

Eastern Cougar Foundation



January 2007

LBL: AN ENTIRELY NEW AREA FOR 2007 REMOTE CAMERA SEASON

If there is any area east of the Mississippi River outside of Florida and within the United States that is likely to be inhabited by a small breeding population of cougars at this time, it may be the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area (LBL) in western Kentucky and Tennessee. LBL is a unique 170,000-acre peninsula averaging 5 to 10 miles wide. It lies between two parallel, lengthy reservoirs on the Kentucky and Tennessee Rivers, and is more or less isolated on all sides except at the southern end.

Alleged sightings of cougars, many by professionals working for the US Forest Service, go back at least to the 1970s. Judy Tipton, who has primary responsibility for the project, studied LBL cougar research techniques as a student when she attended Murray State University. LBL staff loaned her a slide picture of a possible cougar track taken in LBL after a maintenance worker reported seeing a cougar in December of 1992. She and Mark Gumbert presented their research techniques as well as the slide picture at the first Eastern Cougar Conference. Jay Tischendorf and Bob Downing reviewed the slide and concurred the slide was likely to be cougar.

LBL was created when the Tennessee Valley Authority built dams on the two rivers for flood control, to provide electricity, and to create a wildlife refuge for waterfowl. Between the early 1930s and 1960s, approximately 2,000 people were moved from their homes. No one lives there today. In 1963 President Kennedy announced that LBL would be developed for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation, and that it would become a showcase for environmental education and resource management and restoration. The Forest Service is responsible for managing the area.

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May 23-26, 2007

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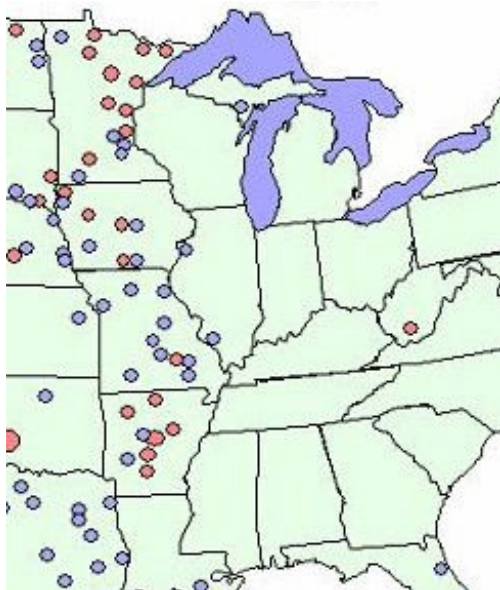
Proceedings of Eastern Cougar Conference 2004 Now Available

Today numerous trails and gravel roads crisscross the area, but there are only two paved roads--the Trace, which bisects the area north to south, and US Hwy 68, which crosses the middle of the area. There are several campgrounds and demonstration areas. Bison and elk have been reintroduced but are confined to fenced enclosures. LBL has a strong deer population of about 12,000, including white-tailed deer and introduced fallow deer. It also supports solid populations of bobcat, coyote, river otter, beaver, and abundant small game such as wild turkey.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service recognized the value of LBL as potential habitat for large carnivores when it proposed establishing a permanent population of free-ranging red wolves there in the early 1980s. However, special interest groups expressed their opposition, and the plan was dropped. But LBL still has a breeding pair of the endangered wolves in captivity.

If LBL is excellent habitat, it might support about a dozen adult cougars. That's not enough for a sustainable breeding population. However, as you can see on the clip from the Cougar Network's "Big Picture," LBL isn't far from Missouri and southern Illinois, both of which have recent confirmation.

With the full support of the Forest Service, Judy and her helper Dana Hurt set out 14 of ECF's remote cameras in late December. Dr. Dave Maehr is lending us an additional 10 digital remote cameras.



Left: A clip from the "Big Picture" © the Cougar Network (www.easterncougarnet.org/bigpicture.html). LBL is in the jog in the boundary between Tennessee and Kentucky, south of the Illinois-Indiana state line. Right: a map showing the principal features of LBL.

