

Mountain Lion Stakeholder Group Meeting

October 3, 2018

Kirschenmann-Opening remarks. Management plan, rules of engagement, layout of meeting, handout of group charter, introductions by all in attendance.

In attendance: Gary Jensen, Rob Goodman, Nancy Hilding, Jim Sherrer, Ross Sweeden, Chris Hesla, Larry Bowden, Jim Margadant, Albert Curry, James Halverson (for Mark DeVries) , Mason Cooper, Tim Goodwin, Sean Fulton, Kerry Burns, Brad Tisdall, Terry Mayes (for Tom Kafka).

Department Staff: Tom Kirschenmann, Chad Switzer, Andy Lindbloom, John Kanta, Cindy Longmire, Trent Haffley, Kris Cudmore, Steve Griffin, Ron Skates.

Management and Research Updates

Vehicle Mortalities

Switzer-How are lion vehicle hits quantified?

Griffin-Report from public, highway workers, road kill contractor.

Fulton- Doesn't account for lions hit by vehicle but not recovered (lions that go into forest and die).

Griffin-Correct.

Removals

Bowden-do removals include all South Dakota or just Black Hills Fire Protection District?

Lindbloom-All

Fulton-What's breakdown prairie vs hills?

Lindbloom/Griffin-Mostly in hills. (No further break down given)

Human-caused Lion Mortality

Tisdall-Is Wyoming data represented by the Black Hills National Forest in Wyoming?

Griffin-Correct. This data is for 2016.

Goodwin-Comment: Biggest mortalities are caused by other lions and they go undocumented.

*Discussion occurred on the challenges associated with mortalities that cannot be accounted. I

Harvest

Hilding-What percent of kills were due to hound hunting on the prairie?

Griffin- 7 in 2017 and 4 in 2016 were killed by hounds. Harvest is with state issued licenses

Hilding-What were the breeding age of females?

Griffin-Since 2014, of the adult females on prairie that were harvested, only one was lactating.

Goodman-A tribal hunter took one male in 2017 and one lion was called in for a total of two lions harvest on Pine Ridge.

Talk of declawed lion from 2005-suspect of a pet that was let go.

Hilding-Question on north of Martin, SD lactating female—the lion that was harvested was closer to what specific tribal ground? Who was contacted? Were kittens attempted to be recovered? Law enforcement called tribes.

Harvest and Snow Event Correlation

Sweeden-Does snowfall correlate to harvest?

Lindbloom-No and it doesn't correlate very well.

Fulton-Snow type plays a large part in hunting-crunchy snow doesn't work but new snow works great.

Kanta-That's why we don't use snow

Discussion on snow events...

Age Quantification on Females

Fulton-Lion at 2 years of age considered an adult or able to lactate?

Lindbloom-A female lion is considered an adult once lactation has occurred.

Discussion- on sampling units

Discussion of how many collared lions are out there?

How many total lions are collared? Are you not collaring anymore?

Kanta/Scherrer/Lindbloom/Fulton-discussion on why radio collars aren't used anymore

Lindbloom-Biopsy darting provides just as good or better information than the radio collars provided from a population estimate standpoint.

Fulton-Why are radio collars not recouped?

Lindbloom-Collar age and functionality has deteriorated and cost is high to recover and refurbish in addition there is risk to recapture of the animal.

Griffin-Flights are every December and as of 2017 we had 7 VHF radio collars left on air.

Hilding-Do collars negatively impact the animals that are collared?

Lindbloom-Potentially, but survival rates do not reflect that.

Population Estimate

Fulton-Can a lion be aged in the tree?

Lindbloom- No, as it's very difficult even by trained professionals

Fulton-Wanting to know can lions be aged and kept track of via biopsy darting?

Further discussion if DNA marked lions from previous years are used as marked lions for the current year. Explanation was that we had to use only lions DNA marked during the current year in the population analysis.

Open Discussion

****** (denotes changing conversations)**

Goodwin-Mentioned folks believe lions are still collared and it's not fully understood lions are now being DNA darted instead of collaring and now it's clear what GFP is doing.

Hilding-Wanted update on collared lions from non-SD entities.

Goodman-Pine Ridge had nothing and wasn't aware of other tribal lion markings or having lions collared.

Switzer-Nebraska has collared lions. Knowledge of other surrounding states is unknown.

Discussion on why SDGFP numbers are off and on a specific population goal. Getting to this goal is extremely hard and collection of samples is easier said than done.

Tisdall-Commented on how good the hounds men and dogs are that are used to biopsy dart lions. Even using the best people and hounds available; an increase in sample size is still very hard.

Scherrer-Revisiting of question: Do we need a population number? Maybe more important to relay what we can show (harvest, vehicle collisions, problem lion numbers, etc.) rather than a number we derive that has error around it.

