougars are just as important. The Eastern Cougar Foundation’s goal is to assess the social habitat and educate interested constituencies, while advocating for reintroductions.

Sources:

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³Bismarck Tribune, October 20, 2006
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⁷<http://www.cougarnet.org/southeast.html>

NEWS FROM THE DAKOTAS

The articles on pages 7-11 were forwarded to the SD Department of Game Fisheries & Parks and the Commission. Unfortunately, the Commission approved an increase in the quota to 40 - 25 females on July 1st.

South Dakota Commission Proposes Increase in Black Hills Hunting Quota

By Helen McGinnis and John Laundré

The South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Commission wants to increase the quota for the next mountain lion season to 40, or 25 females, whichever comes first. The season will run from January 1 to March 31, 2010. The commissioners will make their decision on July 1st. Last year the quota was a total of 35, or 15 females. According to the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks (DWF&P), approximately 250 cougars now live in the Black Hills, and the population is stable.

Cougar advocates in the Black Hills have been unable to learn the rationale for the increased quota, beyond the fact that the Commission wants to decrease the population to 85% of current population (or 85% of carrying capacity). The latter will be difficult if not impossible to determine. Instances of livestock depredation in the Hills are rare, and there has been only one controversial alleged attack on a human that lacked confirming evidence. But we have clues. In early May, hundreds of sportsmen submitted a petition to the DGF&P asking for an increase in the cougar quota because of their perceived impact on ungulates (deer, elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goats). Presumably this is the petition still online at the website of the South Dakota Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation¹. The petition states, "Based on extensive research, SDGF&P has concluded that the Black Hills can support no more than **145** lions yet the **current** population is as high as **280!**" This statement is based on the DWF&P's outdated management plan, which estimated the Black Hills had a carrying capacity of approximately 140 cougars. According to John Kanta, Regional Wildlife Manager of the DGF&P, the plan needs to be revised to a higher level.

Cougar populations are self regulatory, unlike deer and elk. Without natural predation and/or hunting by humans, deer and elk can overpopulate their range, literally eating themselves out of house and home. Many other species of wildlife and plants are suffer when this happens. But if there are too many cougars, more subadults will disperse out of

the range. Others die of starvation or are killed in fights with other cougars over territories. But dispersal in itself is not a sign of overpopulation. It is necessary to maintain genetic diversity and prevent inbreeding in populations of cougars that are always sparse because they are obligate carnivores at the top of the food chain.

The DGF&P and a graduate student working toward a PhD under the direction of Dr. Jonathan Jenks of South Dakota State University will start a study of prey selection in Black Hills cougars on July 1st. About 75 Black Hills cougars now wear radio collars. The university has obtained new GPS collars that allow much closer monitoring of the animals that carry them. When the signals from a GPS-collared animal cluster in a restricted area and period of time, the researchers assume that the cougar has made a kill and will visit the site to determine the prey species.

In an interview with McGinnis, Jenks said that the main concern is the impact of cougar predation on bighorn sheep. Bighorn sheep definitely are in trouble, not only in the Black Hills, but throughout much of their range. Unregulated hunting eliminated native bighorns in the Black Hills by 1916. They were reintroduced into Custer State Park from Wyoming and Colorado in the 1960s and 1990s, and remain clustered in and around the park. The DGF&P was allowing a very limited take by hunters until 2005, after disaster struck in 2004.



Bighorn Rams in the Black Hills

The main killer of bighorns today is pneumonia contracted from domestic sheep. Domestic sheep are resistant to the disease, but it is usually fatal to bighorns. Researchers have determined that domestic sheep and bighorns should not be allowed to mix. Sheep are grazed in the Black Hills. In the winter of 2004, as many as 75% of the bighorns in the state park died of pneumonia. The DGF&P suspects that the bighorns came into contact with a domestic sheep herd at Hot Springs but has not been able to link that possibility with the die-off.