SKYLAND CHANCES

By Christopher Spatz

With its ribbed and rolling 62 square miles of deciduous hills and farmlands, Vernon isn't everyone's idea of New Jersey. Bounded on the west by a 7,500 acre wetland and federal wildlife refuge, to the north by New York State's Black Dirt agricultural region, on the east by a quartz conglomerate plateau of sky lakes, state parks, and the vast Newark water supply, only its central, southern valley buzzes with highways, box stores and strip malls. Vernon is a town where the rest of New Jersey comes to play: to ski, boat and swim, to bird-watch the marshes and hike the Appalachian Trail, to fish and to hunt.

In a state boasting one of the densest concentrations of black bears on the continent, the big omnivores are an omnipresent nuisance, ambling the Vernon streets with the deer and the wild turkey and those irrepressible coyotes. So frequent are bear incidents that Jersey Fish & Wildlife has outsourced their management to the township's police force. And lately, forty crow-fly miles northwest of Manhattan, rumors of cougars are circling Vernon's fecund bestiary.

Though cougar reports have been occurring in New Jersey's northern Skylands sporadically for at least a decade, this past spring sightings spiked in Vernon--from the Highland Lakes area of the plateau, a cougar reportedly hitched a ride on a Fed Ex delivery truck; on June 1st across town in a backyard abutting the wildlife refuge, a police officer and his wife reportedly observed a presumed mother cougar with an eighty-pound cub; and a pair of cougars fitting the same description were reported slinking through a Highland Lakes neighborhood at 10 am on the 4th of July.

Reports continued throughout the summer--a cat said to be "bigger than the neighbor's black Lab" rummaging through the garbage two doors up and two weeks after the policeman's sighting: a single cougar roaming the streets of Highland Lakes at 3 pm; a report from another police officer at the Great Gorge Country Club and three days later from girls working at an adjacent riding stable whose bear-savvy horses were reportedly spooked by a cat during an early evening ride. Located near the center of town, the golf course and riding stable straddle a gas pipeline corridor that bisects Vernon, linking the plateau's lakes directly to the wildlife refuge at the perimeters. The pipeline is a well-traveled wildlife corridor.

When a neighbor returned from vacation to learn of the policeman's backyard sighting, she recounted hearing some ungodly screaming one evening several years ago emanating from the refuge. With her daughter she attempted to identify the screams through internet recordings--mating cougars seemed to match the sounds. In September, reported sightings began cropping up ten miles west along the rural Kittatinny Ridge around High Point State Park--a cougar supposedly tracked to a den; a purported cougar jumping the guardrail and bounding across Rt. 23, disappearing up a long driveway; a sighting next door by a bow-hunter of a thirty-pound, long-tailed, spotted cat.

With nothing to show from collecting six years of cougar sightings around the Catskills and the Shawangunk Ridge, I started for New Jersey in June, eager for news of a hot trail. I shelved my rock climbing and fly fishing gear, and two or three times a week drove the sixty miles south,

slogging Vernon's marshes, traipsing corridors riparian and man-made, crawling into dens, moving a single remote camera around scent stations and game-trails. I read deeper into the literature, especially on suburban cougars – whose bold escapades these New Jersey reports mirrored – along Colorado's Front Range and from Paul Beier's studies in the Santa Anas. I got in touch with some of the East Coast experts.

As Todd Lester found when he went searching for cougar sign in the Appalachian jungle, big, soft-padded animals leave little trace in the East's summer terrarium – at least to this bumbling amateur. I've found only a handful of prints from even the ubiquitous bruins. The dens appear to have yielded bear and canid fur, but those aren't confirmed. I've scattered crows and vultures to find a few measly, well-picked bones. Scat? Well, nothing worth submitting to the gauntlet of cougar experts. For photographs I've got said bear and deer and a couple dozen of a middle-aged guy wearing a baseball cap and glasses scratching mosquito bites.



←Chris' remote camera captured these two bear cubs.

