



COS

Human-Cougar Conflict Response Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

An effective wildlife management strategy must balance the necessities of wildlife with those of the public. Protection of life and property is a priority, as is meeting objectives for cougar population management.

This guide provides a standard approach for determining an appropriate response to human-cougar conflicts and will be applied throughout the Province, including provincial parks and protected areas. It is a resource for conservation officers who must act in situations of conflict where clear, concise and consistent direction is needed. The guide supports Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (“FLNRORD”) Procedure, 4-7-04.01.1 -Preventing and Responding to Conflict with Large Carnivores, and is the result of collaboration between government biologists, conservation officers, park rangers, the Provincial Wildlife Veterinarian, and the ministry’s Human-Wildlife Conflict Manager.

This guide is also intended to explain to the public how human-cougar conflicts should be handled. Conservation officers will use the guide as a reference to communicate with stakeholders and the public about managing conflicts with cougars and to promote public and community support for cougar conservation.

The guide is reviewed annually and revised as required.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide will be applied to human-wildlife conflicts with cougars, including family units.

The Report All Poachers and Polluters (“RAPP”) Program offers a toll-free tip-line and web-based service that members of the public can use to report human-cougar interactions where public safety may be at risk. On average, the RAPP line receives 4,500 human-wildlife conflict reports (“HWCRs”) per year related to cougars. This guide will assist conservation officers with determining an appropriate response to these reports, which is based on an incident investigation including an assessment of the reported actions of the cougar, the presence of humans near the occurrence location, and known conflict history.

Conservation officers will use the guide to categorize cougars into one of three different threat levels. Each category has recommended responses based on the public safety risk and effective conflict prevention actions. Category 1 cougars are a serious threat to public safety and may have caused significant loss to pets or livestock and/or are injured or suffering from distressed health and require a conservation officer to respond. Category 2 cougars may pose a threat to public safety and/or pets or livestock and will result in a conservation officer taking steps to manage the incident. Category 3 cougars are exhibiting normal, natural behaviour and are assessed to have a low public safety risk. Conservation

officers typically provide advice and education in response to Category 3 cougars.

Cougars have known behavioural patterns, which, when combined with the cougar's actions, location of the incident and proximity of humans, conflict history and other factors, may indicate an incident is highly probable. It is unlikely, however, that this guide will anticipate all possible situations. Nonetheless, where unusual or novel incidents arise, conservation officers will make decisions that most closely follow these guidelines. Furthermore, for any incident where an imminent threat to public safety exists, any appropriate and necessary action may be applied.

INVESTIGATION

HWCR's relating to human-cougar conflicts will be reviewed and categorized. Category 1 and 2 cougars will be investigated by conservation officers. The aim of the investigation is to collect evidence, including witness reports and physical evidence that will provide an accurate account of the cougar's actions, as well as any human activity involved.

Conservation officers should also be familiar with the following related directives:

- [CO Authority to Destroy Wildlife](#)
- [Wildlife Attack Response](#)
- [Human-Wildlife Conflict Reports \(HWCRs\)](#)
- [Houndsmen](#)
- [Atipamezole as Emergency Treatment for Medetomidine Exposure](#)
- [Media Contacts](#) and [Standard Messaging for Media Contacts](#) [includes messaging respecting attractant management, cougar safety, RAPP and WildSafeBC]

CATEGORIES and RESPONSE

Category 1

Cougars in this category pose a serious public safety threat and may have caused significant loss to pets or livestock and/or are injured or suffering from distressed health. They include animals that have attacked, injured, killed or fed on a human and/or attacked, injured or killed a domestic pet or livestock. It may also include cougars that have entered temporary or permanent dwellings. Cougars that have previous conflict history and are deemed a threat to public safety will be included.

Category 1 Response Guideline

Conservation Officers will contact the complainant and conduct an investigation to determine an effective response to resolve the conflict. Cougars involved in this category will be euthanized if the investigation determines that there is a serious threat to public safety, significant property damage has occurred and/or the cougar is injured or suffering from distressed health. Euthanasia will follow the Canadian Council on Animal Care's guidelines to ensure humane and efficient methods. Where possible, euthanasia will take place out of the public eye to minimize risk to the public and stress on the animal. The following actions are to be used as a guide for

conservation officers to determine an appropriate and consistent response to Category 1 cougars.

