

Cougar Kittens Find New Home After Mother is Shot

The Cougar Fund is working to protect female cougars with dependent young from being killed by hunters.

Four, fourteen-week-old cougar kittens that were discovered in late January after a hunter shot their mother in Jackson, Wyo., will find a new home Wednesday at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The Cougar Fund, a non-profit educational organization based in Jackson Hole, Wyo., reported that after the kittens were found, they had been held at a research facility near Wheatland, Wyo., and later at a similar facility in Colorado.

We were concerned about the future of these kittens, said Zeenie Scholz, director of operations and development for The Cougar Fund. It is tragic enough that they were orphaned, but the fear from our constituents that they would be used as research animals was overwhelming.

Cougars may be legally hunted in fourteen states, however, there are few regulations that protect female cougars, according to The Cougar Fund.

The best available science confirms that female cougars are either pregnant or raising dependent cubs for more than 70 percent of their lives, said Rick Hopkins, Ph.D. cougar biologist and Principal of Live Oak Associates, an ecological consulting firm in Silicon Valley, Calif. And the cubs stay with their mothers for anywhere from 14 to 18 months.

The Cougar Fund reports that about 3,000 cougars are legally shot for sport each year. This means that game officials and even hunters may not realize how many kittens are being orphaned, Dr. Hopkins said.

Finding these orphaned kittens after a mother has been shot is not common protocol.

These kittens were tracked because their mother was shot in a winter closure area, which is illegal, Scholz said. Otherwise Wyoming, along with the other western states policies, does not require that potential orphans be searched for when females are killed.

Some hunters agree that female cougars should be protected.

Its an easy fix, said Jason Reinhardt, a sportsman and cougar hunter in Jackson, Wyo. Change the regulations and treat cougars just like you treat other big and small game, deer and elk, ducks and geese. Female cougars should be protected, just like antlered and antlerless game.

The Cougar Fund is currently trying to build a bridge between the public, hunters and the officials charged with amending hunting regulations.

This is one issue where hunters and non-hunters agree, females with dependent young should be protected, Scholz said. Its what we called a common-ground issue because it moves the debate away from the emotionally-charged arguments of hunting, good or bad, and shows that we can work together.

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