Responses to the sightings from wildlife officials have varied. The director of the 4800-acre Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge asserted from his headquarters that the June 1st incident "was a mile from here," while conspicuous federal boundary markers are posted on trails less than two hundred yards from the home. He reports finding no evidence of the cat(s) inside the refuge. Though gamely pursuing panicked cougar

melodramas this year in central and south Jersey, the Fish & Wildlife division has yet to set their traps and cameras in the Skylands. The celebrity New Jersey tracker Tom Brown, Jr., who says he tailed a young male cougar two years ago in Gloucester County, has been recruited for the south Jersey search by the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Fish and Wildlife Division spokespeople and biologists maintain that while they're not discounting anything, they've found no physical evidence of cougars anywhere in the state. In late November, I received approval both from High Point's supervisor, John Keator, and from the Division of Fish & Wildlife, to set up cameras as a volunteer in the park.

I wish I could tell you that there is flesh attached to all these sightings. I wish I could tell you that there is evidence to support the cheerful possibility of cubs. I wish I could tell you that against overwhelming mortality patterns, New Jersey cougars (and where better to learn?) have adapted to the menace of the roads. Until answers emerge, I'm hoping that whatever is out there inspiring reports from people who often had to identify from the internet the inexplicable cats they encountered – folks who've patiently answered my inquiries, generously allowing me to

photograph on their properties and to track from their backyards – continues to survive the harrying traffic and another Skylands hunting season.

Ironically, if proof of cougars is found in the nation’s archetypal suburban state, it could well be a matter of some New Jersey wildlife officials eschewing the ambivalences of their Eastern colleagues, and simply wishing to find them. In the meantime, I’m praying for a winter of snow for good tracking.

2006 REMOTE CAMERA SEASON

This past year, ECF’s 18 remote cameras were distributed among members in four states and were “on duty” between late May and early October. In 2003 and 2004, Todd Lester had set the cameras along game and man-made trails in the vicinity of the Cranberry Backcountry in the southern Monongahela National Forest of West Virginia. Hundreds of wildlife photos were taken, but none that were undoubtedly cougar.

For 2006, we decided to place the cameras in other regions and to experiment with cougar urine as an attractant. The people responsible for the cameras put them in places they judged likely to be visited by cougars. Small scent dispensing bottles were hung from nearby branches. Those of us who used the cougar urine can attest that it is very powerful stuff!

Six cameras went to **eastern Kentucky** and were set out by Judy Tipton and Mark Gumbert. Judy reports: “No cougars were captured by any of the cameras. ...we constructed a scent post and also used scent bottles. We did not find that the scent of estrous cougar urine repelled any animals from the research site. We found many animals were captured sniffing at the areas where the cougar urine scent was deposited. Three cameras placed in Cumberland Gap National Park were torn down early in the research process by bears, so our research time was cut short in that area. It is our opinion, that attempting remote camera research in areas with bear populations during months of bear activity is not productive, and subjects the cameras to damage. Our other two cameras were set up on private property within 60 miles of the 1997 cougar road kill in Floyd County. During the research period, there were reports of cougar sightings within 30 miles of the remote cameras, but our cameras did not capture any cougar.”



One of the cameras set out → in eastern Kentucky captured this little buck.

The eastern Kentucky documented 58 deer, 9 coyotes, 7 grey fox, 5 opossums, 4 house cats, 3 squirrels, 2 bears, 1 raccoon, 1 skunk, 1 dog and 5 animals that could not be identified.

Helen McGinnis and Mary Ann Honcharek set out another six of the cameras in the **Dolly Sods area in the northern Monongahela National Forest in north-central West Virginia**. We thank national forest wildlife biologists for permission to do so. Four of the cameras were set out on the Roaring Plains, just south of the Dolly Sods Wilderness; the other two on Dolly Sods North, just north of the designated wilderness. Dolly Sods is a well known wild and scenic area—a high plateau with spruce, northern hardwoods, bogs and rock outcrops. The cameras were at elevations between 3900 and 4500 feet, high altitude for this part of the country.

The wildlife tally was 52 deer, 10 bear, 2 bobcat, 2 coyotes and 1 raccoon. What is striking is that wildlife is apparently much more diverse at the lower elevation sites in eastern Kentucky.

