



THE STATE OF ARIZONA
GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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March 15, 2004

Governor Janet Napolitano
State of Arizona
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Governor Napolitano:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some background pertaining to the Department's position regarding mountain lions that constitute a threat to public safety in Sabino Canyon.

Attached is a chronology of events from Arizona Game Fish Department and U.S. Forest Service records pertaining to this incident. As you can see, the Department's decisions did not come quickly or without considerable review of available options. We communicated in our monthly reports to your office in June and November 2003, as noted in your letter, that mountain lions along the northern edge of Tucson have been a growing concern for months. The Department had reports from the public of dogs being killed in their yards, as well as numerous calls of lions exhibiting aberrant behavior in close proximity to humans. There have been many articles in the *Arizona Daily Star* about this, and the Department has unsuccessfully tried on no less than six different occasions since July 2003, to remove an offending lion when an incident of aberrant behavior could be verified.

When the U.S. Forest Service first considered closing Sabino Canyon to remove mountain lions during the last week of February we suggested a meeting with them to discuss options. This meeting occurred on March 5, 2004 at the U.S. Forest Service, Catalina District Ranger's office. In attendance were representatives of Pima County Animal Control, Pima County Sheriff's Office, the Coronado National Forest, and the Game and Fish Department. The Department was provided a synopsis of events as recorded by the U.S. Forest Service, and Lori Faeth was provided with this list. There were also more current sightings and events that we were aware of in the area. That list, coupled with our experience and knowledge of the issue, and that of our peers in other western fish and wildlife agencies, caused us to concur that lions needed to be removed from Sabino Canyon.

We did a subsequent study of the State's liabilities, consulted experts on lion behavior, and studied the best possible means to resolve the public threat between March 5th and 9th. Concurrently, news releases and reports were provided to the news media about our deliberations and were aired in print media and on nightly television in Tucson. We determined from our professional experience with large predators and the experience of professionals in other western

states, that the behavior documented by mountain lions in Sabino Canyon constituted a significant risk to public safety and additional action was warranted.

On Tuesday, a Commissioner went to your office prepared to update you personally on this issue, but was unable to speak with you.

The Department discussed possible options for any animals that would be removed from the Canyon. The Department's experience, and those of wildlife captivity facilities, like the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, is that mountain lions captured as adults generally do not do well in captivity. We do know that juveniles may successfully adapt to captivity, and we plan to remove any kittens caught to AGFD facilities until permanent placement can be made to an appropriate institution. Additionally, any animals captured in Sabino Canyon will very likely need to be removed from very rough, steep terrain. Attempting to remove and handle drugged animals in such terrain, knowing that the animals might recover from sedation during transport, could place our employees in unreasonable jeopardy.

Another potential option suggested was relocation of these animals, but the option was deemed unacceptable, as the potential to transfer the problem to another community was too high. Adult male mountain lions may have a home range as large as 150 square miles, adult females around 60-80 square miles. It has been our experience, and that of other western fish and wildlife agencies, that relocating an animal that is a known threat to public safety is simply transferring a problem to another community. The problem must eventually be dealt with by another community and the Department. We feel strongly such an action would be inappropriate and irresponsible.

Aversive conditioning has also been suggested as a possible option. The Department has personal experience with using techniques such as shooting "bean bag" rounds at other large predators like black bears. In our experience, the technique is only occasionally successful. Please see the attached recent article where aversive conditioning was tried in Yosemite National Park on mountain lions without success.

A final option that has been considered was a more permanent closing of the Sabino Canyon area. We do not feel this is a viable option for several reasons. First, given the large home range associated with mountain lions, these lions will continue to constitute a threat to residents and other visitors in areas adjacent to Sabino Canyon. Second, once large predators lose their natural fear of, and exhibit aggressive behavior toward humans, such behavior is unlikely to stop. In our experience, it continues to escalate. Given the frequency of the documented occurrence of mountain lions in and around Sabino Canyon, it is unlikely they would leave the area, making reopening of the Canyon anytime in the foreseeable future problematic. The only real solution under this option would be permanent closure of the Canyon. We disagree with the assertion that the mountain lions will eventually move on once summer comes. It has been our experience that once predators take up residence in close proximity to urban areas, they seldom leave due to the increased availability of easy prey items like rabbits and other small mammals, including pet dogs and cats.

