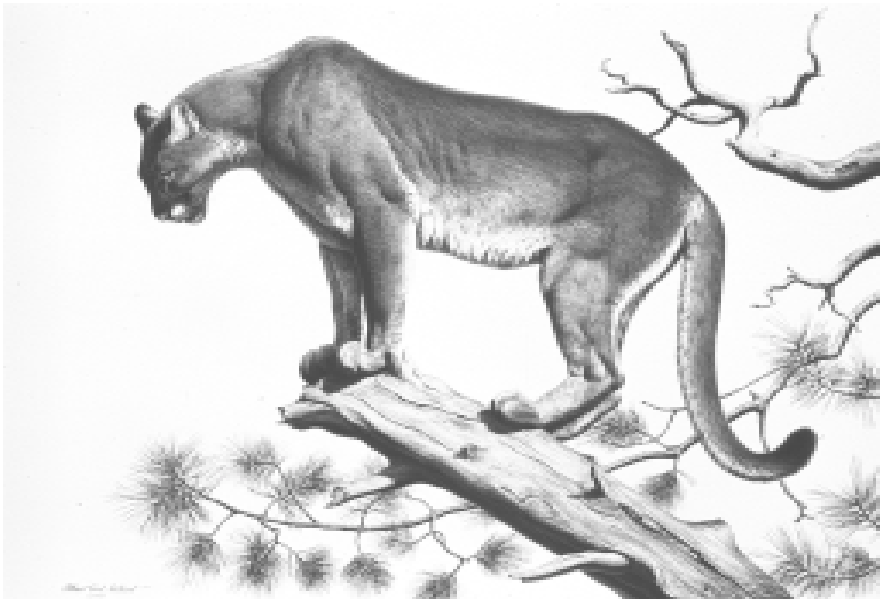




Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
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Salem, OR 97322

*Living with Wildlife* — Mountain Lion — Cougar — *Puma concolor*

# MOUNTAIN LION



**THE LARGEST MEMBER** of the cat family in Oregon, the mountain lion, is known by many names: panther, puma, catamount and, most commonly, cougar. The mountain lion is usually a secretive animal that is perceived as a symbol of wilderness and the western back country.

Although most Oregonians may never see a mountain lion, they find satisfaction in the knowledge that mountain lions still roam wild in Oregon and that their existence in our state is not threatened.

Early pioneers saw these animals as a threat, and bounties were paid for mountain lions killed beginning in 1843. By the 1960s, mountain lions were eliminated from much of the state, and only about 200 mountain lions remained in all of Oregon.

*Continued on page 2*

## MOUNTAIN LION FACTS

Almost all of Oregon is populated by mountain lions. This fact is a surprise to many residents and visitors. Mountain lions have made a strong comeback after being reduced to very low populations in the early 1960s. These large, powerful predators have lived here since prehistoric times.

### #1 Identifying Characteristics

Adults of both sexes have long black-tipped tails, and black coloration on the backs of their ears. Adult males may exceed 8 feet in length, from nose to the end of their very long tail, and weigh between 130 and 170 pounds. Adult females can be 7 feet long and weigh between 75 and 105 pounds. Kittens, or cubs are covered with blackish brown spots and have dark rings around their tails. The markings fade as they mature.

# Mountain Lion FACTS

## #2 Habitat

In western Oregon, the most productive mountain lion habitat is Douglas-fir forest. In southwestern Oregon, mountain lion habitat consists of hardwood, mixed conifer and agricultural lands. The best eastern Oregon habitat is the open mixed conifer type of the Blue and Wallowa mountains, including the pine bunchgrass and canyon country of northeastern Oregon. All of these habitats are productive deer and elk areas. Most locations used by mountain lions during the day are characterized by rock outcroppings or downed logs in forests. Cover is important to mountain lions for bedding sites and when hunting prey. Cougars have also been found living in drain ditches and culverts in subdivisions.