Gene Odatto set out 4 of ECF's remote cameras and another loaned to him by Arthur Barry in **south-central Pennsylvania, Michaux State Forest west of Gettysburg**. Gene chose this area of public land because of the past history of alleged cougar sightings by professional foresters, hunters, hikers and mountain bike riders. Each of the reported sightings was electronically mapped on Terrain Navigator software, and the cameras were located with a GPS unit. Discussions with the foresters in the area provided Gene with some valuable on-the-ground local information. For instance, they agreed to place the cameras in road culvert tail drains. Tail drains lead into the forest to drain the water away from roads, and are travel routes for coyotes and fox. The silt and sand in the ditches at the ends of the tail drains are good for tracking. The first camera was located near a large rock outcrop because cougars tend to walk ridge tops and sit on rock ledges.

As a side note, other predators, such as bears, coyotes, and bobcats, have increased their populations in the region due to the large deer populations in the decades between 1960 and 2000. Because of a number of factors the deer population has declined somewhat since 2000.

The 4 ECF cameras were pulled in October, but Mr. Barry's camera is still working. This scent post also has a barbed wire fence around it, similar to the ones that captured cougar hair at the successful Fundy National Park site in New Brunswick. Some deer hair was captured on the barbed wire.

The cameras recorded deer and turkeys over the summer. Unfortunately, 4 rolls of film are still at the developer's at press time. It became apparent to me that the use of scent can work to capture target animals, and it also keeps down the number of deer, which is a plus when using film cameras.

The other two cameras were shipped to Jay Tischendorf and set out in **Montana** to serve as controls, to see if the cougar urine attracted cougars where they are known to occur. In October, Jay reported: "Deer and bobcats. And no evidence that puma urine frightened the deer or

attracting pumas or other predators---but of course the sample size is quite limited. The scent canisters did certainly retain their scent/urine well. So....so far no pumas. But the systems sure seem to work well and reliably. Am going to use them thru the winter if at all possible.”

PASSPORT NEEDED FOR UPCOMING CONFERENCE IN ONTARIO May 23-26, 2007



**Peterborough, Ontario, Canada
May 23 -26, 2007**

Don't forget to apply for a passport if you are planning to attend the upcoming midwestern-eastern puma and carnivore conference, "Apparent Apparitions." Complete information is available at <http://www.pumaconference.com/index.html>. * If you don't have a current passport, you need to allow at **least 6-8 weeks** to get one.

AA is sponsored by the Ontario Puma Foundation, which has a close working relationship with the Eastern Cougar Foundation. OPF President Stuart Kenn says, "If everything comes together as planned, this conference will do more than focus on pumas. The second day of the conference has a lot of speakers that pertain to green space, land, corridors, conservation practices, large wilderness tracts etc. that not only affect pumas, but the survival/health of all species in general."

The agenda is still coming together.

OPF has developed a close working relationship with Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). Stuart continues, "As far as puma research in Ontario is concerned? We have come a long way! My attitude is simple and works well. I have a dream of recovering an endangered species in Ontario known as the Puma. The OPF's objectives have been written, and we stay focused on those objectives."

"Tomorrow [January 16th] I have a meeting with the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario to give him a report/presentation on pumas in Ontario and the actions of the MNR. He is the watch dog of the MNR and MOE [Ministry of the Environment] and Conservation Authorities in Ontario. Laws have been written that state that these government organizations must act upon these laws and perform their duties as the governing bodies of these Ministries."

The OPF is now collaborating with Dr. Rick Rosatte, who has written a proposal to document cougars with hair snares across the Ontario. "People across this province know the OPF and that it is the leading organization in the province as puma researchers. We stayed the course and maintained our focus on our objectives and as a result, my dream is coming to light."

We Americans can learn something from these Canadians!

* If you don't do email, you can obtain information directly from Stuart, telephone 905-729-4273; mailing address: Box 580, Beeton, Ontario, L0G 1A0

COUGAR ECOLOGICAL BENEFITS DEMONSTRATED IN UTAH

Does the Study Apply to the Eastern United States?