Jenks said that some research projects have documented that cougars can decimate bighorn populations, and that there should be “zero tolerance” for cougars around these populations. It



South Dakota Mule Deer Buck

is true that individual cougars may specialize on bighorns and can severely impact an already reduced bighorn population. Several years ago individual cougar specialists were eliminated from the range of Sierra Nevada bighorns, to the benefit of the sheep. But cougars and sheep have co-existed for thousands of years.

How was that so? Can there be a better way of managing the problem than sacrificing one species,

the cougar, for another, the sheep? We now know that cougars are important keystone species in ecosystems, and it is not as simple a solution as getting rid of them – zero tolerance, forever! If we analyze the problem more objectively, we see that besides initial overhunting and contact with domestic sheep, sheep range today is not the same as the sheep range that existed a hundred years ago. Fire suppression has led to major advances of trees and shrubs in what was once prime sheep habitat. Many content that it is this habitat change that is the problem, not the predators. How so? According to the landscape of fear model Laundré presented at the Biennial Symposium of the North American Wild Sheep and Goat Council², this change in habitat has allowed a stalking predator such as the cougar more success at catching sheep than in the original open landscape. Laundré also contends that most sheep reintroductions are destined to fail because sheep are released in rocky, cliff “escape” habitat that furthers favors cougar success. He concluded that if there is hope for coexistence of sheep and cougars, sheep biologists need to address the anti-predator habitat needs of sheep rather than propose “zero tolerance” programs that would need to be conducted in perpetuity.

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Also thanks to John Kanta of the SD DWF&P and Dr. Tom Huhnerkoch, aka Mountain Cats Trust (<http://mountaincatstrust.googlepages.com/mountaincatstrust>) for some of the information in this article.

South Dakota Hunters Concerned that Cougars May be Impacting Deer and Elk Populations

By John Laundré

Recently several hundred South Dakota sportsmen submitted a petition to the South Dakota Game, Fisheries and Park Commission requesting an increase in the cougar hunting quota because of their concern that cougars may be reducing the numbers of ungulates (deer, elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goats) that they want for themselves.

Cougars in South Dakota are making a valiant attempt to re-establish themselves in their historical range--an effort we humans would admire and hold in awe as an ecological wonder for any other non-predator native species. This selective and outright prejudice against predators has got to stop. Not just because it is ecologically disastrous, but also

because it is flat out logically wrong! All across the West, so called sportsmen have been blaming predators, mainly cougars, for declines in deer populations that began in the early 1990's. These populations have yet to recover to the previous, probably unhealthy, highs in the 1980's. In the scientific literature, I demonstrated that if you go through the calculations and add the numbers up, it just does not make sense¹. Logically, given what cougars eat, the number of cougars and the number of deer, cougars just can't eat enough deer to make a difference. To do so, there would have to more cougars than have ever been reported, and they would weigh over 700 pounds after one year!

If as I did in Idaho¹, we bother to do the same calculations for the Black Hills of South Dakota, again, the numbers just don't add up. Let me show you. Now I know the numbers may get confusing but please bear with me because it is only by following this number trail that we can logically assess the impact cougars in the Black Hills can possibly have on the deer population. First, how many deer are there in the Black Hills? Based on a study out of Brookings, SD, there are approximately 43,000 mule and white-tailed deer there². Eighty percent of them are females (or about 34,000). Approximately 80% of them will give birth to an average of 1.5 young/year, or about 41,000 fawns. If 50% of them survive their first year, 20,500 new deer will be added to the population each year!

The next thing to ask is how many cougars are there. According to the South Dakota Game Fish and Parks, there are about 250 cougars living in the Black Hills. If each of them eat only adult deer and kill on average 30 deer per year (this is actually high based on previous studies³) then they will kill about 7,500 deer per year. This represents only about 17.4% of the adult deer population of 43,000 or only 34.3% of the surviving fawn crop would be needed to replace the adult loses to cougars! Human hunters take from 3000-4000 per year, still leaving a net gain of OVER 10,000 deer per year! So, unless there are twice as many cougars as estimated or they are eating twice as much as a normal animal (and thus weighing over 700 pounds!), the numbers just do not add up!

