

Jackson Hole News & Guide

[Print This Page >](#)

3rd cougar kitten found

By Cory Hatch, Jackson Hole Daily

Date: February 3, 2012

Wildlife managers searching for one cougar kitten in the Cache Creek drainage got a surprise Thursday when they found two kittens in separate live traps near the popular recreation area.

Officials decided to capture and relocate a cougar family after the cats killed deer among homes near the Cache Creek trailhead east of Jackson late last month. Wyoming Game and Fish personnel captured the adult female Jan. 23 and one of the kittens, a female, Jan. 30.

Wildlife managers assumed only one kitten remained on the loose, Game and Fish spokesman Mark Gocke said.

"The information we had — photos — did not suggest there were three," he said of the kittens. Tracks were misleading, too. He's confident the kittens are from one family.

"We're aging them by tooth eruption, and they were all the same age," he said. "We're going to submit samples for DNA testing, just to be sure."

Wildlife managers will continue to patrol the area. Like their sister, the male and female kittens captured Thursday were healthy, Gocke said.

Wildlife managers are moving the kittens to a site somewhere between Lander and Rawlins. There, the cats will be reunited with their mother and sister, which have been held near Laramie, since their capture last month.

"We plan to release them as soon as possible," Gocke said. "We didn't see any reason to hold them any longer than necessary because they were in good body condition. We want them to go back to being wild lions as soon as possible."

The two places where the family group could be released are open to hunting, Gocke said. Hunters have not killed any cats in the hunt areas this season. Wildlife managers aren't worried about the family group because the areas are remote.

"Typically, they don't get much for lion harvest out there because it is so inaccessible because of the snow," he said. "There are winter closures in the area. Also, it's illegal to take a female cat with kittens."

"The goal all along is to release them in a place where they're least likely to end up back in a developed area or around people," Gocke said. "Also, we wanted to choose a location where there is abundant prey and a lower density of lions."

The cats will likely be released today or Saturday.

Wildlife managers tranquilized the two kittens captured Thursday to transfer them from the traps to the cages in which they will be transported.

The mother and three kittens were given antibiotics and ear tags, but none will receive a tracking collar.

"We didn't see a reason to burden them with a collar unnecessarily," he said.

The cats will likely not be tranquilized before they are released. "We want them to be ... 100 percent when they hit the ground," he said.

Conservation groups say the mountain lion family should be released into the Cache Creek drainage. A local research group, Craighead Beringia South, offered to collar the cats at no expense to Game and Fish so Cache Creek residents could be alerted if the family again moved close to homes.

Conservation groups and biologists worry the cougars will die if relocated.

"I don't believe that the decision-makers within Game and Fish care at all about these cougars," said Lisa Rullman, development director for the Cougar Fund. "If they don't collar the mother, they don't want to know if she survives or not.

"Many people have told me that what they've learned from this is, 'Never report anything to Game and Fish,' " Rullman said. "Their behavior is unconscionable."

The cats were likely lured to the neighborhood by deer that have been fed by residents in the past.

"One of the best things that can happen in all of this is that the community realizes the huge downside to feeding wildlife," which is illegal, Gocke said.

www.jhnewsandguide.com

307-733-2047

© 2012 Jackson Hole News&Guide

All Rights Reserved