

# Living with cougars

## Staying safe while living and recreating in cougar country

Cougars are exciting animals to see in the wild and rarely cause problems for humans. Although unlikely to happen, you should know how to react if you encounter an aggressive cougar.

## What to do if you meet an aggressive cougar

- **Do not run from a cougar.** Running will provoke an instinctive prey response and the cougar may pursue you.
- **Make yourself look intimidating.** Make eye contact with the cougar, which cougars consider a threat. Make yourself look big by opening your jacket, raising your arms and waving them. Speak loud and firm to the cougar.
- **If you have children, pick them up.** Try to pick children up before they panic and run. When you are picking children up, keep eye contact with the cougar and try not to bend over too far or turn your back to the cougar.
- **If you are attacked, fight back!** Protect your head and neck, as the neck is the target for the cougar. If the cougar thinks it is not likely to win its fight with you quickly, it will probably give up and leave.

## Facts about cougars

- Cougars, *Felis concolor*, are also known as the mountain lion, puma or panther.
- Cougars are one of North America's largest cats and is recognized by its tawny color and long tail.
- Cougar kittens, or cubs, have blackish-brown spots on their body and dark rings on their tails that fade as they get older.
- Cougars are solitary animals, making them a rare sight for humans. They usually hunt alone and at night, ambushing their prey from behind. Typically, cougars kill their prey with a bite to the lower neck.
- After making a kill, a cougar often will take the carcass to the base of a tree and cover it with dirt, leaves or snow, saving it to eat later.
- Cougars live all across Utah, from high in the Uinta Mountains to the dry southern Utah deserts.
- Cougars' main prey is deer, so cougars are often found close to deer.

- Cougars live up to 12 years in the wild but have lived up to 25 years in captivity. In the wild they face death through accidents, disease and large predators (including humans).

## Living in cougar country

If you live in cougar country, here are a few guidelines to make your property safer:

- Do not feed wildlife. Feeding wildlife attracts animals to your yard that may be prey of cougars, thus attracting cougars to your yard.
- Do not feed pets outside. Cougars will eat pet food, and the food could attract cougars to your yard. Keep pets indoors at night as well, as pets make easy prey for cougars.
- Make your yard deer-proof. If your landscaping is attractive to deer, cougars will follow the deer and hang close to your property.
- Dense vegetation makes great hiding places for cougars. Remove vegetation that could be a hiding place, making your yard less friendly for cougars.
- Outdoor lighting and motion-sensitive lighting is a deterrent for the secretive cougar. Lights also make approaching cougars visible.
- Secure livestock in a barn or shed at night. If that is impossible, a small, well-lit pen close to a structure is the next-best option.
- Keep a close eye on your children when they are playing outside. Bring children in before dusk when cougars begin to hunt.

## Playing in cougar country

If you recreate in cougar country, here are a few guidelines to make your experience safer:



*Note the typical "M" shape on this cougar track. Also note that no claws show on the print. Felines walk with their claws retracted.*

- Hike with other people and make noise. Cougars rarely bother groups of people.
- Keep a clean camp. Store food and garbage in your vehicle or hang it between two trees where cougars (and bears) cannot reach it.
- When hiking with small children, keep the children in the group or in sight ahead of the group. Remember, cougars ambush from behind, so keeping a child in front of the main group will lessen the possibility of attack.
- Keep away from dead animals, especially deer or elk. This could be a kill that a cougar is guarding or will be returning to. A cougar will defend its food.
- If hiking with pets, keep them close to the group. Roaming pets will be open to cougar attacks or could irritate a cougar that is trying to avoid the group.

## **Whom to call if you meet a cougar**

If you encounter a cougar in a residential area, or if you have an aggressive encounter with a cougar, please alert the Division of Wildlife Resources.

During regular office hours, please call the **DWR office closest to you**. A Division employee will notify a conservation officer of your encounter or transfer you directly to law enforcement personnel. If the encounter or sighting occurs after hours or on the weekend, please call the police, who can contact a conservation officer to handle the situation.