## #3 Reproduction

Females begin to bear young when they are about 2-1/2 years old. Breeding may take place throughout the year, but most females give birth between April and July. The three-month pregnancy results in a litter of two to three young,

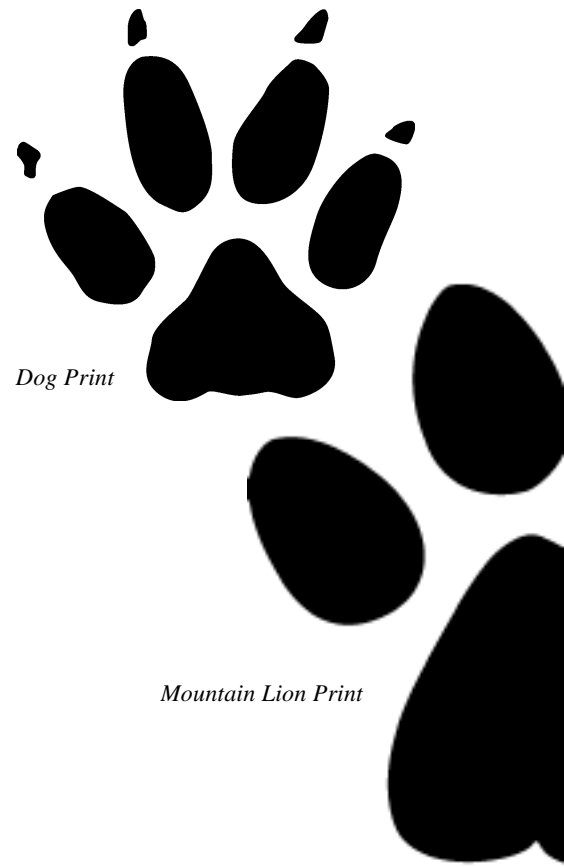
called kittens. The female is the sole caretaker of the kittens. Kittens remain with their mother for up to two years as they learn to obtain food on their own.

## #4 Territory

A mountain lion can occupy a large territory, depending on habitat and how much prey is available. An adult male's territory can exceed 150-200 square miles and usually includes the territory of several females. An adult female's territory can cover up to 65 square miles. Their ability to cover such an expanse may bring them into contact with humans and urban areas. Because their mobility makes it possible for the animal to travel many miles away within only a few hours, it can be difficult to track their movements.

## #5 Foraging for Food

Mountain lions are very powerful and normally kill large animals such as deer, elk and bighorn sheep for food. However, they can survive on smaller animals such as raccoons, and occasionally kill domestic livestock and pets. They usually hunt at night and prefer to ambush prey from behind and kill with a powerful bite. They kill may be covered with leaves or snow. Mountain lions may come back to these carcasses over several days.



Dog Print

Mountain Lion Print

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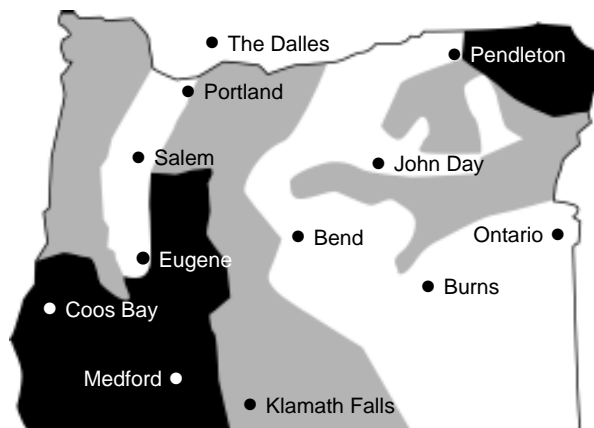
The Oregon legislature repealed the state bounty system in 1961, and in 1967 changed the status of cougars to a "game mammal" regulated by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

Through protection and management, mountain lion populations began to increase to a current estimate of 4,000 animals. Controlled hunting seasons were used to manage populations prior to 1996 to minimize predation on domestic animals. Currently, mountain lions are hunted during general seasons. Since December of 1994, it has been illegal to hunt mountain lions with dogs.

Mountain lion populations are increasing locally along with an increase in damage complaints and human encounters.

If you live in Oregon, odds are you live or play in mountain lion country. Like any large predator they can be dangerous, but they generally try to avoid humans. We can coexist with these magnificent animals. With a better understanding of mountain lions and their habitat, people can minimize potential problems.

*Mountain lions are highly adaptable and widely distributed, occurring in a broad spectrum of habitats ranging from desert to alpine environments.*



Relative Mountain Lion Density



## How to Identify Mountain Lion Tracks and Signs

Many mountain lion sightings are often a case of mistaken identity. Large dog paw prints are frequently mistaken for mountain lion tracks. The major difference between dog tracks and mountain lion tracks is that dog tracks have claw marks.

In an unhurried walk, mountain lions place the hind paw in the imprint of the front paw. They have four toes and three distinct lobes at the base of the heel pad, forming an “M” shape. An average sized

mountain lion makes a track about 3-1/2 inches wide and 3 inches long. Claw marks are usually not visible because mountain lions can retract their claws.

