

UPDATE ON MOUNTAIN LION RESEARCH IN THE GARNET MOUNTAINS ^{TWS}

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Mountain lion research began in the Garnet Mountains in 1998 to better understand characteristics of a hunted lion population and evaluate the accuracy of track surveys and other techniques to monitor trends in lion abundance. The 330 square mile study area located south of Ovando represents typical hunted mountain lion habitat of central and western Montana. Fifty-one mountain lions have been equipped with transmitters and research to date indicates that lion biology and ecology are similar to other studied lion populations. Hunting resulted in 14 of 21 radioed adult lions harvested during 1998 and 1999. Lion hunting was suspended for 3 years starting in 2000 in order to capture all lions in the study area and to allow the population to increase. After a 3-year increase, hunting will again be allowed, thus reducing the number of lions. By having the population increase and then decrease we can determine which population indicators are most sensitive to changes in lion abundance. Population indicators being evaluated include trends in the number of lion tracks on survey routes. Eleven routes (7-39 miles in length) have been established and were searched primarily by snowmobile 10 times this winter to document the number and location of lion tracks. These 170 miles of roads and trails will be inventoried during the 6-year period to determine the relationship between lion track density and the actual density of lions. Other population indicators being evaluated include lion observations by deer hunters sampled through FWP's statewide telephone survey; interviewing a portion of the state's houndsmen to record views on lion trends; lion hunting statistics; deer and elk trends in the study area; and lion DNA sampling.