

2009-2010 COUGAR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT Olympic National Park

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We received 8 and 5 reliable cougar reports in Olympic National Park in 2009 and 2010 respectively. Of those 2 (2009) and 1 (2010) were encounters. There were no near attacks or attacks reported. These were the lowest numbers of reports received in the 18 years of record. It is unknown if these low numbers reflect trends in cougar populations or a decreasing percentage of cougar observations that are getting reported.



Figure 1. Cougar checking out a fisher trap near Deer Park Road, 2010.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout western North America the number of cougar-human interactions increased markedly in the 1980's and 90's. These include negative human-cougar interactions,

some of which resulted in human fatalities. Although very few visitors to Olympic National Park (Park) ever see a cougar, and those that do usually only catch a fleeting glimpse, each year a few close encounters are reported. Consequently, the Park's Natural Resource Management Staff developed a Cougar Action Plan (as part of the larger Nuisance and Hazard Animal Plan) which guides management practices. The goals of the plan are twofold: first, to provide advice on education of visitors, employees, and in-holders about how to minimize the chance of negative interactions with cougars; secondly, to provide guidance so that cougar observations, encounters, and incidents are responded to appropriately.

Following the Cougar Action Plan, we maintain a cougar observation database and compile yearly summaries. In years past the park also increased public education measures, with signs about appropriate behavior in cougar country placed on bulletin boards park-wide and included in the park newspaper and wilderness trip planner. In conjunction with the black bear management program, the Park also implemented clean camping policies and enforced visitor compliance with these policies. These have wide implications for cougar management; primarily, clean camping techniques limit the number of raccoons and other prey items available to cougars in human-occupied areas of the park.

COUGAR REPORTS

As recommended by the Cougar Action Plan, park employees in 2009/2010 were asked to report all cougar observations, both those seen by staff and those reported by visitors, to the wildlife biologist immediately. Cougar Report Forms were available as hard copies at all ranger stations, on the ONP intranet site (<http://www.olymp.nps.gov/>), and the I drive (I:\All\wildlife\Wildlife_Forms) as well as by e-mail. As reports were received, they were reviewed and entered into the Cougar Observation Database. Because staffing decreased to the lowest levels since the program's inception in 2008, the speed of report follow-up and data entry decreased. Detailed notes were written on unique or alarming encounters. We input all reports into the database, but only those that 1) occurred in the park, 2) a cougar was seen, and 3) were evaluated to be reliability level one (verifiable with documentation) or two (probable based on clarity of description or other factors) are utilized for analytical purposes.

2009/10 Cougar Observations

We received a total of 14 cougar observations in 2009 and 10 in 2010. 2009 had 8 reliable in park reports and 2010 had only 5. (Table 1) These are the two lowest years of reported cougar observations since we started collecting this data in 1993 (Figure 2). It is always hard to tell whether the decline in reports is due to fewer animals or fewer percentage of observation reported.

Table 1: Reported cougar observations and incidents, Olympic National Park, for the past ten years (2001-2010) and annual mean 2001-2010.											
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Mean
Total Reports	39	31	25	16	24	21	26	16	14	10	22.2

Table 1: Reported cougar observations and incidents, Olympic National Park, for the past ten years (2001-2010) and annual mean 2001-2010.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Mean
Received											
Total Reliable in Park Reports	30	21	15	11	17	14	21	14	8	5	15.6
TYPES OF OBSERVATIONS											
Observation ^a	18	14	9	9	8	11	10	7	6	4	9.7
Cougar-Human Interactions ^b	12	7	6	2	9	3	11	7	2	1	6.0
<i>encounter</i> ^c	8	7	5	2	8	3	10	7	2	1	5.3
<i>near-attack - human</i> ^d	4	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0.6
<i>near-attack - pet/livestock</i> ^e	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1
<i>attack-human</i> ^f	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
<i>attack-pet/livestock</i> ^g	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Number Observation in Front Country	18	14	11	9	11	10	13	8	6	4	10.4
<i>From a car</i>	11	11	5	8	6	8	8	4	5	4	7.0
Number Observations in Back Country	11	7	4	2	6	4	8	6	2	1	5.1
Number Human Injuries	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Number Cougars Killed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0