Of course this begs the question of whether there could be enough cougars in the Black Hills to negatively impact deer numbers. Historically, we

consistently found the largest ungulate populations, e.g. the plains of the Serengeti, the tundra of the arctic, the plains of North America, in the presence of healthy and "uncontrolled" predator populations.



*Covered cougar deer kill in the Black Hills
From the Mule Deer Foundation website*

How can that be? Why in these cases didn't predators increase in number, as most population models would predict, to eventually cause the downfall of their prey populations? First of all, this would be evolutionarily unstable and any predator that did that would have long gone extinct along with its prey. So evolutionarily, there is pressure on a predator NOT to be too efficient. Secondly, they need to catch their prey with their TEETH and CLAWS! No spears, no high powered rifles--they have to come in physical contact with their prey and wrestle them to the ground! Given that and that the prey are not totally defenseless, it is not surprising that a predator's efficiency rate is only around 20%. Plus if we add the fact that in some habitat types the predators' efficiency is almost zero (we call them refuges) it makes logical sense that predators rarely can "decimate" prey populations the way hunters and ungulate biologists believe. What all this leads to is a system where only a small percent of the prey is actually realistically available to the predator. In this system, there can never be too many predators because there can never be enough of them.

Instead of decimating deer numbers, what cougars are more likely doing in the Black Hills is giving a long overdue reprieve to the forest vegetation of the area. As we have seen in Yellowstone Park and see too plainly here in the East, the mountains do indeed live in fear of the deer. Though I have not looked, I am sure I can find studies that show deer and elk have been severely overgrazing the Black

Hills for decades. Freed of predation, and more importantly, the fear of predators, ungulates roam like cattle, overgrazing their favored food species and eventually reducing the productivity of the range and its ability to support the large numbers hunters seem to want! So, instead of being concerned that cougars might be impacting deer populations, hunters should be thankful that cougars are likely re-establishing a landscape of fear where deer are too afraid to go to certain areas, which will reduce the ecological damage their uncontrolled grazing has done. Thanks to the cougar, long overgrazed plant species can recuperate, enhancing productivity and biodiversity in the Black Hill forests for the benefit of multiple other species as well as the long term health of the hunters' beloved deer populations.

One last word on this. We have to stop thinking that ungulate populations exist only for human hunters! Although historically we relied on wild game animals, in the modern world hunting is a luxury, not a necessity. We should not sacrifice key elements of an ecosystem, the top predators, for this luxury. To do so is to destroy the ecosystem on which all of us, not just the hunting public, rely. An ecosystem functions by the flow of energy through all of its trophic levels, including the top predators. In a functioning ecosystem, deer live to feed cougars just as plants live to feed deer. This is how ecosystems function. Break the chain of

energy flow and you break the ecosystem. Break the ecosystem and we all suffer. The flow of energy from prey (deer) to predators (cougars) is the cost of operation in a functioning ecosystem. In a functioning ecosystem, there will be plenty of game for both humans and predators. We just have to not be so greedy! We need to start treating the Black Hills as a living functioning ecosystem, not a deer farm.

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Study of Food Habits of Cougars on the Dakota Prairies Finds No Evidence of Livestock Depredation

The stomach contents and intestinal tracts of 14 cougars killed on the prairies of North and South Dakota outside the recognized populations in the Black Hills and the Badlands of North Dakota contained no livestock remains, according to a recently published study in *American Midland Naturalist*, although two of the cougars had eaten domestic cats¹. Other food items included porcupine, badger, beaver, jackrabbit and other small animals. Six of the cougars were killed in the North Dakota prairies and eight were taken in South Dakota. Six of the cougars had eaten deer.

