



Key Facts about Mountain Lions, and Contact Info for Mountain Lion Experts for Journalists

1. Mountain lions are not resilient to human-caused mortality¹

- a. Human-caused mortality is generally additive—meaning that cats that are killed by humans would have likely survived to live much longer (Wolfe et al. 2015, Logan and Runge 2021).
- b. When >20% of independent females in a population are removed, you will almost certainly see a decline in that population. (Logan and Runge 2021)
- c. When you remove >14% of the independent animals in a population, you generally see a decline in that population. (Beausoleil et al. 2013; 2021)
- d. Populations suffering heavy mortality generally exhibit a younger age structure, and see higher female percentages in lions killed by hunters (Elbroch et al. 2022)

2. Killing Native Carnivores is Harmful to Their Social Structure

- Research suggests that when adult mountain lions are hunted, killed, and removed from a population, it can result in social disruption with unintended consequences. The absence of adults encourages subadult males to establish in their place—subadults are less skilled at hunting, and generally more naive about how to live with humans. Research shows that this influx of subadult males may increase conflicts with human and livestock (Robinson et al. 2008, Cooley et al. 2009, Peebles et al. 2013). A literature review by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2022, casts doubt on Peebles et al's data, methods and conclusions.
- Mountain lions breed for the first time between 2.5-4 years old, depending upon sex and population characteristics. They generally suffer low survival as kittens, but high survival as adults, in the absence of hunting pressure. Killing female mountain lions causes the orphaning of kittens and juveniles—Wyoming Game and Fish estimated 18% of kittens are orphaned due to hunting in their management plan. (Stoner et al. 2006). These animals are highly dependent on their mothers until 18 to 24 months of age, learning crucial survival skills such as how to hunt deer and elk effectively and how to avoid humans. Killing mother lions can leave multiple young to die from starvation,

¹ Human-caused mortality includes recreational hunting, killing by APHIS wildlife services, killing by state wildlife managers, vehicular collisions, and ingestion of poisons.

dehydration, exposure or predation and leaves juveniles to fend for themselves which can increase conflicts with humans, pets, and livestock.

- In areas without trophy (recreational) mountain lion hunting, populations of mountain lions are older, more mature and stable because the lions are living longer. Older, more mature lions know how to hunt deer and elk effectively, have established home ranges, and thus largely avoid conflicts with livestock, pets and people. In areas with sport/recreational hunting, the populations of mountain lions are younger, because mature mountain lions are being killed off, opening up more territory and increasing reproductive rates. Younger, inexperienced mountain lions, especially those who are orphaned, are more likely to find themselves involved in conflict. (Laundre' and Papouchis, 2020.)
- Colorado Open Records request documents show many subadult mountain lions being killed by mountain lion hunters, which likely reflects the overall population of mountain lions in Colorado as being younger. This likely indicates a high level of hunting pressure.

2. Killing Native Carnivores Harms Colorado's Sensitive Ecosystems

- Mountain lions are low-density species that serve important ecological roles, including a variety of ecosystem services (Weaver et al. 1996, Ripple and Beschta 2006, Estes et al. 2011, Elbroch and Wittmer 2012).
- Mountain lions fulfill important ecological roles in their biotic communities. They structure the distribution and demography of prey; increase biological diversity; reduce vehicular collisions with deer (Gilbert et al., 2016), and play a role in managing Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) (Krumm et al. 2010; Baune et al. 2021).

3. Mountain lions are a keystone species.

Youngsters stay with mothers for about 18 months to 24 months, well after their spots disappear. If a few mountain lions are spotted together, it is likely a mother with dependent young.

- The male lion has a large territory, which overlaps with several females.
 - Juvenile males may travel hundreds of miles to find an unoccupied territory.
- Mountain lions are more social than previously believed.
 - Will share carcasses and parenting duties. Orphans have been adopted by other females.
 - Mountain lions regulate their populations based on available habitat, prey availability and social dynamics. They do not overpopulate if not hunted. (Laundre, J. and Papouchis, C. 2020.)

Mountain lions appear to have the most diverse set of biotic relationships documented for any species in the world. (LaBarge et al., 2022.) This is partly a reflection of their wide geographic range, a fact which explains why they have more common names than any other species. It also reflects their role as a keystone species throughout their range, affecting everything from carrion beetles and other insects that rely on cached carcasses (Barry et al. 2019) to complex changes to vegetation, soil nutrients, and riverbanks due to mountain lions' effects on deer populations (Peziol et al. 2023).

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Contact Information for Experts

Mark Elbroch melbroch@panthera.org

Byron Weckworth bweckworth@mountainlion.org

Jim Williams pumapatagonia@gmail.com