Mountain lions are found commonly throughout Arizona, except in the Southwestern corner of our state, and are not rare or endangered, especially in the Catalina Mountains. Statewide there

are more than 2,500 of these large predators. It is for all of the above reasons that we decided it best to selectively remove and humanely destroy animals likely involved in the documented incidents. This is consistent with our policy and procedures, and the policies and procedures of other western states fish and wildlife agencies for handling of large and potentially dangerous predators, including black bears. Furthermore, this action will have only limited and temporary impact on a localized population of mountain lions in the Catalina Mountains. It in no way will threaten or harm the continued existence of mountain lions in the greater Tucson area or the State of Arizona.

The Commission welcomes public debate and input into wildlife management issues and the actions of the Commission and Department. However, we believe these must continue to be tempered with reason when there is a clear duty to act before tragedy strikes. We note that two schools, an elementary and a middle school, are located within 1000 feet of the Sabino Canyon entrance. In issues where human-wildlife conflicts occur that pose a significant threat to public safety, we continue to stand committed to our belief that public safety must come first. This is not a wildlife management issue or population management issue, but one of public safety. To engage in a lengthy public debate while such an imminent threat to public safety exists without taking action would be irresponsible. We believe that any delay of our intended action would be irresponsible and inappropriate given our knowledge and understanding of the current circumstances and the proximity of schoolyards.

We would encourage those with an interest in this issue to focus on actions that this and other communities can take to prevent this type of event from reoccurring. The Department has been attempting to get ordinances passed to prohibit feeding of wild mammals with limited success for several years. In the Sabino Canyon area, there are large and growing populations of prey animals artificially enhanced and maintained by continued and increasing human populations. These animals are easy prey for mountain lions and other predators. The Department would like to continue to work with interested citizens and local municipalities and counties to address this problem. We also welcome assistance with additional educational activities to address living with our native wildlife and ways to minimize potential conflict. We would also welcome and appreciate your assistance in addressing these efforts.

Again, thank you for your concern and for allowing us this opportunity to respond. This Commission stands committed to effectively managing Arizona's wildlife resources while protecting the public from significant and identifiable threats from animals exhibiting aggressive and unnatural behavior.

Sincerely,



Sue Chilton
Chair
Arizona Game and Fish Commission

Attachments

ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT/CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST
SUMMARY OF LION SIGHTINGS AND INCIDENTS
In and In Close Proximity to Sabino Canyon
March 12, 2004

March 11, 2004 - 1000, Tucson, Region V

Alleged mountain lion seen March 10, 2004 at 8:00 AM heading toward a barn between Tanque Verde and Cloud west of Bear Canyon

March 10, 2004 – 1900, Tucson

Mountain lion in backyard south of Sunrise and Sabino Canyon Roads

March 9, 2004 – Fresh tracks observed by Sabino Canyon tram operator at bridge six across Sabino Canyon Road. Tracks apparently digitally photographed by a visitor. Need to find contact info for the visitor. Tram driver was very confident in the identification.

March 6, 2004 – Homeowner on Villa Noriega called while observing a lion shaded up in her yard. From the description the lion was in the 1 and ½ year age class. Still had remnant spotting on the forelegs. I carefully interviewed this person to ensure that a long tail was observed.

March 5, 2004 – Report from homeowner on Siesta, south of Sabino Canyon Ranger Station. When rains ceased, homeowner discovered tracks in the yard beneath the children's tetherball pole. Homeowner made plaster casts and gave them to a FS employee to deliver to the District office. Tracks appear to be average size measuring 3.25 inches wide and 3.25 inches long. One cast is a full track, the other is a partial print of just the toes. Tracks were determined to those of large dog.

February 28, 2004 – Report from two hikers in the canyon, one a Coronado NF employee. Late afternoon, lion seen walking within 30 feet of Sabino Canyon tram road along the top of a cliff ledge. Reporting party had seen cougars in zoo settings previously.