Fourteen is a small number, but the Cougar Network's confirmation maps for the northern Great Plains show a total of only 33 confirmations

from 1990 to date². Some of the confirmations almost certainly pertain to a single individual, so the actual number of cougars is less than 33. So the sample of 14 likely represents at least half of the cougars documented on the prairies.

The results contradict fears of ranchers that cougars will be significant depredators on livestock. Under their influence, any landowner outside the Black Hills can now shoot a cougar for any reason, as long as he or she has a \$15.00 cougar hunting license. North Dakota has no quota on the take by cougar hunters outside the Badlands during the cougar hunting season. The last North Dakota season ran from August 31st 2008 to March 31, 2009.



Porcupine on gravel road

It is commonly assumed that the prairies are unsuitable habitat for cougars, but Fecske³, drawing her information from Turner⁴ states that cougars occurred throughout the South Dakota into the late 1800s, although they were considered abundant only in the Black Hills. In North Dakota at the beginning of historic times, cougars were probably rare east of the Missouri River⁵. The physical habitat is certainly less suitable today, but the main reason that the state wildlife agencies in the Dakotas consider the prairies unsuitable for cougars is probably based mainly on the “social climate,” the attitudes of ranchers.



Black-tailed jackrabbit



Badger

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³Fecske, Dorothy M. 2003. Distribution and abundance of American martens and cougars in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming. PhD dissertation, South Dakota State University. xxiii + 171 pp.

⁴Turner, R.W. 1974. Mammals of the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming. Miscellaneous Publication No. 60, University of Kansas Publications, Museum of Natural History, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁵Young, S.P., and E.A. Goldman. 1946. The Puma: mysterious American cat. Amer. Wildl. Inst., Washington, DC, xiv + 358 pp.

North Dakota's fourth cougar hunting season ended on March 31st. The season had actually closed on February 23rd when the quota of eight cougars was filled. It took longer to fill the quota for the 2008-2009 season, which began on August 31, 2008, than in the previous three seasons, when the seasons ended in November or January. Possibly this indicates that the population in the Badlands in the southwestern part of the state is being reduced, or perhaps weather and snow conditions made the cougars more vulnerable to hunters.

No quota was imposed on the rest of the state, but as of March 31, no cougars had been killed on the prairies. Besides the eight killed by hunters in the Badlands, four other cougars were killed to “protect property or humans.” Only one cougar was killed in the eastern part of the state in 2008, in

Sargent County. It was a young male shot by coyote hunters on New Years Day.

With the apparent reduction of the number of dispersers making onto the prairie of eastern North Dakota and the lengthening of the time required to

fill the quota in the Badlands (Zone 1), the potential for North Dakota as a source of cougars to colonize the Upper Great Lakes states apparently has been minimized.



MORE NEWS FROM THE BLANK SPACE

←Historic range of the cougar.

Range of the cougar ca. 1990→



Maps of the cougar's range produced in the 1990s show a vast blank space in eastern and central North America—habitat that the big cat used to occupy before it was eliminated by persecution and near-elimination of its natural prey—the white-tailed deer. Above are maps from Kevin Hansen's 1992 book [Cougar: The American Lion](#). The Eastern Cougar Foundation is dedicated to the restoration of cougar populations in suitable areas of the eastern portion of that blank space and advocates responsible management when they recolonize former habitat.

Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, Alberta-Saskatchewan: Michelle Bacon contributed an article on this recently established "island population," Canada's easternmost, in the September 2008 issue of this newsletter (accessible on the Internet from our website by clicking on "Newsletters" in the left column). Only one male, weighing 180 lbs., held a territory in the Hills. He had been radio-collared in the winter of 2007-2008. On April 11th of this year, he stopped moving, so Bacon knew he was dead. Hikers recovered his body on April 13th. The carcass was taken to a veterinarian for a necropsy. The examination revealed broken ribs and punctured lungs.