Margadant -What is used to derive population models and are all things (harvest, vehicle collisions, problem lion numbers, etc.) considered?

Kirschenmann – Yes, all things are considered when it comes to harvest approach but not all data sets are considered to derive population estimate. However, we are working towards doing just that.

Lindbloom-Explanation of estimate and confidence intervals.

Switzer- Public is asking for a population number. Is there some other metric we can use?

Tisdall—We need a number if we want to manage. Used checking account analogy; need a number to spend the money in the “account”.

Goodwin-Believes lions manage themselves via emigration and immigration. Lions leave and then it gets filled in.

Kirschenmann-Clarified Goodwin’s comment.

Bowden-Comment on DNA sampling and origin of Black Hills lions (lions found in other states traced back to SD). Recommendation of quicker service when a lion is trapped so additional DNA can be collected. Mentioned time it used to take to get someone from GFP out to radio collar or DNA sample a trapped lion and now if a lion is trapped no one calls GFP; it’s too time consuming on the trappers parts.

Bowden- Also commented on amount of deer and elk consumed via lions. Actually ran the figures that 413 lions are killing around 23,000 deer per year in the Black Hills (used 56 or 57 deer per year per lion in his example)

Lindbloom-Addressed the amount of deer and elk consumed.

Hilding-Comment on estimate number and percent of females killed in the hills. Wants to express concern on overharvest of lions in the Black Hills. Stated that 9 of the stakeholder group members represented hunting groups, and that only 6 were representing non-hunting groups; stated this was not representative of who should be at the meeting.

Fulton –Comments on lion tracks he views as a boot hunter. Believes numbers decreased and have since rebounded in the last couple of years.

Hilding-Not happy with adequacy of data collected. Believes GFP is not giving the correct numbers. She wanted biologist from Mountain Lion Foundation at this meeting. The Humane Society of The United States and other groups not invited to this meeting to be able to look at GFP data as they do not believe our numbers

Fulton-Has changed thoughts over years; was not agreeing with GFP on data initially, but has since recanted that.

Jensen-Asked Nancy if she knows of a better way.

Hilding-Said the experts (as stated above) were not invited to this meeting. Said people are upset females are being killed and upset more than 25% of females in population are being killed.

Fulton-Perhaps that is because there are enough lions in the Black Hills we are harvesting over that 25% threshold.

***lunch break

Switzer-Comments on purposely trying to age lions as juveniles; this was a comment from one of the stakeholders.

Kanta-Explained the techniques used for aging mountain lions.

Hilding- Sees a bias. Age bracket and calling a lion that is an adult a juvenile based upon lactation.

Kanta/Griffin- Age based upon characteristics such as lactation. Showed the group the chart that we use to estimate ages of lions as they are checked in.

Hesla-What difference does this all make?

Hilding-Fears we are overharvesting via hounds on the prairie.

Kanta/Switzer-We will revisit this when we discuss prairie management of mountain lions.

Goodman-Why can you take a female with babies from any other species and you can't do that with lions?

Kanta-Charismatic mega fauna is the reason why. Public perception is the answer. There is no biological significance.

Darting lions before season begins.

Sweeden- Does darting affect the meat?

Lindbloom-Tissue is only pulled to collect DNA sample; no drugs are used.

No further comment.

Population question from **Margadant**

No comments.

Cooper-Is any data used off of mountain lion predation on prey species to garner information on lion estimates?

Switzer-Cited literature and studies conducted in the Black Hills.

Lindbloom- Cited survival rates on collared deer.

Cooper-Clarified—wanted know if we correlate mortality of ungulates with an increase/decrease in lion population?

Kanta-Clarification-we do not do that and cited Custer State Park elk study.

Jensen-Harvest limit and how to set? What would group recommend for criteria by which commission should set harvest limit? Break down by numbers (40, 50, 60), male/female ratio, how? Gave explanation of how we do counts with ELK perhaps we do a limit this way. Maybe we look at harvest limits like we do with bobcats.

So how does the commission proceed?

Mayes-Quota should be taken out of the discussion as he feels it is misleading. Also data is available on a trend basis and limits should be approached with trends over a Pop. Estimate.

Halverson-Cattle/livestock-Public safety based criteria. Wildlife/urban interface.

Hilding-News and media has a bias on reporting of lions and the urban interface. Brought up prey species (porcupines specifically)

Tisdall-Biopsy darting- Dart for 30 days put forth same effort and then take the darted amount vs the amount harvested.

Fulton-Break hunting areas into unit areas. But likes the way it's currently done and suggestion is based solely on if changes were talked about and required.

Switzer-Not sure data can support this methodology.

Hilding-Wants to support this and have a lion sanctuary. Gave US Fish and Wildlife Service statistics about wildlife watching and how those numbers compare to hunting numbers.

Bowden-Brought up lions following their prey and their potential for never staying in a given area.