An important study in Zion National Park in southwestern Utah documents the ecological benefits of cougar predation. William J. Ripple and Robert L. Bechsta of the College of Forestry, Oregon State University, compared the flora and fauna in Zion Canyon (North Fork of the Virgin River) with those in nearby North Creek and the East Fork of the Virgin. The major difference between Zion Canyon and the other two canyons is that cougars are exceedingly rare in Zion Canyon. They are not hunted in this national park, but a highway runs through the canyon. This drive has become increasingly popular with visitors. Cougars generally avoid roads and people. As early as the 1930s, park employees noted that cougars had disappeared, and that mule deer were overpopulating Zion Canyon. North Creek and the East Fork of the Virgin River are roadless and visited only by a few hikers.

Along bottoms of these canyons, cottonwoods are the predominant tree. Ripple and Bechsta determined the ages of cottonwoods in the three canyons. They also looked for evidence of cougars (scats along trails) and estimated the number of deer, based on track counts. Understory vegetation, wetland plants, wildflowers, butterflies, reptiles, and amphibians were tabulated. They also looked for evidence of streamside erosion and resulting differences in the conformation of the streams.

Almost all the cottonwoods in Zion Canyon were mature. No young cottonwoods existed except in a few areas inaccessible to deer. Banks were eroded, and the North Fork of the Virgin was wide and shallow in comparison to North Creek and the East Fork. Cougar scats were almost never found. The only species inventoried that was very abundant in the Zion Canyon was the mule deer. Understory plants, wetland plants, wildflowers, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians were all strikingly less abundant.

The study recalls the famous Kaibab Plateau, not far to the south, which is partially in Grand Canyon National Park. By the 1920s, deer predators such as wolves and Indians had been removed from the Plateau, which is essentially an island surrounded by flat desert with nothing to offer either deer or cougars. An intensive predator extermination campaign then removed essentially all the cougars and most of the coyotes. The deer population began to grow. Important deer food was eliminated by the ravenous deer. Then the population crashed. Aldo Leopold, the father of modern wildlife management and author of *A Sand County Almanac*, used the Kaibab as a classic example of the value of predators in his textbook. Later studies suggested that the situation was much more complicated than a simple relationship between pumas and deer. However, Ripple and Bechsta cite recent articles indicating that Leopold was essentially correct.

So what relevance do these observations have to the possible impact of cougars in the East? Pennsylvania comes to mind. The Strategic Plan for the Conservation and Natural Resources Advisory Council, adopted in January 2006, states, "Regeneration challenges face both the state and private forest base. The 1998 conditional certification of state forests identified over-browse

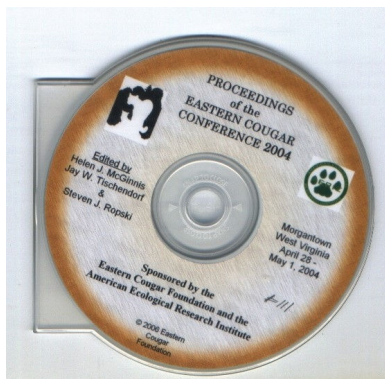
by white-tailed deer as the largest threat to long-term sustainability of the forest base. Control of the deer population remains an important challenge to DCNR's [Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources] management and sustainability of its forest system, and is a formal condition to achieving and maintaining certification.”

Overabundant deer are recognized as a major threat to biodiversity worldwide. But there is already a major deer predator in the East. Can't human hunters handle the job? One difference between hunters and cougars is that hunters (in Pennsylvania at least) don't go far from roads, while cougars tend to avoid them. In the 2001 and 2002 deer seasons in the Sproul State Forest in north-central Pennsylvania, Penn State researchers put GPS units on 300 deer hunters. They discovered that the hunters were bunched in flat areas within 1/3 of a mile of roads. Except on the opening day of deer season, when 1.75 hunters per square mile were found more than 1/3 mile from a road, only one hunter per 8 square miles was documented. There were far more hunters abroad during bear season. One reason that deer hunters are less numerous than they used to be in state forests is because the quality of the deer habitat has declined. Here deer are literally eating themselves out of house and home. There is better habitat elsewhere.

