

# **Arizona Game & Fish Department**

## **Draft Action Plan For Minimizing and Responding to Lion/Human Interactions**

### **Plan Purpose:**

- To guide the Department's response to a report of a mountain lion-human interaction in a consistent fashion, while minimizing, to the extent possible, public safety risks and the need to eliminate specific mountain lions.
- To provide the public with an understanding of the basis for actions taken by the Department to resolve mountain lion-human interactions
- To aid the Department in maintaining a central mountain lion-human interaction database using reporting forms to ensure consistency in reporting

**Problem Statement:** Throughout the West, many people have chosen to live in the rural-urban interface in what has been, and in many cases continues to be, good lion habitat. This has increased the frequency of people seeing and/or interacting with mountain lions. Also, deer, javelina, and other wildlife populations may be in higher concentrations due to the availability of ornamental plantings, access to free-standing water sources, and intentional feeding, which can result in increased mountain lion activities in the rural-urban interface. This has led to an increase in mountain lion-human interactions, which in some cases has resulted in injury or death to humans and mountain lions, which in turn has led to conflicts over agency incident management. These incidents are infrequent and between 1998 and 2004, a total of 9 mountain lions have been lethally removed in Arizona.

### **Mountain Lion Status and Regulations**

Mountain lions are widespread and inhabit all suitable habitat in the state except the extremely arid southwest corner. The Department has mapped mountain lion distribution to include 62,000 square miles of occupied habitat; 10,700 square miles are classified as high quality habitat where lions are considered abundant. Mountain lions are classified as a game species with a yearlong season. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission meets annually to review and approve regulations pertaining to sport harvest regulations. There is a mandatory checkout process to gather information on age, gender and kill location. A.R.S. § 17-301.1 allows any person to take wildlife in self-defense or in defense of another person if it is immediately necessary to protect oneself or to protect another person. Additionally, A.R.S. §17-302 allows a livestock operator who has recently had livestock attacked or killed by a bear or lion to kill the animal causing the damage.

### **Information and Education**

Education will be an ongoing effort to increase the public's knowledge about mountain lions and to create an awareness of how to reduce the potential of human/mountain lion conflicts. A brochure, *Mountain Lions in Arizona*, has been developed and is available from the Department. The Department will also work with land management agencies to develop appropriate signage in

problem areas. Specific training can be provided for local police/sheriff's officers and animal control staff. Education efforts will be intensified when lion sightings increase in an area.

## **Definitions**

To ensure all reporting of mountain lion-human interactions are responded to in a consistent manner the following definitions will be used in filling out all Mountain Lion Observation Forms:

- Sighting – a visual observation of a lion or a report of lion tracks or other sign.
- Encounter – an unexpected direct neutral meeting between a human and a lion without incident.
- Incident – an interaction between a human and a lion in which the human must take an action to make the lion back down or leave the area of the human, without injury to the human.
- Attack – when a human suffers bodily injury or is killed by a mountain lion.

## **Acceptable and Unacceptable Wildlife Behaviors:**

For the purpose of offering advice and establishing general guidelines, wildlife behavior relevant to humans can be categorized as acceptable or unacceptable. Acceptable behavior can be defined as any wildlife-human interaction where there is no unprovoked aggression from the animal toward the human. Unacceptable behavior is where an animal displays unprovoked aggression, repetitive nuisance acts, or unacceptable levels of damage to the resources.

### **1. Examples of acceptable behavior include:**

- The animal retreats at the sight of a human.
- The animal stays put while humans show no aggression.
- The animal shows signs of curiosity while humans show no aggression.
- The animal takes an aggressive posture followed by retreating or shows no further aggression.

### **2. Examples of unacceptable behavior include:**

- The animal displays unprovoked aggression.
- The animal exhibits forms of predatory behavior towards humans.
- Intentionally approaching close to a human after the animal knows the human has seen it, even if the human did not have to take evasive or aggressive action to drive the animal off.
- The animal continues to disturb, raid, or investigate humans or high use areas.
- A mountain lion that is not cornered but refuses to retreat when objects are thrown at it.
- A mountain lion spending > 1 day in a residential area (neighborhood yards) and is eating pet food or pets.
- The animal displays a lack of fear of humans by aggressively approaching, or failing to retreat when humans take aggressive actions.
- Intentionally approaching a human at close range that requires the human to take some evasive or aggressive action to avoid attack.

**NOTE:** Not every wildlife-human interaction will easily fit into one of the two behavior patterns listed above, and will have to be judged on all circumstances of that interaction. Investigators should look at each wildlife-human interaction for signs that an animal was present and displayed little fear of, or an unusual interest in, humans.

In some instances, humans may unintentionally provoke unacceptable behavior on the part of the animal by:

- Immediately running away on sighting (especially children), triggering the chase instinct.
- Remaining in a location that does not allow the animal an escape route.
- Approaching an animal that is feeding, or is with its young.

## **Actions**

It is the policy of the Game and Fish Department to direct all problem lion management efforts at the individual lion deemed to be dangerous or a potential threat to human safety, or to the lion responsible for depredation. Mountain lions will be destroyed if they attack a human or when they are judged to be a substantial threat to public safety. Consideration was given to trapping and relocating problem lions; however, due to their large home ranges, the fact that all suitable habitat is occupied; and intraspecific defense of occupied habitat, this option will not be used. Loose dogs and cats can serve as an attractant for lions and loss of these free roaming animals will not result in any Department action, but will be considered in the totality of circumstances.

