



**Humane
World for
Animals™**

Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States

Coexisting with cougars

Taking simple precautions in cougar country can easily prevent conflicts with these native carnivores

Once robust, populations of cougars (also known as mountain lions or pumas) have declined drastically across most of their range in the Americas. The population decline is due to the impact of extensive hunting and predator control, in addition to continued habitat loss and fragmentation. Cougars are secretive and rarely seen, adapting even to extensive human encroachment into their territories.

Understanding cougars and their habits, along with recognizing that they are our wild neighbors, is the first step toward coexisting with them. Simply seeing a cougar, or signs that a cougar was in the area, is not reason for alarm.

Preventing conflicts with cougars

If you live in or near cougar habitat, making a few changes to your landscape and your behavior can significantly reduce your chances of drawing in unwanted wild visitors—not only cougars, but also bears, coyotes and wolves.

- Store trash in clean, well-secured containers. Wash trash cans to avoid attracting potential prey species such as raccoons.
- Don't leave pet food outside. Either feed pets indoors or remove food immediately after they've eaten.
- Don't feed deer or other wildlife that may attract cougars.
- Don't compost meat scraps or other foods that would attract cougars or their prey.
- Trim vegetation around your house to avoid providing concealment for cougars as they rely on cover to ambush their prey. Your yard need not be completely barren, but it shouldn't include dense underbrush that would allow a cougar to hide undetected.
- Seal open areas under structures such as porches, sheds and decks that can provide shelter for cougars or their prey.
- Install lighting or motion-sensor lighting in dark areas around the home to deter cougars and other wildlife.

Protecting pets

Cougars pose only a small risk to pets, but those risks can be minimized with some common sense and preventative measures:

- Keep cats indoors and always supervise small pets when outside, especially from dusk to dawn. Be aware that cougars can jump 18 feet, so most fences will not protect unsupervised pets outside.
- Keep small pets such as rabbits or guinea pigs inside or in a secure enclosure that is covered on top.
- Minimize brush and cover in your yard that can provide hiding places for cougars.
- Walk your dog on a leash 6 feet long or shorter.

Protecting farm animals

While some farmers lose an occasional animal to cougars, the numbers are quite small. Many more farm animals are lost every year to weather, birthing problems, theft or disease rather than to predation by cougars. Still, there are measures that you can take to reduce this risk:

- Keep animals in pastures away from ambush cover (such as shrubs).
- Synchronize the birth of calves and lambs with prey (deer and elk) births.
- Fence in your farm animals to keep them contained.
- Keep small animals (such as chickens) in secure enclosures that are covered on top, making sure that these enclosures are also secured against intrusions from wildlife such as raccoons that might attract cougars.
- Consider using a guard animal, especially for larger properties. Donkeys, llamas and certain types of dogs can successfully guard farm animals.
- Where possible, place farm animals in enclosed sheds or barns at night.



Recreation in cougar country

When living or engaging in recreational activity (such as hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding) in cougar country, the best way to prevent a conflict with a cougar is to take a few extra precautions:

- Take a friend with you; avoid venturing into cougar country alone.
- Be aware of your surroundings (i.e., don't wear headphones!).
- Bring along a whistle or an air horn that could help scare away wild animals you may encounter.
- Keep children close and don't allow young children to play outdoors unsupervised. Walk with children between two adults or hold their hand.
- Keep your dog on a leash 6 feet long or shorter.

What to do if you encounter a cougar

- Don't run! Running will provoke the predatory chasing behavior of cougars, as it would with other predators such as bears, coyotes and wolves.
- Pick up small children or pets who are with you.
- Directly face the cougar, but look at the cougar's feet, not directly into their eyes, to avoid appearing aggressive.
- If the cougar displays aggressive behavior, try to appear larger—raise your arms or open your jacket over your head.
- Make noise by yelling, blowing a whistle or using an air horn.
- If you have an umbrella, quickly open and close it while facing the cougar.
- Do not approach the cougar. Give them ample space to run away.
- If there are kittens, be careful not to get between them and their mother.

If a cougar attacks

In the very rare event that you are attacked by a cougar, fight back in any way that you can. People have stopped attacks by hitting the cougar with sticks, their hands, baseball caps and garden tools.

There are no repellents that have been registered for use on cougars, but the pepper (capsaicin) sprays sold to deter attacks by bears may be effective. Be sure to read the directions as these can vary depending on the brand.

Public health concerns

Cougars don't carry any diseases that are a threat to public health, but like any mammals, they can contract and then transmit rabies through a bite. However, the risk of contracting rabies from a cougar is extraordinarily small; there has only been one recorded incident of an attack on a person by a rabid cougar.

Why killing doesn't solve conflicts with cougars

Cougars are killed as trophy animals in nearly every state where they are found. State wildlife management agencies and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program also often kill "nuisance" cougars. But because killing cougars disrupts their social structure and may exacerbate conflicts with humans and farm animals, it is not a viable solution.

Killing cougars does nothing to prevent future cougar attacks or make people, pets or farm animals safer; however, employing commonsense precautions makes all the difference.