The mountain lion is a solitary animal and adult males almost always travel alone. If tracks indicate two or more mountain lions traveling together, it is likely a female with kittens. Mountain lion feces are often covered by soil, leaves or other debris that is scraped from an area up to 3 feet in diameter. They create similar scrapes (often urine-scented) to mark their territory. They also leave claw marks in trees. All of these marks are signals to other mountain lions that the area is occupied.

The mountain lion is usually silent, but has calls similar to an ordinary tomcat, though magnified. They also have a shrill, piercing whistle-scream (a type of mating call), a hiss and growl.



## Reporting Human Encounters

If you are involved in a face-to-face encounter with a mountain lion, contact the nearest district or region office of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. In case of human attack, call 911 for immediate emergency assistance. If possible, leave paw prints and other possible mountain lion signs undisturbed so they can be examined. It helps to cover tracks with a pie tin or bucket to protect them from rain and trampling.



## Damage Problems

Local law enforcement agencies, county animal control and other animal damage organizations act under the direction of ODFW in handling damage complaints, and reporting sightings.

ODFW has the authority to assist with damage problems. If a landowner believes their livestock or pets were killed by a mountain lion, they should leave the remains undisturbed and contact the local ODFW or animal damage control offices as soon as possible. Leaving the site undisturbed is essential for agents to determine what killed the animal.

Landowners can kill mountain lions that have killed, or are in the act of attacking livestock. While no permit is needed under these circumstances, statutes require that a person killing a mountain lion report the kill to their local ODFW office or Oregon State Police. Landowners are limited to their own property for damage control actions.

Killing mountain lions where there is not an immediate human safety threat is not legal except during open hunting seasons with the appropriate license and tag. Consult current Oregon Big Game Regulations for mountain lion season information and license requirements.

## Human Safety Precautions

The potential for human/mountain lion interactions has increased in recent years. However, more people are injured or killed by deer, bees, dogs and spiders than by mountain lions. Since every attack is different, patterns of attack behavior are difficult to identify. People should familiarize themselves with mountain lion signs and habitat. If you are concerned about safety, the following suggestions can help prevent an attack.

**Do Not Hike Alone:** Go in groups, with adults supervising children.

**Do Not Approach a Mountain Lion:** Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.

**Do Not Run From a Mountain Lion:** Running may stimulate the instinct to chase. Stand and face the animal. Make eye contact. If you have small children with you, pick them up so they don't panic and run. Try to pick them up without bending over or turning away from the mountain lion.

**Do All You Can to Appear Larger:** Raise your arms, open your jacket, throw stones or whatever you can without crouching or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak in a firm, loud voice.

**Fight Back if Attacked:** Because a lion tries to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the attacking animal. Use rocks, sticks, jackets, garden tools, camping gear and your hands to fend off the attack.

### Backyard Tips

**Don't Feed Wildlife:** By feeding deer, raccoons or other wildlife in your yard, you may inadvertently attract mountain lions, which prey on them as a food source.

**Landscaping:** Be aware that planting trees and shrubs that attract deer may also attract mountain lions. If you are interested in naturescaping for wildlife, there are alternatives including gardening for birds, bats, and butterflies.

Make it difficult for mountain lions to approach your yard unseen by removing dense or low-lying vegetation, especially around walkways and children's play areas.

**Install Outdoor Lighting:** Keep the perimeter of your house well lit at night.

**Keep Pets Secure:** Bring pets inside or keep them in a kennel with a secure top. Don't feed pets outside as this can attract mountain lions and their prey.



**Educate Children:** Teach children what to do if they encounter a mountain lion.

**Keep Livestock Secure:** Where practical, keep livestock in enclosed sheds and barns at night, and be sure to secure all outbuildings, especially during peak birth periods (calving, lambing, etc.)



D E P A R T M E N T R E G I O N O F F I C E S		
REGION	ADDRESS	TELEPHONE
Northwest	17330 SE Evelyn Street, Clackamas, OR 97015	503-657-2000
Southwest	4192 N Umpqua Hwy, Roseburg, OR 97470	541-440-3353
High Desert	61374 Parrell Road, Bend, OR 97702	541-388-6363
Northeast	107 20th Street, La Grande, OR 97850	541-963-2138
Portland HQ	2501 SW First Avenue, Portland, OR 97207	503-872-5268

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