February 15, 2004 - Call received of an observation of two mountain lions along the Sabino Canyon road at 0930. Lions were walking within 30 yards of the road. Canyon was very busy on that day. Had Shane Lyman's dogs on the scent within 2 hours, dogs unable to follow scent due to heavy human traffic in the area. Backtrack took us up Rattlesnake canyon where we found a third track of a larger single lion. (at the same time, A lion was observed off-forest loafing in the front yard of a home near Bear Canyon and Snyder...this has lead me to conclude that four lions use the area).

February 15, 2004 - Calle Primula near Snyder and Bear Canyon Road. The lion has been seen repeatedly in the neighborhood the reporting individual and her neighbor. Lion loafing in front yard of neighbor during the morning. This occurred on the same day and at the same time that two lions were observed within 20 yards of the Sabino Canyon Tram road, indicating that three lions are using the Sabino Canyon area.

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February 3, 2004 - Lion loafing in Rattlesnake Wash east of the Tram road. Lion sat up to watch a group of people walk through the small parking lot near the rest-room less than 10 yard away. Tracks revealed that it spent time under the box culvert at the Rattlesnake trail crossing.

February 2, 2004, Tucson, Region V

Mountain lion observed North of River Road between Campbell and Alvernon. Several sightings in neighborhood. Lion shows no fear of humans, neighbors afraid to go outside.

January 20, 2004 - Lion crossed tram road from east to west at 1445 between admin road and the place where the median starts. Report did not get to me until 1600. Others saw this lion near Cactus picnic ground around the same time.

January 20, 2004 - 1540, Tucson, Region V

Mountain lion sighted crossing road ¼ mile from hikers near truck yard on Sabino Canyon Road in Sabino Canyon Recreation Area between 2:35 and 2:40 pm.

Probably same as above.

January 19, 2004 - Lion reported to be on the Ventana Golf Course seen by many golfers. Employee of the Club called into report it.

January 13, 2004 - 6:30 pm - Lion seen leaving the road between stops 5 and 6. Unconcerned with human presence.

January 13, 2004, Tucson, Region V

Mountain lion frequenting residential yard NE of Swan and River. Appears unafraid of residents, sighting credible.

January 8, 2004 - Woman walking with her dog on Sabino Canyon Road NE of Snyder. A lion behind a bush less than 5 yards away growled at her. Scared, she jumped into traffic, a swerving car sounded its horn which caused the lion to flee.

January 7, 2004 - Lion seen walking down to the Anderson dam area by the tinajas.

Observers saw the lion approach the tinajas. People were recreating in along the stream within 20 yards of the lion. People were unaware of the lion.

January 2, 2004 - A pair of lions crossed the Phone Line trail within 20 yards of two hikers. Lions headed down to the creek area.

November 25, 2003 - 0845 Lion reported by jogger at the junction of the Bear Cn. Trail and the tram road. Jogger claimed that the cat "growled" at her. Subsequent follow-up by FS and Game and Fish failed to locate a lion. A bobcat was seen in the area.

November 25, 2003 - 1045 - A second jogger reported seeing the lion near the second toilet on the tram road leading to the turnaround below the Overlook. Lion was said to have a small mammal in

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its mouth and ran away. The jogger described the cat as "larger than a German Sheppard with a two foot long tail". Sighting was followed by AGFD and FS to no avail.

November 22, 2003 - Lion reported by member of Sheriffs Posse 0.3 miles above the Sabino Dam on the Creek Trail. AGFD responded, but was unable to locate the lion. Due to confusion with myriad of "lion sightings", AGFD got to the site at least 1.5 hours after the sighting. Call went through AGFD Radio Room.

November 17, 2003 - Unconfirmed lion lunged across Sabino Canyon road from the Esperero Middle School to FS System lands at about 1330. The lion came very close to a car, which was forced to stop. Incident witnessed by a PLIA employee. Follow-up search failed to locate footprints.

November 15, 2003 - Confirmed Mountain lion heard by a FS employee in the front yard of a friends house "two streets west of Esperero Middle School" in the early hours of morning. Lion "catterwalled".

November 15, 2003 - Unconfirmed firsthand report of a lion approaching public at Camp Lawton Boy Scout facility on Organization Ridge. Lion "followed" people into the woods when they left their campfire to get marshmallow sticks. Person who reported the observation saw the lion in full light of a flashlight.

