



Cougars in British Columbia: conservation assessment and science-based management recommendations

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Long-term conservation strategies for BC cougars should include education and awareness efforts, habitat protection and freedom from (over)exploitation.



Literature cited:

- ¹ Cougar Management Guidelines Working Group. 2005. *Cougar Management Guidelines*. WildFutures. Bainbridge Island, WA.
- ² Logan, K.A., and L.L. Sweanor. 2001. *Desert puma: evolutionary ecology and conservation of an enduring carnivore*. Island Press. Washington, DC.
- ³ Sweanor, L.L., K.A. Logan, and M.G. Hornocker. 2000. Cougar dispersal patterns, metapopulation dynamics, and conservation. *Conservation Biology* 14: 798-808.

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An opportunity and responsibility to contribute to cougar conservation:

- The British Columbia (BC) cougar population is a remnant population of a once larger network of populations across North and South America.
- Given the abundance of wilderness and cougars remaining in BC, the province provides an important opportunity for global cougar conservation.
- At present, the BC government does not have sufficient ecological data or a comprehensive cougar management strategy.
- In anticipation of a new provincial management plan, British Columbians have a promising opportunity and serious obligation to contribute to cougar conservation.

Our vision & the challenges of collaboration without compromise:

- Several challenges prevent harmony among science-, advocacy-, and management-based approaches to cougar conservation and welfare.

To address these challenges, our vision is founded on:

- the precautionary principle
- 'best' principles in contemporary Conservation Biology
- emerging ethics related to human-carnivore relationships

Conservation assessment and conservation strategies:

- Based on our review of cougar ecology, research and management in BC and elsewhere, our forthcoming report will provide a comprehensive conservation assessment and framework for a science-based conservation plan.
- We conclude that current provincial management policies, which depend on hunting regulations only, are inadequate to protect cougar populations and habitat in the long term.

'Best' principles of precautionary harvest management:

- If cougar hunting is permitted in BC, the best available science recommends:
 - (1) low, male-only quotas
 - (2) management in a metapopulation framework^{1,2,3}
 - (3) establishment of no-hunting refuge zones²
 - (4) the abolishment of pursuit-only seasons, based on ecological and ethical considerations.
- Most British Columbians do not support trophy hunting of large carnivores.

Protection of a large network of connected habitat:

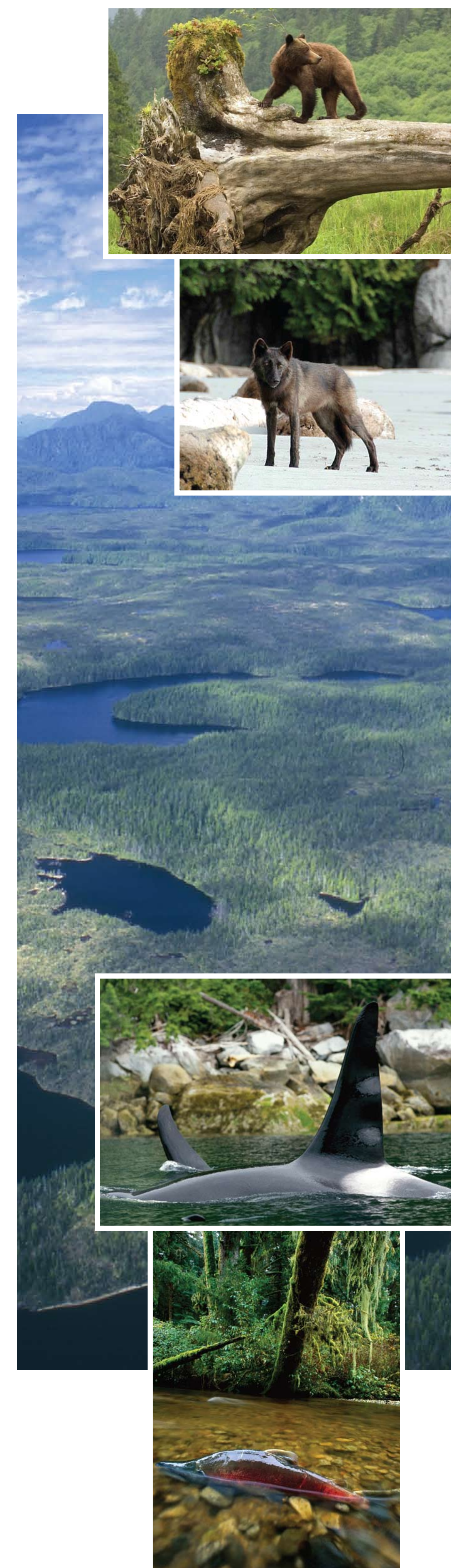
- Long-term conservation strategies for BC cougars should include the immediate protection of what remains of a large network of undisturbed and connected habitat for cougars and their prey.
- In conjunction with other conservation planning strategies, cougars can be used as a focal species for ecosystem-level, conservation-based landuse planning in BC.

Ongoing conservation issues for BC cougars:

- predator control related to recovery plans for endangered mountain caribou
- widespread cougar-human conflict
- continued habitat loss and fragmentation

Urgent research priorities:

- influences of hunting and logging on cougar populations
- predator-prey-habitat relationships
- population monitoring
- Our proposed location for study is coastal BC, where cougar-human conflict is particularly prevalent.
- Methods might include non-invasive genetic sampling and/or collaring.



We hope our recommendations will be included in the upcoming BC management plan for cougars.