## **Game and Fish Staff Response**

### **1. Sightings**

- Handle primarily through outreach education efforts, including distribution of *Mountain Lion In Arizona* brochure.
- Personal contact may be warranted
- Information regarding the location and animal behavior will be recorded on a Human–Mountain Lion Interaction Public Interview Form.
- The completed Human–Mountain Lion Interaction Public Interview form should be forwarded to the appropriate Wildlife Manager, the appropriate Field Supervisor, the Regional Game Specialist, the Regional Supervisor, and the Regional Information and Education Program Manager, and entered into the Arizona Game and Fish Department’s centralized database within one week of the observation by the Regional Game Specialist.

### **2. Encounter**

- A field response is encouraged to verify presence of a lion.
- Information regarding the location and animal behavior will be recorded on a Mountain Lion Observation Report. Additionally, an analysis of the situation should be provided with recommendations for reducing future conflicts.
- The completed Mountain Lion Observation Report form should be forwarded to the appropriate Wildlife Manager, the appropriate Field Supervisor, the Regional Game Specialist, the Regional Supervisor, and the Regional Information and Education Program

Manager, and entered into the Arizona Game and Fish Department's centralized database within one week of the observation by the Regional Game Specialist.

### **3. Incident**

- A prompt response to the incident location is required to verify if a lion was involved. If at all possible, the reporting party should accompany the Department employee responding to the scene of the incident.
  - If the appropriate Wildlife Manager is not immediately available to respond, the next choices in order are an adjacent Wildlife Manager, the Field Supervisor, the Game Specialist, the Wildlife Program Manager or other appropriate Department employee.
- Immediately notify the Regional Supervisor and the Regional Information and Education Program Manager, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Ombudsman or other Director's Office representative.
- If a lion was involved, the decision on the disposition of the lion will be based on the totality of the circumstances of the incident using, in part, the list of unacceptable mountain lion behaviors listed above.
- Immediately contact the appropriate land management agency and local law enforcement authority to discuss possible closure of the area if the evidence suggests this is a reasonable measure to reduce the risk of escalating mountain lion-human interactions.
- The following factors will be considered in making a decision:
  - The location of the incident in relation to the probability of reoccurrence;
  - Whether or not other incidents have been reported in the immediate area;
  - The timeliness of the report;
  - Whether or not the lion was protecting a kill site or kittens;
  - If pets are present with the person, the proximity of the pet to the person and hence the threat to the person, will be considered, not the nature of injury to the pet;
  - The type of action the person had to take to deter the lion.
- If a decision is made to kill the lion, the preferred option is to employ APHIS – Wildlife Services to track and kill the lion. They can be reached in Phoenix at 602-870-2081. For the Arizona Strip area, the Salt Lake City APHIS office can be reached at 801-975-3315. If Wildlife Services cannot respond in a timely manner, other persons experienced in tracking lions may be employed to track and kill the lion. The lion will be submitted to the Veterinary Diagnostics Laboratory at the University of Arizona for a necropsy.
- The responding Department employee will complete a report detailing the incident and actions taken. This will include an analysis of the incident and recommendations for reducing the chance of future conflicts. Copies of this report will be distributed to the appropriate Field Supervisor, Regional Game Specialist, Regional Supervisor, and Regional Information and Education Manager, and entered into the Arizona Game and Fish Department's mountain lion incident central database within 24 hours by the Regional Game Specialist.

### **4. Attack**

- An immediate field response is required.
- If the appropriate Wildlife Manager is not immediately available to respond, the next choices in order are an adjacent Wildlife Manager, the Field Supervisor, the Game

Specialist, the Wildlife Program Manager, or other appropriate Department employee.

- The Department representative on site will secure the scene and treat it as a crime scene.
- Immediately notify the Regional Supervisor and the Regional Information and Education Program Manager, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department Ombudsman or other Director's Office Representative.
- Notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency.
- Immediately contact APHIS – Wildlife Services in Phoenix at 602-870-2081 and request that they respond to track and kill the lion. For the Arizona Strip area, the Salt Lake City APHIS office can be reached at 801-975-3315. The lion will be submitted to the Veterinary Diagnostics Laboratory at the University of Arizona for a necropsy.
- The appropriate Wildlife Manager will complete a report detailing the incident and actions taken. This will include an analysis of the incident and recommendations for reducing the odds of future conflicts. Copies of this report will be distributed to the appropriate Field Supervisor, Regional Game Specialist, Regional Supervisor, and Regional Information and Education Manager.

### **Media guidelines**

Any interaction between a human and a mountain lion may evoke strong feelings from members of the public and is likely to generate media interest.

### **Response to Incidents and Attacks**

- Media inquiries about incidents or attacks must be referred to the regional Information and Education Program Manager (RIEPM). If the RIEPM is unavailable, the next choices, in order are: Regional Supervisor, FOHQ Field Operations Coordinator, IED Public Information Officer.
- The Regional Information and Education Program Manager will coordinate media contacts with the Information Branch Chief, and will share information with all AGFD public information officers.
- A media fact sheet will be developed and distributed as needed for each human–lion interaction that falls in the “Incident” or “Attack” categories. Incidents or attacks of a highly unusual nature may fall under the Department's Critical Incident Policy L1.7. It is the responsibility of the Deputy Director to determine whether a critical incident exists; if that determination is made, a Department-wide notification will be issued and employees will follow the policy.

### **Data Collection and Interview Forms (attached)**

Two forms have been developed to facilitate consistent collection of data related to mountain lion–human interactions. The first of these is the Mountain Lion Observation Form. This form is intended to be used when conducting field-based investigations. The Public Interview Form is to be used when collection preliminary report data from an individual who has information on a mountain lion–human interaction.