- Investigation
 - Assessed public safety risk
 - Assessed health as per animal welfare guidelines
 - Assessed known conflict history
 - Confirmed identification of offending animal(s)

- Prevention and Education
 - Provided safety information to the public
 - Provided attractant management and husbandry information to the public
 - Contacted FLNRORD Biologist/Veterinarian
 - Conducted media release to educate the community
 - Contacted WildSafeBC or local interest group to deliver education to the public
 - Contacted bylaw to assist with managing attractants
 - Direct livestock owner to / explain sections 2, 26(2) and 75 of the *Wildlife Act*
 - Contacted the Livestock Protection Program (“LPP”) (cattle and sheep only)

- Outcome
 - Enforcement action (warnings, Dangerous Wildlife Protection Order, charges)
 - Closed area to the public, post signs warning the public
 - Euthanized responsible animal(s) following Canadian Council on Animal Care guidelines
 - Resolved incident with other qualified responders (Police)
 - Destroyed by others
 - Attended - animal was gone on arrival
 - No capture efforts taken
 - Trap(s) set – capture
 - Trap(s) set – no capture
 - Removed or secured attractants
 - Deployed COS K-9 Unit
 - Hired contract houndsman
 - Immobilized animal(s)
 - Completed Wildlife Attack report

Category 2

Cougars in this category may pose a threat to public safety or cause property damage. They include cougars that have entered temporary or permanent dwellings; injured or killed a domestic pet or livestock; or have followed or stalked a human in wilderness areas with a moderate to low conflict history.

The majority of cougar HWCR's in British Columbia involve cougars that on initial contact with communities have moved close to people and have been seen. If pets, livestock, cougar, people and the site are not successfully managed, the public safety risk will increase and the cougar will likely become a Category 1 cougar.

Category 2 Response Guidelines

Conservation officers may provide technical advice or education. In some situations, officers may be required to conduct site visits to assess the public safety risk and manage people and the site. The following actions are to be used as a guide for conservation officers to determine an appropriate and consistent response to Category 2 cougars.

- Investigation
 - Assessed public safety risk
 - Assessed health as per animal welfare guidelines
 - Assessed known conflict history
 - Confirmed identification of offending animal(s)

- Prevention and Education
 - Provided safety information to the public
 - Provided attractant management and husbandry information to the public
 - Contacted FLNRORD Biologist/Veterinarian
 - Conducted media release to educate the community
 - Contacted WildSafeBC or local interest group to deliver education to the public
 - Contacted bylaw to assist with managing attractants
 - Direct livestock owner to / explain sections 2, 26(2) and 75 of the *Wildlife Act*
 - Contacted the Livestock Protection Program (“LPP”) (i.e., cattle and sheep)

- Outcome
 - Enforcement action (warnings, Dangerous Wildlife Protection Order, charges)
 - Closed area to the public, post signs warning the public
 - Destroyed by others
 - Resolved incident with other qualified responders (Police)
 - Attended - animal was gone on arrival
 - No capture efforts taken
 - Trap(s) set – capture
 - Trap(s) set - no capture
 - Relocated conflict animal(s)
 - Removed prey animal being fed upon
 - Removed or secured attractants
 - Deployed COS K-9 Unit
 - Hired contract houndsman
 - Immobilized animal(s)

Category 3

Cougars in this category are exhibiting normal, natural behaviour and generally represent a low public safety risk. They may be observed crossing a road, searching for food, or using natural travel corridors close to communities. In wilderness areas cougars may demonstrate some levels of habituation.

Category 3 Response Guidelines

Conservation officers may provide technical advice and/or education. In wilderness areas, officers will manage people to prevent conflict. The following actions are to be used as a guide for conservation officers to determine an appropriate and consistent response to Category 3 cougars.

- Investigation
 - Assessed public safety risk
 - Assessed health as per animal welfare guidelines
 - Assessed known conflict history
 - Confirmed identification of offending animal(s)

- Prevention and Education
 - Provided safety information to the public
 - Provided attractant management and husbandry information to the public
 - Conducted media release to educate the community
 - Contacted WildSafeBC or local interest group to deliver education to the public
 - Contacted bylaw to assist with managing attractants

- Outcome
 - Enforcement action (warnings, Dangerous Wildlife Protection Order, charges)
 - Closed area to the public, post signs warning the public
 - Resolved incident with other qualified responders (Police)
 - Destroyed by others
 - Attended - animal was gone on arrival
 - Removed prey animal being fed upon
 - Removed or secured attractants

HWCR TYPE

Cougar Action (HWCR Type):

Sighting at Night or Tracks Found: Includes sightings at night or reports of tracks where there was no conflict.