If hunters aren't willing to go far from roads, and cougars *prefer* to be distant from roads, maybe Pennsylvania's forests in the sparsely populated (with humans) north-central region would benefit from a few cougars. There may well be a few there now, but we still await definite confirmations.

References:

- Ripple, W.J. and R.L. Beschta. 2006. Linking a cougar decline, trophic cascade, and catastrophic regime shift in Zion National Park. http://www.pumaconservation.org/html/trophic_cascade.html An article based on this research is in the December 2006 issue of Smithsonian magazine and is available at <http://www.smithsonianmagazine.com/issues/2006/december/cougar.php>
- Young, Christian C. 2002. In the Absence of Predators: Conservation and Controversy on the Kaibab Plateau. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 269 pp.
- Mulhollemis, Jeff. 2005. Hunter Movement in Search of Deer: Reality versus Perception. Penn State Agriculture Magazine, Summer/Fall 2005. <http://www.aginfo.psu.edu/psa/sf2005/Hunter.html>



PROCEEDINGS OF EASTERN COUGAR CONFERENCE 2004 NOW AVAILABLE

The Eastern Cougar Foundation and the American Ecological Research Institute (--AERIE) proudly present the Proceedings of the Eastern Cougar Conference 2004. It includes 30 articles and 5 abstracts derived mainly from presentations and posters at the conference, held in Morgantown, West Virginia, April 28-May 1, 2004. It is on a CD, making it possible to include numerous color photographs, maps and graphs. The price is \$15.00, including postage, to US and Canadian addresses.

If you are following the controversy in Michigan, you won't want to miss the four articles devoted to that issue. One of them, "Evidence of Cougars in Michigan: An Historical Summary" by Pat Rusz, includes interesting photos I have never seen before.

Other significant articles include a review of the New England situation by Bob Tougias, an article on the controversial skull and other bones found at Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts, and another by CN's Director Clay Nielsen on the use of the bobcat as a surrogate species to assess the status of cougars in the East.

Joe Lankalis has contributed two articles, one on the leopard skull found near Manchester, New Hampshire, and another summarizing the distinguishing characteristics of house cats compared to cougars, illustrated with many drawings. Eric Anderson and co-authors present a well illustrated article on sightings of cougars in Wisconsin. Two articles come from the United Kingdom: a historical perspective of exotic cats in Britain, and another on how Alaric Smith graded sightings of non-native cats in Wales.

To see the complete Table of Contents and to order a copy, visit the ECF's online Store at <http://www.easterncougar.org/store.htm>. Or you can order one directly from Helen McGinnis. Checks should be made out to the Eastern Cougar Foundation.

EASTERN-CENTRAL COUGAR NEWS

Compiled from news report by Helen McGinnis

FLORIDA: A 3-5 year-old male panther died on County Line Road just off Immokalee Road on December 12th. It's the 11th panther--the most in a year--to die on Florida's roads this year. Two weeks earlier, a female died in a vehicle collision on US 41 East, tying the record for panthers killed on highways in a single year. [The previous issue of this newsletter erroneously stated that 10 panthers had been killed by May of this year.]

The embattled panthers are increasingly coming into conflict with the desires and perceptions of humans. Although no one has been attacked by a panther, pets and hobby livestock have been killed, and the level of fear is rising. A 22,000-acre development is proposed in Collier County. On December 16th, the US Fish and Wildlife Service posted a revised "consultation area" map for the panther. Some 890,000 acres have been trimmed from original 3.8 million-acre area. Although agencies must consult with the Service before approving projects that could adversely affect the panther with the consultation area, they do not have to desist from development even if it is likely to be harmful. What is being lost here is not just panther habitat, but the whole unique subtropical ecosystem of southern Florida.

INDIANA—AN UNPLANNED EXPERIMENT: Donner, an eight-year-old cougar weighing 70 to 80 lbs, climbed out of her 14-foot-high topless pen on January 5th and escaped from the Exotic Feline Rescue Center compound at Center Point in Clay County in the west-central part of the state. How she accomplished that feat remains a mystery. EFRC provides homes for 195 unwanted captive wild cats. It encompasses 102 acres, 30 acres of which are devoted to enclosures.

The Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks agency rescued Donner and her brother Boomer when they were kittens after their mother had been killed by a poacher. They have always been kept secluded from visitors. Boomer will approach keepers for food, but Donner would hide in the back of the pen until the keeper left. The two cougars have not been declawed. You can read the

story of their arrival at the compound in the December 1999 issue of Cat Tales at the EFRC website.

EFRC personnel believe Donner may still be on the property. She has always been with Boomer and may want to stay close to him. She has killed at least one raccoon since her escape, and tracks were found on the property on January 10th. Indiana Conservation officers are searching for her, and a trapper has been hired to set leg-hold traps.

Such an event is among the worst nightmares for sanctuaries for large exotic cats. But it is also an unplanned experiment for eastern cougar advocates. We know for a fact that a cougar that avoids people and likely is capable of killing prey is at large. The best outcome would be for her to be recaptured alive and unharmed. But if she remains free, what will happen? Some people insist that any cougar living in the wild in the East will soon end up dead on a highway or shot. Will one of these things happen to Donner? If so, will authorities be notified? Will people find characteristic kills? Will they report sightings? Or will she just disappear? Stay tuned.

MICHIGAN: This fall, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources modified its policy toward cougars, setting up a section on cougars in at their website and soliciting reports of sightings and evidence. Undoubtedly, unrelenting pressure from the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy and others who insist that cougar occurs on both the Lower and Upper Peninsulas has something to do with this change.

The DNR has announced that it will be taking reports seriously and that three staff members will be attending a Cougar Field Workshop in March. The workshop will be conducted by well-known cougar biologist Harley Shaw and is co-sponsored by the Cougar Network and the Missouri Department of Conservation. It is intended primarily for professional wildlife biologists, but others can participate if fewer than 10 biologists sign up.

MISSOURI CONFIRMATIONS: A deer hunter's remote camera captured the image of a young cougar, with spots on the inner sides of its legs, in Livingston County in the north-central part of the state. Also, Missouri's Mountain Lion Response Team, headed by Dave Hamilton of the state's Dept. of Conservation, verified that a cougar had appropriated a deer killed by a hunter in November in Shannon County, in the southeastern part of the state. The hunter had shot a doe at dusk and decided to leave it until the next morning. When he came back, he discovered the carcass had been partially eaten. Since 1994, there have been ten confirmations in Missouri, scattered across the state. (See the map on page 2 of this newsletter.)

NORTH DAKOTA: In August, the Cougar Network, in cooperation with the ND Department of Fish and Game, announced that the Badlands in the southwestern part of the state should be considered cougar range occupied by a breeding population. The state's 2nd experimental hunting season opened on September 1st. It was to continue until five cougars had been shot or until March 11, 2007. The quota was reached on November 4th. The first cougar killed was an illegally-killed spotted kitten. The others included two adult females, one adult male and one subadult male. All were killed within a 60-mile radius of Grassy Butte in SW North Dakota. Other cougars were confirmed elsewhere in the state during the year. A 3rd experimental season will likely be scheduled for 2007.

In late November, a year-and-a-half old male was caught in a trap in Billings County. It was fitted with a radio collar, and its movements are being monitored. A hair sample was collected. Samples for DNA analysis are being sent to the wildlife genetics laboratory of the Wildlife Research Unit in Missoula, Montana. So far 13 samples have been obtained. They will be compared with samples taken from cougars of the Black Hills of South Dakota to determine if the North Dakota cats originated there.

PENNSYLVANIA: The Game Commission seems to be following the same path as the Michigan DNR. In October, Calvin DuBrock told state wildlife commissioners that a new system of recording reports of mountain lions was being developed. The Game Commission does not believe that there are any naturally occurring wild cougars in the state, but they do want to keep track of reports in an organized way and be on the lookout for credible accounts. Despite hundreds--or more likely--thousands of alleged sightings in the state since 1900, only one has produced credible evidence. That was in 1967, when a squirrel hunter shot a young female in Crawford County. That individual was almost certainly a former captive.