Tisdall-Small unit will cause mandatory check-in problems.

Griffin-Would be hard to make this work based upon the area size of the Black Hills.

Hesla-A population number shouldn't be released. Likes the male/female/harvest limit methodology we use now. Base harvest limit upon depredations, public interactions, take off the word "quota", but keep the number out of the public. What he cares about is public interactions and the potential to harvest one.

Cooper-Current model is working fine. Last year's data is negligible at this current point in time.

Bowden-No data to suggest increase or decrease. Remain the same.

Hilding-Do need numbers and estimates. Even though she questions GFP population numbers.

Clarification provided on mountain lion management plan and seasons for 2019 by GFP Staff.

Hilding-Plan isn't on par with what her affiliates and their feelings. Wants to have previous plan modified with new data from outside sources.

Kirschenmann -Further clarification on management plans on how GFP proceeds once a plan is in place.

Goodwin-Hard to get new people (hunters) involved and hard to keep interest after initial pulse of harvested lions occurred in early years. The current guys that regularly harvest lions are the only ones whom will continue to harvest lions based up their exuberant passion for lion hunts.

Hilding-Wants to have Black Hills act as a source for potential eastern lion populations (lists off multiple potential eastern habitats). (Group opposition to this idea in various ways.) Hilding said she wants an objective of ...never stated a way or a number. Read Bier publication, not Dorothy Fecske publication and base information on this.

Kanta-Does group feel we need an objective; a population range?

Halverson -We don't need a number but pubic may want it.

Hesla-Said to quit putting out a number and use a range of numbers (using confidence intervals); use biology.

Bowden-Use stable, self-sustaining as a guideline. Agrees with Hesla. Evaluate every year.

Tisdall-Agrees with Bowden/Hesla

Fulton-Agrees with this Bowden/Hesla

Switzer-So use other indices beyond a populatin estimate/population objective? Answer was yes.

Goodwin-Says "not broke, don't fix it"

Hilding-Says numbers are not believable-again does not trust GFP numbers.

Cooper-A change to season is not needed. Doesn't feel the system is broken.

Kirschenmann -Overall desire is to have a healthy population. Group consensus was an overwhelming yes.

Griffin-If GFP does estimate a number, then the public will want to know what it is, so maybe a number is needed.

Margadant-Number is needed for scientific reasons but the problem is how it's released. Public doesn't understand how the number should be read.

Kanta-Estimates are variable and we need to be able to explain the number and variables associate with the number.

Prairie Management

Hilding-Listing of areas that can support lions which included many tribes (available habitat areas)

Skates-Tribes don't want lions.

Group interactions about tribal want for lions. It was stated that SDGFP does not have any jurisdiction over tribal lion management. Two tribes- Oglala Sioux (OSPRA) and Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have established lion seasons.

Hilding-Habitat definitions in plan are not congruent with reality. (cites that plan states only Black Hills Fire Protection District is suitable lion habitat).

Kirschenmann -Fair statement to re-evaluate definition of suitable habitat but we cannot on our own as a Department speak for the tribes.

Kanta-Should we manage on prairie is the question?

Hesla-Agrees with definition of habitat available on the prairie. Also said if tribes want lions ok, but they need to approach GFP with the requests but private land owners have spoken and they don't want lions.

Lindbloom-Re-iteration of Kanta. Do we need to manage for prairie lions?

Fulton-Not in favor of year-round season on the prairie. Is there a way to revise prairie season just for winter months?

Cooper-Question on harvest on prairie. Wants to know if the smaller amount of harvest on the prairie is even worth hassling over.

Kanta-Clarification of prairie unit.

Halverson-Not broken, don't fix it.

Tisdall-Wants to revisit definition of where houndsman can hunt lions. Wants to revise current hunting rule where dogs crossing over from private to public hunting must stop.

Goodman-Not officially speaking but tribe would more than likely want to/request to manage lions in the Black Hills more intensely. If we do not meet the harvest limit, must kill more lions.

Jensen-Addresses Tisdall question on hound hunting on the prairie and its history. Said they voted for no hounds due to thinking it was a fair chase issue.

Mayes-Prairie is a place most people shoot lions on sight.

Helsa-Opposes 365 day season and doesn't support expansion of dog hunting.

Discussions of Lions on the prairie and removals by landowners

Goodwin-Does not want hounds in the Black Hills. Is afraid giving an inch will lead to a mile with hounds; therefore, is hesitant on expanding hound hunting.

Goodman-Why not allow hounds for lions when they are used for everything else?

Kanta-Conflicts with other user groups is a major concern.

Kanta-Majority say?

- Leave it alone
- Have Tribal discussions
- Definitions of habitat revisited
- Private landowners don't welcome lions
- Proposal for lions on public lands
- No further comments offered

****break****

Season Dates and Regulations

Harvest Limit

Tisdall-Wanted to see biopsy darting info when meeting started and believes that harvest limit is about right.