November 8, 2003 - Public reported lion encounter to Sheriff. Encounter occurred at approximately 1630 at the dam in lower Sabino Canyon. Public was hiking, had crossed the disused bridge below the dam and was heading to the lake area. Lion was sitting on the rock wall near the trailhead. Lion merely stared at her, did not flee allowed her to pass within 40ft of it. Friends that were to meet her there had the same experience. FS did not receive the report until Wed. 12th.

October 30, 2003 – 0910, Tucson, Region V
Mountain lion seen last week in Agua Caliente area.

October 23, 2003 – 1500, Tucson, Region V
Seeing mountain lions and bobcats in backyard. 4" prints. East of Sabino Canyon Recreation Area.

October 1, 2003 – 1600, Tucson, Region V
Mountain lion seen several times during day this week in neighborhood. Getting bolder. Bear Canyon and Snyder

September 23, 2003 – 0800, Tucson, Region V
Mountain lion seen at approximately 6 PM. Young 70 pound animal described accurately by reporting party. Lion stared at him for about 30 seconds then jumped the fence and left the area. Cats missing from neighborhood. Near 49er's Country Club.

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September 11, 2003 - Man was stalked by a lion along River Road between Tenuri and Sabino Canyon Road. Cat was noticed when it had moved within 30 ft of the person. Cat continued to follow the man all the way to Sabino Canyon road where it "screeched" twice. Man was an experienced hunter and saw the cat in full view of headlights of passing truck. Reported incident to "police".

September 2003 - Second hand report of a woman jogging on Territorial, south of Basha's in the evening. Woman was passed by a neighbor in a car who waved. Car drove a short way. Stopped, turned around, open the door and neighbor insisted that the jogger enter the car since there was a mountain lion following jogger.

September? 2003 - Second hand report - Man living at Snyder and Bear Canyon heard disturbance in back yard. Ran out to see what was up. Saw lion jump out of yard over fence. Found his pet dog dead in back yard. Reported to Sheriff.

June 17, 2003, Tucson, Region V
Wildlife Services agent ran hounds through foothills of Santa Catalina Mountains in response to numerous previous calls in Catalina Foothill Clusters neighborhood

May 16, 2003 – 0920, Mount Lemon, Sabino Canyon, Palisades trail, Mud Springs
Three mountain lion sightings in two days

Mid May 2003 - two reports (not recorded on the ledger) of a lion, one at the dam, one on the Phone Line trail. Both observers reported that the cat was unconcerned with the presence of humans.

Monsoon 2003 - first bridge at lower bear. 2100 on the night of a large flood event. Cat seen by FS employees standing by water. Heard during July a couple of times.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the
Interior

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Yosemite National Park News Release

October 28, 2003
For Immediate Release

Two Mountain Lions Euthanized in Yosemite National Park

Yosemite National Park wildlife biologists euthanized two mountain lions late last night. The lions displayed threatening behavior and were routinely sighted by visitors and employees alike in the developed part of eastern Yosemite Valley.

The two lions, an adult female and a sub-adult, were trapped and then euthanized by lethal injection.

The lions had been seen, often hunting as a pair, in Curry Village, Yosemite Village, and by the Ahwahnee over the last three weeks. There is a large population of raccoons in this area, drawn to an abundance of human food available, that the lions used as prey. Wildlife biologists began tracking the pair and used aversive conditioning in an effort to keep the animals away from developed areas. These efforts were, however, unsuccessful.

Biologists were concerned that the lions were spending so much time in developed areas of the valley and showed no fear of the people around them. The situation became more serious when one of the lions displayed stalking behavior toward humans.

Park management decided to take action to ensure visitor safety in Yosemite Valley. This area of the valley sees high visitation, including families with children

and youth groups. It was determined that immediate action needed be taken after considering all the factors.

National Park Service looked into relocating the lions. However, an adequate relocation distance is at least 200 miles away, with 500 miles be closer to the ideal. This made relocation within the park unrealistic. Additionally, since the lions were unafraid of humans and displayed stalking behavior toward humans, they would be a threat at any location. [This paragraph added on 11/26/03.]

Yosemite National Park is a natural habitat to mountain lions. While the lions were relying on their natural hunting instincts, their increased interest in humans and the possibility that they regarded humans as prey caused serious concern.

-NPS-

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