

From Craighead Beringia South:

The Cache Creek cougar family group has drawn considerable attention. Emotion always plays a role in human-cougar interactions. Craighead Beringia South is a local non-profit that has been conducting field research on cougars (Teton Cougar Project) in Jackson Hole for more than 10 years. We believe one of the most important starting points is to look to the scientific literature for guidance in making any decisions regarding cougar behavior and the potential for conflict. It's also important to recognize which people and agencies have jurisdictional authority at a particular site or area; this can commonly determine the conservation and management actions that are possible. Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) has jurisdiction over cougars in the state of Wyoming, and in Cache Creek. Their goal of mountain lion management in Wyoming ([Mountain Lion Management Plan](#)) is as follows:

- To sustain mountain lion populations throughout core habitat
- To provide for recreational/hunting opportunity
- To maintain ungulate populations in line with current habitat conditions
- Minimize mountain lion depredation to pets and livestock
- Reduce the potential for human injury

Due to the proximity of the cougar family group to human development and “the potential for human injury”, the capture of the Cache Creek cougars has become the management objective. When captured, the family group will be killed, moved, or put in a zoo. WGFD will likely translocate the female and two kittens. Translocation has become a preferred management and conservation technique due to changing attitudes toward more direct methods of predator control. Translocating large carnivores is usually a short term fix. Adult female cougars are territorial and have a strong desire to return to their home territory. A translocated cougar is rarely tolerated by resident cougars. And finally, the territory vacated by the translocation will be quickly filled by yet another cougar. However, responding to the need to protect human safety and the public's will to keep this group alive and wild, translocation could be the best option in an agency's tool chest. Studies suggest that *most cougars avoid confrontations with people and, even in areas where the two species share habitats, cougars show a proclivity for using those habitats during times*

*when human use is minimal.* Research has also shown that properties of cougar-human interactions are increased when prey, cougar, and human populations in that area have increased.

Those areas that surround the Cache Creek drainage and landscapes to the north and east are prime habitats that support both predator and prey species. With deepening snow compromising their movements, both prey and subsequently predator species are moving into lower lying areas. There have been reports and even sightings of cougars in the Game Creek and Cache Creek drainages, including Snow King, for years. And, this is not the first time a cougar has been captured and translocated from Cache Creek. This female and her two kittens have a home range (an area they use and with which they are familiar), but we do not know the boundaries of that area. Moving the family group to what we might speculate to be the edge of her territory is worth discussion.

Our continuing discussions with WGFD, our collaborators in many aspects of our work, have encompassed many options and potentials. Ultimately, the decision about how to proceed is with them. But, much of the success of co-existing with cougars lies in the hands of people who share the habitat.

We suggest that the community use this opportunity to engage in a civil discussion of the issues surrounding cougar management in Jackson Hole, using the best available science to direct decisions. Jackson Hole has an opening and can be in the forefront of examining management options, and even testing them. Arguments based solely on emotion will do little to further the issue of the human/wildlife interface. We all should see this as an opportunity to further our knowledge about cougars, cougar ecology, and examine our role in securing a long-term approach to conservation and management that the community can embrace.