Natural Prey Killed or Fed on: Natural prey may include deer, elk, moose, ducks etc. killed or fed upon.

Confined or Treed: Inside structure, no escape route, e.g. up tree/hydro pole/roof or shopping mall parking lot and surrounded by people.

School/Park/Playground Present: Present at a school, park, or playground.

Habituated, Day Time Sighting: Learned to associate people (or the smell of people), human activities, human-use areas, or animal storage areas. Also may include a cougar seen during the day near humans.

Follow/Stalk a Human: Predator behaviours are described as persistent - silent, stalking, following, crouching, hiding, and chasing. Defensive behaviour include showing teeth, hissing and vocalizing while protecting kittens, food cache, or confined without escape route.

Livestock/Pet Killed/Injured: Cattle, goats, horses, sheep, swine, game farmed animals, animals held under a fur farm licence and animals not defined by the Wildlife Act, that is not native to or does not naturally occur within the province and is tame and kept in captivity for the use of man.

Enters Dwelling - Temporary or Permanent: Enters in or under a house, cabin, trailer, motorhome or a tent and may result in the damage and destruction of property.

Injured/Debilited Present: On site and is so badly injured or debilitated that chance of survival is doubtful, e.g. immobile or restricted movement.

Human Injury/Death: Contact with a person resulting in death or injury (e.g., wound, bruise, puncture, cut, scratch, abrasion, laceration, or other physical trauma). An attack may be predatory, non-defensive (e.g., offensive, aggressive or threatening) or defensive. This also includes a cougar found feeding on a human.

CONFLICT HISTORY

CONFLICT HISTORY

Conflict history describes the number of times an individual cougar has been in conflict with the public. Habituation occurs as the conflict increases. A habituated cougar shows little or no perceived reaction to people. This is an animal whose presence could be interpreted as, or lead to a public safety risk. A habituated cougars may frequent developed areas or areas of high human use, or may feed on natural foods within or adjacent to developed sites or in areas frequented by people such as roadsides, campgrounds, or ranch yards.

Low: The initial known conflict by a cougar.

Moderate: Multiple known conflicts by a cougar. This may be determined on the first HWCR as a result of facts that the cougar has been in conflict multiple times.

HWCR LOCATION

HWCR Location

Wilderness: Remote area with few people; may include forest recreation sites, Provincial Park camp grounds and remote cabins.

Rural: May include small communities, regional districts or small towns.

Urban: May include larger communities, towns or cities.

Generally, subjective language, such as the term “aggressive,” tends to be a characterization rather than an objective description of cougar behaviour and should not be used in the application of this guide.

Cougar Threat Level		Human-Cougar Conflict Response Guidelines									
Category 1		Cougar Action (HWCR Type)					Public Safety Risk				
Category 2		Conflict History	Sighting at night or tracks found	Natural Prey Killed or Fed on	Confined or Treed	School/Park/Playground Present	Habituated and/or Day Time Sighting	Follow or Stalk a Person	Livestock /Pet -Killed/ Injured	Injured/ Distressed Present	Human Injury/ Death
Category 3											
HWCR Location	Wilderness	Low	Category 3	Category 3	Category 3	Category 2	Category 2	Category 2	Category 2	Category 1	Category 1
		Moderate	Category 3	Category 3	Category 2	Category 2	Category 2	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1
	Rural	Low	Category 3	Category 3	Category 2	Category 2	Category 2	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1
		Moderate	Category 3	Category 2	Category 2	Category 2	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1
	Urban	Low	Category 3	Category 2	Category 2	Category 2	Category 2	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1
		Moderate	Category 3	Category 2	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1	Category 1

COS Response to Cougar Conflict Threat Level	
Category 1	- CO must take action due to serious public safety risk or loss of property.
Category 2	- CO to manage people and the site.
Category 3	- CO to monitor and may provide education and advice.