



February 17, 2020

Mr. Eric Sklar, President
 California Fish and Game Commission
 1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1320
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted via email to fgc@fgc.ca.gov and USPS

RE: Petition to list Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act – support advancement to candidacy

Dear President Sklar and Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the petition to list Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA).

The undersigned organizations, which represent millions of supporters throughout California, strongly support the protection of mountain lions in Southern California and along the Central Coast. We urge the Commission to initiate a full status review and advance the mountain lion populations in the entire area of the proposed evolutionarily significant unit (ESU) to candidacy.

Researchers have shown that our state's mountain lions are being profoundly impacted by human activity, most notably from habitat loss and fragmentation due to roads and development¹. Scientists have described an "extinction vortex" of genetic isolation, car strikes, depredation kills, rodenticide poisonings, poaching, disease, and larger and more frequent wildfires that could drive the Santa Ana and Santa Monica mountains populations to extinction within 50 years or less². Other populations within the proposed ESU, including those in the Santa Cruz, San Gabriel, and San Bernardino Mountains, are showing similar patterns¹. Protections under CESA that would improve habitat connectivity throughout the entire proposed ESU area are needed to ensure these magnificent big cats continue to inhabit these landscapes and inspire future generations.

Protecting mountain lions would have a positive effect not only for the species itself, but also for threatened and endangered wildlife and plants that are the cornerstone of California's unique biodiversity. The presence of this wide-ranging top predator has been shown to help maintain diverse habitats that support a multitude of fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, mammal, insect, and invertebrate species. And mountain lion kills provide an important source of food for numerous scavengers and opportunists. Loss of the species could potentially lead to degraded ecosystems and decreased biodiversity.

Affording protections to mountain lions would also benefit public health and safety. About 100 mountain lions are killed on California roads every year, and thousands of collisions with large mammals (mostly deer) are reported to state agencies and insurance companies annually. Protecting mountain lions by facilitating their safe passage over roads would improve gene flow among isolated populations and allow for the safer passage of many other animals, like deer, which would help to reduce wildlife vehicle collisions.

The well-being of mountain lions is linked with ecosystem function and public health and safety, but the species is now facing unprecedented threats to its long-term survival in several

¹ Gustafson, K.D., Gagne, R.B., Vickers, T.W., Riley, S.P., Wilmers, C.C., Bleich, V.C., Pierce, B.M., Kenyon, M., Drazenovich, T.L., Sikich, J.A. and Boyce, W.M., 2018. Genetic source-sink dynamics among naturally structured and anthropogenically fragmented puma populations. *Conservation Genetics*, 20(2), pp.215-227.

² Benson, J.F., Mahoney, P.J., Vickers, T.W., Sikich, J.A., Beier, P., Riley, S.P., Ernest, H.B. and Boyce, W.M., 2019. Extinction vortex dynamics of top predators isolated by urbanization. *Ecological Applications*, 29(3), p.e01868.

parts of the state. We therefore strongly recommend the California Fish and Game Commission to initiate a full status review and advance Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions to candidacy.

Sincerely,

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