"We figured out he had likely been hunting elk and an elk had kicked him in the ribs," Bacon said. "It was really surprising and unexpected, but it goes to show the risk of being a predator. Even the biggest cat around can (get into trouble)."

An animal that preys on ungulates that are sometimes larger than itself is continually risking its life. The vast majority of cougars dying today are killed by humans, especially hunters, but even without hunting, the life of a cougar is a risky one.

What will happen to the Cypress Hills population now? Will one of the big male's sons take over as dominant male, leading to inbreeding, or will a disperser come in from elsewhere? Stay tuned.

Saskatchewan: Good news for a change for us cougar advocates! In an article published in the Prince Albert Daily Herald, Shawn Burke said that the province's cougar population has rebounded to 300 to 350 (not a large number for such a large province). Burke is Manager Saskatchewan's Ministry of Environment's Wildlife Management Unit. He said cougars can be found anywhere from La Ronge to the Manitoba border, with strong populations in Cypress Hills and along the North and South Saskatchewan River. Burke considers the resurgence of cougars a success story. He told reporter Joshua Page of the Herald staff, "People's attitude to wildlife has changed. Cougars are out there and they are the sign of a healthy environment."

Cougars are also being documented in Manitoba, including one caught by a remote camera on November 11, 2008 in the Lac du Bonnet area, about 40 miles west of the Ontario border.

Ontario: Dr. Rick Rosatte of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has purchased 40 remote cameras that will be set out in areas where promising sightings occur and where cougars have been confirmed by tracks or DNA. Rosatte said that more than 500 sightings have been reported to the MNR since 2002. Most are cases of mistaken identity. He noted that in Oregon, officials estimate that only 7% of alleged cougar sightings are correct.

During the past three years, researchers have collected 20 pieces of actual evidence of cougars in the province. They include scats, hair and sightings by Ministry of Natural Resources employees. One promising area with a lot of probable sightings is near Charleston Lake. Charleston Lake is in southern Ontario, about 50 miles WNW as the cougar walks and swims from the Adirondack Park Preserve in New York State.



The Spooner Cougar, early March, 2009

Cougar track near Durand, WI, late May 2009

Wisconsin: In early March of this year a male cougar was treed on three successive days near Spooner in the northwest part of the state. Efforts to tranquilize him and put on a radiocollar were unsuccessful. No further sign of him was found until the Dr. Adrian Wydeven of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced that tracks of a large cougar had been confirmed in soft soil in late May on a large dairy farm in the Town of Lima near Durand, Pepin County. The farmer, who has hunted big game in the West, knew how to identify cougar tracks. The farm is about 80 miles south of Spooner and 25 miles SW of Eau Claire. The DNR has no plans to pursue the big cat.

NEWS OF THE EASTERN COUGAR FOUNDATION

Thank You's: Many thanks to ECF members Rupe Cutler of Roanoke, VA; Brian Vitelli of Guilford, CT; and Stanley F. Warner of Farmville, VA for generous membership renewals. Gratitude also to Ramon (Ray) Bisque of Golden, Colorado. Earlier Ray donated several copies of his book **LIONS OF THE LYONS** to us, and it has become ECF's "best seller." Now he will also be donating part of the proceeds from copies he sells from his own website.

In late March Ben Shrader received a Buckeye Cam remote camera. With accessories, it is worth \$850. Ben has set it out near his home in western Virginia. A bear went straight for it and ripped out the screws. Since then, the Cam has captured a bobcat, bears, gray foxes, red foxes, deer, squirrels, raccoons and feral house cat.

