

An Open Letter to Arizona's Veterinarians

RE: Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), disguised as Arizonan's for Wildlife (AfW) sponsoring an emotional non-science based "Wild cat" ballot initiative.

Dear colleagues

You may have recently received a letter from the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (hsVma) requesting you to support and endorse an initiative by Arizonan's for Wildlife that will "ensure wild cats in the Grand Canyon State are protected from extreme cruelty by prohibiting trophy hunting and trapping of mountain lions, bobcats, jaguars, ocelots and lynx." They go on to say how important your endorsement is because "the public looks to our profession for guidance on animal health and welfare issues."

While it is true that the public appreciates the guidance and counsel of veterinarians when it comes to animals, they also expect that guidance to be of a factual nature, not solely based on emotion sprinkled throughout with scientific inaccuracies. One of the great parts of our profession is our commitment to make medical decisions based on evidence and science.

The first paragraph of this solicitation letter seeking your support is fraught with inaccuracies and innuendos, and the following paragraphs continue the ruse. The HSUS has an agenda to end mountain lion and bobcat hunting in Arizona. They included Jaguars, Ocelots and Lynx which are already protected to for no other reason than to stimulate emotional response. Research, science, and evidence support that current managed mountain lion hunting in Arizona has had no negative effect on Arizona's lion population.

Here are some facts that should be used in making decisions:

- Arizona has no such thing as a "trophy hunt" for mountain lions, or any species of animal hunted in the state.
- Trapping on public land was outlawed in Arizona in 1994.
- Jaguars, ocelots and lynx are already federally protected species under the Endangered Species Act; it is already illegal to hunt them in Arizona or anywhere in the United States.
- "Wild cats" in Arizona are not disappearing; in fact mountain lions and bobcats are expanding their ranges and now are seen in more places than they ever have been before.
- There have been six confirmed jaguar sightings in Arizona in the last 50 years. Arizona is on the extreme northern edge of their range. All have been males and none have been hunted or accidentally killed by hunters.
- Ocelots are similar to jaguars but smaller, again on the northern edge of their range, and only four spotted here in a similar time frame. They too are a protected species.
- Canadian Lynx do not call Arizona home. We don't have any. A number of years ago one lynx transplanted in Colorado wandered into Arizona, looked around and returned; it had a radio collar on its neck.
- Arizona's Game and Fish Department employs 350 biologists and other scientists to manage the wildlife in Arizona for everyone.

- Our state biologists that monitor, understand and manage wild cats and other wildlife in Arizona based on science and evidence are not allowed to comment on this initiative. (*Arizona law prohibits Arizona Game and Fish Department employees from acting in an official capacity or using public resources to influence the outcome of any possible or pending ballot measures and must refrain from expressing an opinion advocating for or against potential ballot measures.*)

I live in the foothills of the Superstition Mountains. About 10 years ago, I woke up to my front doorbell ringing frantically in the middle of the night. It was my neighbor in a panicked state. He stated his dog had been attacked by a coyote and was in bad shape. I went over and his dog was lying there in a pool of blood, with multiple bone fractures and a flail chest. We euthanized his dying dog. I found it odd that coyotes would have been able to enter his chain link fenced yard. When the sun came up it became clear what had happened. A mountain lion had jumped his fence and attacked the dog in the middle of the night when it had gone out to go to the bathroom. There was blood up one side of the fence where it tried to drag it out and then dropped it when the other dog came out barking. There was mountain lion hair stuck along the top of the fence where it scraped itself entering and leaving the yard. The same lion was documented killing many other dogs, chickens, and pets within a few miles. Everyone in the area was fearful of letting their kids out to play in the desert surrounding our homes for several months until the lion was killed.

Mountain lion hunting was banned in California by a similar initiative in 1990. This resulted in an increase in mountain lions eating pets and livestock. They are a significant predator and with less fear of humans, they often start forging more on pets and livestock. A report from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife detailed that 107 California mountain lions were killed in 2015 legally under provisions of special depredation permits. The stomach contents of 83 were analyzed and 52 percent (up from 41 percent in 2014) were found to have eaten dogs, cats or other domestic animals. Eighteen percent of the lions had contents too digested to be recognized. Deer remains were only found in 6 percent of the lions in 2014 and 5 percent in 2016. The California Division of Fish and Wildlife also reports that 3 times more mountain lions are killed by cars on roadways than by depredation hunting/euthanasia.

Approximately 250 mountain lions are harvested in Arizona each year by hunters with proper permits obtained from the Arizona Game and Fish Department. This has shown scientifically to not have any negative impact on the population of mountain lions in Arizona. The revenue received from these permits helps biologists monitor the population along with studying them and learning more about them. If Arizona follows the same path as California, the same amount of lions will likely be harvested annually for killing dogs, cats and domestic animals and/or hit by cars on roadways. The difference is that we the tax payers will be paying the bill for professional hunters to kill problematic lions, we will have more pets killed or injured, and experience an increased risk of human injury from car collisions.

Many of our colleagues, friends and families have pets, working animals and livestock that depend on your expertise and scientific medical management for the good of their animals. Let's leave science in charge of all the species of wild animals that call our state home, and not carve out a segment based on the emotional opinion of the nation's largest anti-hunting organization, the Humane Society of the United States. The best thing for mountain lions and bobcats in Arizona is for them to be kept at a healthy manageable population where they will be less likely to interact with the dangers of expanding human civilization.

For almost 100 years the biologist and scientists at Arizona Game and Fish Department have scientifically managed over 800 species of animals, including the wild cats. Let's leave the science with the professionals, and not in the hand of a well-intentioned voter that is not being given the real facts.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the facts. I urge you to not support this ballot initiative based on emotion and lack of science.

Jay Johnson, DVM

Other Veterinarians who support this letter:

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