

History of Mountain Lion Management

The United States has a long history of managing mountain lions and other large predators. According to a 2001 report by the United States General Accounting Office:

The practice of managing wildlife is not new, nor is the control of predators. For centuries, control of mammalian predators has been practiced worldwide as a means of protecting livestock and enhancing game populations. The first recorded federal involvement in wildlife damage control in the United States occurred in 1885, when a federal agency sent questionnaires to farmers about crop damage caused by birds. By 1915, the Congress was appropriating funds for federal predator control operations directed at wolves and coyotes. In 1931, the Congress passed the Act of March 2, 1931 [Animal Damage Control Act (7 U.S.C. 426-426c)], authorizing the control of injurious animals. Since then, federal wildlife control activities have evolved along with demographic and societal changes. In the program's early years, for example, the emphasis was on conducting general eradication campaigns that might be directed at the entire statewide population of a particular species of predator.¹

There are many reasons to support predator control measures, one of which is financial, primarily concerning the loss of livestock due to depredation. Estimates indicate that each year the United States loses \$71 million due to livestock loss (Table 1).

Table 1: Annual Livestock Losses Attributed to Predators^{2,3}

Livestock	Number Lost to Predators	Value of Loss (in millions)
Cattle	147,000	\$51.6
Sheep	273,000	\$16.5
Goats*	61,000	\$3.4
Total	481,000	\$71.5

* Losses of goats and kids were reported only for three states: Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas

Human safety is always a concern. As the human population of the country increases, wildlife habitat shrinks and people are more likely to encounter wildlife. Some of these encounters are going to be negative. In fact, thousands of people are injured or killed each year from animal attacks (Table 2).

Table 2: Estimates of Annual Human Injuries and Fatalities in the United States from Wildlife Bites or Attacks^{4,5,6}

Animal	Number of Injuries	Number of Fatalities
Bees and Wasps	More than 1,000,000	30-120
Dogs	800,000	17
Rodents	27,000	Unknown
Venomous Snakes	8,000	15
Skunks	750	0
Foxes	500	0
Bears	30	1
Sharks	28	2
Alligators	18	.5
Coyotes	2	0
Mountain Lions	2	.4

Note: These data are extrapolated from various studies done in various geographic regions over various periods of time. They are probably understated because they exclude nonreported bites, which could be quite high in number.

The government invested many resources in an attempt to eliminate these predators. "Between 1937 and 1970, federal employees...killed 7,255 cougars; 23,830 bears; 477,104 bobcats; 50,283 red wolves; 1,744 lobo wolves; 2,823,000 coyotes; and millions of other animals."⁷ In addition to these efforts, many states offered bounties on animals they deemed to be "undesirable predators," particularly the mountain lion. Between 1907 and 1978, nearly 50,000 mountain lions were killed in the United States (Table 3).

Table 3: Approximate Number of Mountain Lions Killed in United States, 1907 – 1978⁸

State	Time Period	Minimum Killed
Arizona	1917 – 1973	8,557
California	1907 – 1973	12,705
Colorado	1917 – 1974	2,007
Idaho	1928 – 1973	2,781
Montana	1921 – 1974	503
Nevada	1917 – 1973	2,198
New Mexico	1917 – 1973	1,283
Oregon	1918 – 1973	6,831
Texas	1925 – 1973	776
Utah	1913 – 1978	6,253
Washington	1936 – 1973	5,253

Today, mountain lion management is based upon sound scientific principles. The Arizona Game and Fish Department states that "(m)ountain lions...will be managed to ensure their future ecological, intrinsic, scientific, educational, and recreational values, to minimize conflicts with humans, and to minimize adverse impacts on other wildlife populations."⁹

Hunting mountain lions is legal in eleven western states. Of the twelve states listed above, only California lists mountain lions as protected. In Arizona, approximately 200 – 300 mountain lions are legally harvested every year by hunters, and about fifty more are removed as outlined by Arizona state law.¹⁰ A small population of mountain lions still exists in Florida, where the species is listed as endangered and receives protection according to the Endangered Species Act.

Sources:

- ¹ "Report to Congressional Committees: Wildlife Services Program." United States General Accounting Office. Nov. 2001.
- ² "Cattle Predator Loss." National Agricultural Statistics Services. May 2001 (data for 2000).
- ³ "Sheep and Goats Predator Loss." National Agricultural Statistics Services. May 2000 (data for 1999).
- ⁴ Michael R. Conover, William C. Pitt, K. K. Kessler, T. J. DuBow, and W. A. Sanborn. "Review of human injuries, illnesses, and economic losses caused by wildlife in the United States." Wildlife Society Bulletin. Vol. 23, No. 3. pp. 407-414. Fall 1995.
- ⁵ "Bee and Hymenoptera Stings." eMedicine. <http://emedicine.com/emerg/byname/bee-and-hymenoptera-stings.htm>
- ⁶ "Dog Bite Statistics." Northeast Arkansans for Animals. http://www.nafacares.org/Dog%20Stuff/dog_bite_statistics.htm
- ⁷ Hansen, Kevin. *Cougar: The American Lion*. Flagstaff: Northland Publishing, 1993.
- ⁸ Nowak, R. M. *The Cougar in the United States and Canada*. Washington, D.C.: New York Zoological Society and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Endangered Species, 1976.
- ⁹ "Predation Management Policy." Arizona Game and Fish Department. Department Operating Manual. A2.31. Sept. 14, 2001.
- ¹⁰ "Mountain Lion." Arizona Game and Fish Department. http://www.azgfd.gov/h_f/game_lion.shtml

Comprehension Questions

1. What is meant by the term "predator control"?
2. What are two reasons wildlife management agencies may decide to control predators?
3. Rewrite the following sentence in your own words: In the program's early years, the emphasis was on conducting general eradication campaigns that might be directed at the entire statewide population of a particular species of predator.
4. On average, how many people do mountain lions kill in the United States every year?
5. Use the data from Table 3 to calculate the average number of mountain lions killed every year in each state. Make a bar graph that clearly shows this information.
6. Based on the information presented in this article, write a paragraph explaining your position on whether the United States government was justified in nearly eliminating the mountain lion. Be sure to explain your reasoning, supported by scientific data provided in this article or in another scientific report you have reviewed. Be sure to identify your source(s) of information.