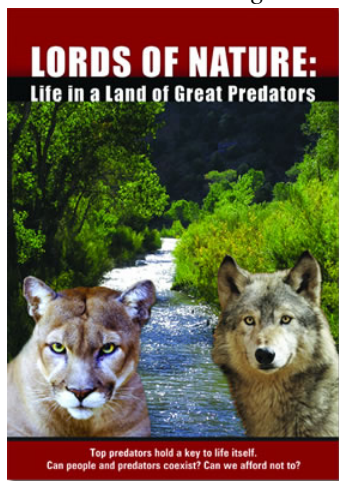
In recent years Kerry Gyekis has given more than 30 PowerPoint talks in Pennsylvania and adjacent states. He reports that the climate for talks has changed drastically because of needed reductions in the Pennsylvania state budget. He says, "I suspect that many of the part-time naturalists who asked me to come in several previous

years, are not even there now and/or are severely restricted in budget. I will, however, be doing a two-day show for members of the Seneca Nation in late summer. That should be interesting.” Kerry stepped down as Vice President in June and has been succeeded by Dr. John Laundré. He was introduced to members in the September 2008 of this newsletter.

What else is the ECF up to? The ECF Board and other active members are investigating ways to restore cougars to selected regions of the East and Midwest. Reintroduction, attitude surveys, education for the general public and for school children, outreach to like-minded organizations and individuals, distribution of DVDs, and methods of preventing unneeded deaths of cougars such as the one that occurred in Bossier City, Louisiana last year are under consideration. We are pursuing grants for many of these projects.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONS TO YOUR BOOK AND DVD SHELF

Lords of Nature: Joining Will Stolzenburg’s *Where the Wild Things Were* and Joel Berger’s *The*



Better to Eat You With, the popularization of predator ecology studies now includes a documentary film, *Lords of Nature: Life in a Land of Great Predators*. Produced and directed by the couple behind Green Fire Productions, Karen and Ralf Meyer, the 60 minute film presents

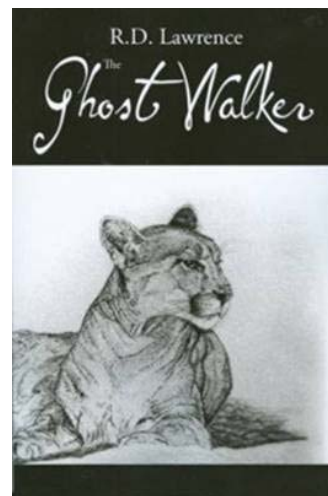
the impact restored predators have on ecosystems long suffering from their absence. Including interviews with Oregon State ecology researchers Bill Ripple and Bob Beschta documenting the recovery of riparian corridors with the return of wolves to Yellowstone and cougars to Zion, the film touches on the evolution of ecology studies from Aldo Leopold’s backyard in rural Wisconsin to the brutal lesson he learned by helping to exterminate predators from the Kaibab Plateau.

Lords also takes a look at how ranchers and sheep herders in Idaho and Minnesota are employing husbandry techniques to tolerate wolves, adapting to their presence. With progressive points of view expressed by both hunters and wildlife managers, and narrated by Peter Coyote with a script by ECF director Stolzenburg, *Lords of Nature* demonstrates

convincingly how people and big predators can co-exist, to the benefit of the ecosystems sustaining us all. The DVD is available for \$19.95 at <http://www.lordsofnature.org/>

The Ghost

Walker: In the fall of 1973, R.D. Lawrence purchased enough food and supplies for ten months in the wilderness near Revelstoke, British Columbia. During the summer he’d hired a private plane and searched the region, looking for a cougar for his planned long term, “noninvasive”



study. Eventually he saw one running across an open space. He ferried in his supplies by canoe and used the ruins of an abandoned mining camp to construct a small, snug cabin. Then he started looking for sign of the cougar. He soon found a kill and hid himself nearby. Over the ensuing months the two potentially dangerous predators—man and cougar, which he named The Ghost Walker—established a relationship. Lawrence wasn’t always the stalker. A unique story and an excellent read for anyone who loves wildlife and wilderness, the book was originally published in 1983.