Goodwin and Fulton-Agree with Tisdall

Group majority reflect GFP is doing a good job

Season Dates

Fulton-Under impression numbers need to be brought down. Suggested a wider season to coincide with the deer and the elk season to allow for a larger harvest/more opportunity only if harvest limit/population dictates increase take.

Kirschenmann-Clarification on Fulton. Just wanted to lengthen season if harvest increase was needed? Yes.

Goodwin-Wearing orange and lion hunting. Changing seasons would require again wearing orange. Doesn't want to wear orange as lions can recognize the color.

Hilding-Confidence intervals are too broad and too many females are taken. Take is being reduced because of lower populations, not because fewer hunters. Take 12-16% of population to stay level. To increase we need to take less.

Goodman-Provide more opportunity if harvest limit is not met.

Kanta-Acceptable to increase harvest via season lengthening; what are some other ways?

Fulton/Halverson-Allow out of state hunters.

Mayes-Although not in favor; maybe allow dogs in the Black Hills.

Tisdall-Allow out of state hunters so there is some reciprocity with other states.

Raise of hands for or against out of state hunters—majority said yes, allow nonresidents.

Bowden-Believe a committee should be made to allow nonresidents, open Forest Service closed roads. Limited licenses for non-residents.

Sweedon-National forest lands are national lands and believe we should open up for non-residents for all to enjoy. Caveat: not part of the South Dakota Big Game Coalition's opinion.

Hilding-Fort Laramie Treaty. Wants tribes to hunt for free and under no restrictions. Against out of state hunters and wants to do right by Lakota.

Tisdall-Non-residents would be ok, but does not want to open Custer State Park to nonresidents. Give a number of 10 non-resident harvested lions for a harvest limit.

Fulton-Allow hounds in Black Hills Fire Protection District—limited amount of tags, high tag price (200 per tag)

Tisdall-Disagrees

Kirschenmann-How about giving out two lion tags per hunter?

Goodwin and Fulton-No, as it would take too much money, energy and time to fill two tags.

Mayes-Against hounds in the Black Hills Fire Protection District as trespass would be an issue.

Kanta/Tisdall-Bobcats are run with dogs and little issues with that activity.

Goodman-Why not allow trapping?

Switzer/Kirschenmann-Would require statutory change. Big game animals cannot be trapped.

Bowden-Went over Montana classification of lions and New Mexico trapping information.

Lindbloom-Stated information on Texas and New Mexico are only states that currently allow trapping of mountain lions.

Kanta-Believes that Texas lists lions as varmints? New Mexico allows it in areas managing for bighorn sheep.

Rule on houndsman in CSP to take first legal lion that is treed

Tisdall-Cases of smaller lions treed and should have been let go but due to rule guidelines they were shot.

Hilding-Opposed to sorting through lions.

Tisdall-States he could then not shoot females and further her point.

Jensen-Brought up disturbance issues, saying you may be able to tell what kind of lion by tracks if they are available, issue of treeing and taking larger lions (said research says could create vacuum selecting for juvenile males).

Kirschenmann -Clarification-remove "first" legal lion? Group agrees yes.

Fulton-Allow/Remove "first" notation

Any other regulation questions

Hilding-Lions in urban areas. Would like to see something different with zero tolerance policy.

Kanta- Explanation of this policy.

Margadant-What are city stances on these "urban" lions.

Kanta-Majority would like to see mountain lion euthanized.

Mayes-Doing a good job and carry on.

Margadant-How many lions coming into town have been removed?

Griffin-Very few removals due to being in a populated area. Most removals are due to hobby farm kills. Few have been killed due to an urban interaction. Removals are very rare in the last 4 or 5 years.

Margadant-Said he has known GFP officials to give lions a pass when there is areas they will pass through and not cause harm.

Forest service road closures and management

Burns-What they are doing on US Forest Service property is dictated by the travel management plan. Closures were done due to management plan and due to some collaborative work with GFP and designed to allow ungulates some winter reprieve. There is an option to make roads more open though.

Hilding-Against opening roads. Wants to have roads closed because it allows sanctuaries for lions and areas for wildlife watchers to view these lions.

Fulton-Suggestion/statement of: roads were open until recently. China Gulch, Slate Creek, etc. were given as examples.

Discussions of wilderness areas.

Wrap-up

Lindbloom-Hoping to have a rough draft of the revised plan by end of October or early November 2018. Hope to have plan by January 2019 to distribute to all GFP staff and then after revisions, perhaps in February 2019, available to the public for comments. Hope is to have a shared and presentable plan by June 2019 for the GFP Commission. Finalization in October 2019 at Commission meeting.

Hilding-Why not have and provide audio/visual available somewhere in the Black Hills for 100% coverage and involvement of the Commission meeting during finalization.