I have not found an attachment soliciting mountain lion reports at the Game Commission's website, so they apparently are not as advanced in their willingness to accept reports as Michigan.

QUEBEC CONFIRMATION: Marc Gauthier's hair traps have snagged more cougar hair, this time in Forillon National Park at the very tip of the Gaspé Peninsula. The hair was actually collected in October 2004, but problems with DNA analysis led to a delay in confirmation. This is the 4th confirmation that Gauthier's hair traps have captured in Quebec. There are two other confirmations, one based on hair collected from a bumper after a car hit a cougar in the Laurentides Provincial Wildlife Reserve, and the other a cougar shot at Lake Abitibi on the Ontario-Quebec border in 1993. Melanie Culver determined that the Lake Abitibi cougar's DNA was similar to that of cougars from Chile. However, Gauthier said that the animal was in good health and had been eating deer—in other words, it was surviving in the wild.

SOUTH DAKOTA: The state's second Black Hills mountain lion season opened on November 1st and ended on the 19th. The quota was 25 lions or eight females, whichever came first. The Department of Game, Fish and Parks ended the season when eight females had been shot, out of a total of 15 cougars. Thirteen, including 7 females, were taken in the 2005 season. The sex ratio slightly favoring females was no surprise to Game, Fish and Parks because males occupy much larger territories, which overlap those of as many as five females. Young males without territories disperse from the area.

In 2006, the SDGFP delayed the season for a month to allow kittens to mature and accompany their mothers. Hunters are prohibited from taking a cougar if it is accompanied by another, because the second cougar would likely be a kitten.

It was legal for ranchers to kill cougars on the prairie until December 31st. A rancher working cattle south of the Black Hills did kill a 2-3 year-old male on December 10th.

VERMONT: This fall the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department announced a new conservation license plate featuring the catamount, as it's known in that state.



Money from the sale of conservation plates supports not only the Nongame Wildlife Fund, but also the Watershed Grant Fund. Vermont joins Florida in making a cougar license plate available.



WISCONSIN: In January, Dr. Eric Anderson, a conservation biologist with the University of Wisconsin, announced that 36 hair snares set out in Lincoln, Langlade and Oneida counties in the northeastern part of the state had failed to capture any cougar hair between January 3rd and the end of March in 2006. The snares did snag bobcat, bear and unidentifiable hairs. More alleged sightings have come from Rhinelander, also in the NE part of the state, than anywhere else. The hair snares will be put out again this year, but the design of the snares will be modified and a different scent lure will be used. Two university students will monitor the snares.

Many possible photos have been submitted by the public, but 90% of them are bobcat.

Adrian Wydeven, another wildlife biologist best known for his studies of wolves, has also been looking for evidence of cougars since 2003. If the hair snares are successful, remote cameras will be set out.

SPEAKING OUT FOR COUGARS

December 22, 2006: A public radio station in the southern Catskills, WJFF, interviewed Chris Spatz and Jay Tischendorf. Many people called in to report sightings, including one who said he'd found one hit on a road, but didn't know they were rare or disputed and didn't call the DEC.

December 23, 2006: An interview with Helen McGinnis was broadcast on Jim Slinsky's Outdoor Talk program.

January 13, 2007: Don Linzey gave a multimedia presentation at the Wilderness Wildlife Week in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. This is the 7th year that he was invited back to give an update on his cougar research in Virginia and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Over 100 interested persons attended. He enlisted the services of two Park volunteers to help monitor the 3 remote cameras that he currently has operating in the Park.



January 24th: Kerry Gyekis and Chris Spatz will be making a presentation for the Nature Conservancy at New Paltz, New York.

April 15th: Gyekis will be speaking at the Jenning Environmental Center in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, for the DCNR.

Late May, perhaps May 19th: Gyekis is *tentatively* scheduled to speak for the Kings Gap Environmental Center near Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

If you'd like to attend one of the upcoming presentations, ask Kerry for details (gyekis@epix.net or 570-353-6682).

The Eastern Cougar Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, science-based, volunteer-run organization dedicated to recovery of cougars as top predators in eastern North America. Please help us by becoming a member.

Dues are \$15.00 per year; \$5.00 for students.

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