



## Mountain Loop Conservancy Fact Sheet:

### Cougar *Puma concolor*

**Range:** In western North America from British Columbia and southern Alberta south through western Wyoming to California and western Texas. Populations also occur in southern Texas, Louisiana, southern Alabama, Tennessee, and peninsular Florida. Historically, they were found in every American state except New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, and Nevada.

**Identification:** This large cat measures 59-108 inches (150-274 cm) in length and 26-31 inches (66-79 cm) in height. Their tail is 21-36 inches long (53-92 cm). Cougars weigh 80-200 pounds (36-90 kg) and males are 25% larger than females. Their coat is tawny to grayish above and white overlaid with buff below. The backs of their ears, sides of their muzzle, and tip of the tail are dark brown to black. Eyes are greenish gold.

Cougars are elusive and rarely seen by humans but signs may indicate their presence. Their large tracks are 3-3.5 inches (7.6-8.9 cm) across. The largest pad has a distinctive “M” shape. Sometimes drag marks from their tail can be seen near tracks. Like

housecats, they generally cover their droppings with soil. It is common to see bones, fur, and teeth of prey in their segmented droppings. Droppings and urine are sometimes left in conspicuous locations as a marking. Cougars scratch trees and stumps 4-8 feet (1.2-2.4 m) above the ground. Cats mark with scent glands on their feet and cheeks. All of these signs give information about their age, sex and reproductive status, dominance, and territory boundaries.



Adult Cougar. Photo by USDA.



**Unique characteristics:** Though cougars are usually silent, their vocalizations include roars, snarls, hisses, growls, yells, purrs, and whistles. In 1882, William A Baillie-Groham described their “scream” as, “The unearthly wail of the Puma or Mountain Lion, [is] demonical and ghoulish as no other sound in the wide realm of nature. As it re-echoes through the forest, you involuntarily shudder, for it is more like a woman’s long-drawn and piteous cry of terrible anguish than any other sound you could liken it to.”

**Habitat needs and life history:** This secretive mammal is the most widely distributed cat in the Americas. It thrives in undisturbed game-rich wilderness in a variety of habitats. They have a large home range and may move 75-100 miles (120-160 km) from where they were born. Home ranges can extend from 50-150 square miles (80-241 km). Cougars are most active between dusk to dawn.

Cougars feed on a large variety of prey species. They prefer to prey on large mammals such as deer. Cougar will also feed on coyotes, porcupines, beaver, mice, marmots, hares, raccoons, and even insects such as grasshoppers. Occasionally, they will take domestic animals. They drag large prey to a “cache” and cover it with dirt, grass, leaves, sticks, or snow. Cougars remain in the vicinity for 6-8 days

feeding on their kill.

A male may travel up to 25 miles (40 km) in a night in search of prey. They are excellent climbers and can jump more than 20 feet (6 m) up a tree and 40 feet (12 m) going downhill. They can run up to 50 mph (80 km) for short periods.



Cougar cub in cave. Photo by NPS.

During the breeding season, this usually solitary animal hunts and sleeps with their mate for about a 2-week period. Young may be born any month of the year. The gestation period is 88-97 days and females have 1-6 (usually 2) cubs. Cubs are born in a cave. They stay with their mothers for 6 months to 2 years. Cougars live 10-12 years in the wild and have lived up to 18 years in captivity.

**Status and Conservation:** Cougar populations are stable in most of their remaining range in North America. In much of their range, they are classified as a game animal. The subspecies at the southernmost tip of Florida is endangered due to loss of habitat.

In Washington State, there were estimated to be between 2,400-3,500 cougars in 2002. The statewide population is likely in decline. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife adjusts the numbers taken annually by hunters based on population estimates.

As human populations expand into wilderness areas, encounters with cougars have increased. They may prey on livestock and/or pets. Attacks on humans are rare. In Washington State, there has been one fatality and fifteen non-fatal attacks in the last 100 years. Seven of the attacks occurred in the 1990's.

**Interesting Fact:** Cougars have been known by over 40 names. These include Mountain Lion, Puma, Panther, Painter, Catamount, Brown Tiger, Varmint, Sneak-cat, Red Tiger, Silver Lion, Purple Panther, Deer-killer, Indian Devil, Mountain Devil, Mountain Demon, Mountain Screamer, and King-cat.

#### Sources:

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Illustration by Siobhan Sullivan © Adult cougar photo by United States Department of Agriculture-National Wildlife Research Center. Cub photo by National Park Service.

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