a: cougar seen from >100' away or from in a car, rapid cougar departure

b: sum of encounters, near attacks and attacks

c: encounter: cougar +/- 50' away, quick to slow to leave, no aggression

d: near attack: close, slow to leave, some aggression, stalking, but no contact

e: near attack involving livestock or domestic animals, not humans

f: attack: physical contact with a human

g: physical contact with livestock or domestic animals, not humans

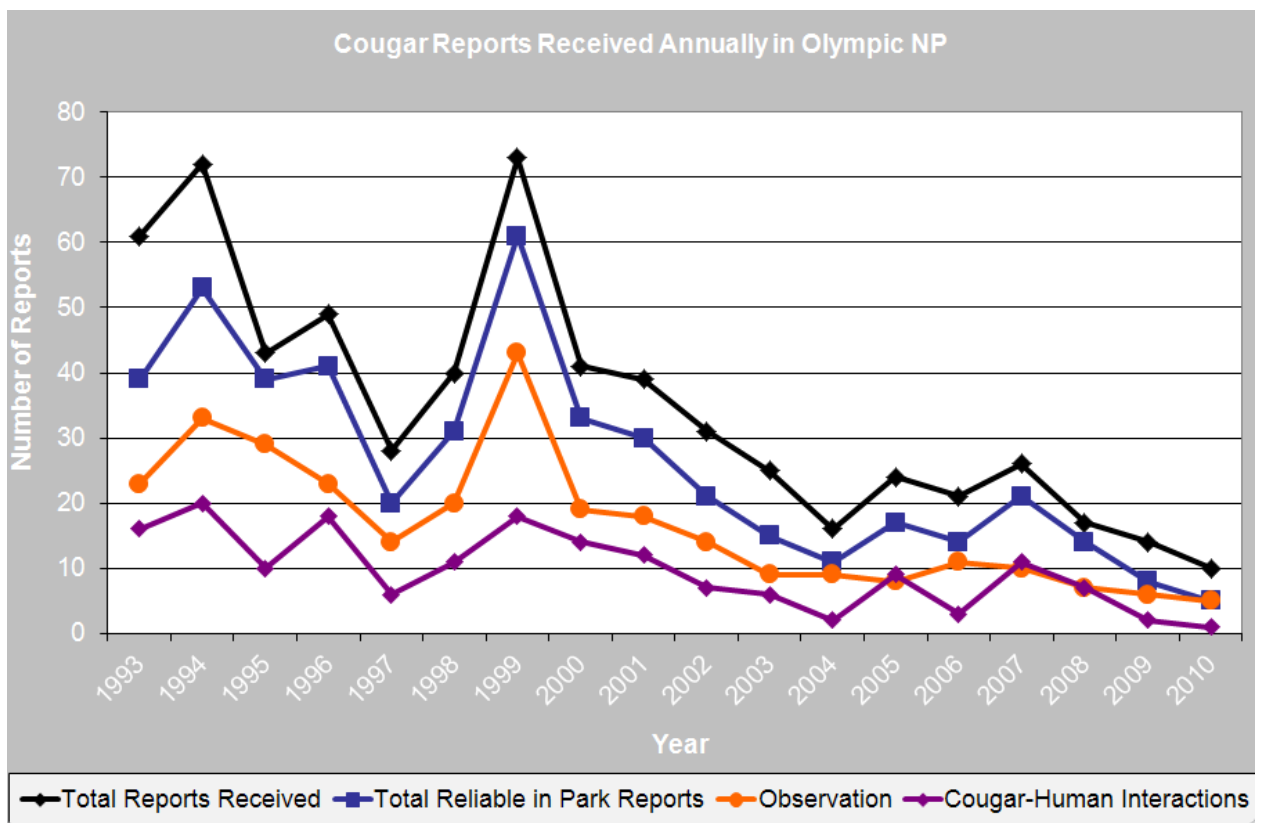


Figure 2. Trends in number of cougar reports received, and report type, Olympic National Park, 1993-2010

Over the period of record (1993-2010) the average ratio was about 1 cougar-human interaction to every 2 observations. This ratio increased a little in 2009 (1 to 3) and in 2010 to 1 to 4. This should be viewed with caution due to the few overall observation from 2009/2010. In 2009 and 2010 there were no near attacks or attacks in the park. There were 2 cougar-human interactions in the Park in 2009 and just one in 2010. Both were encounters (closer than 50', slow to leave) (Figure 3).

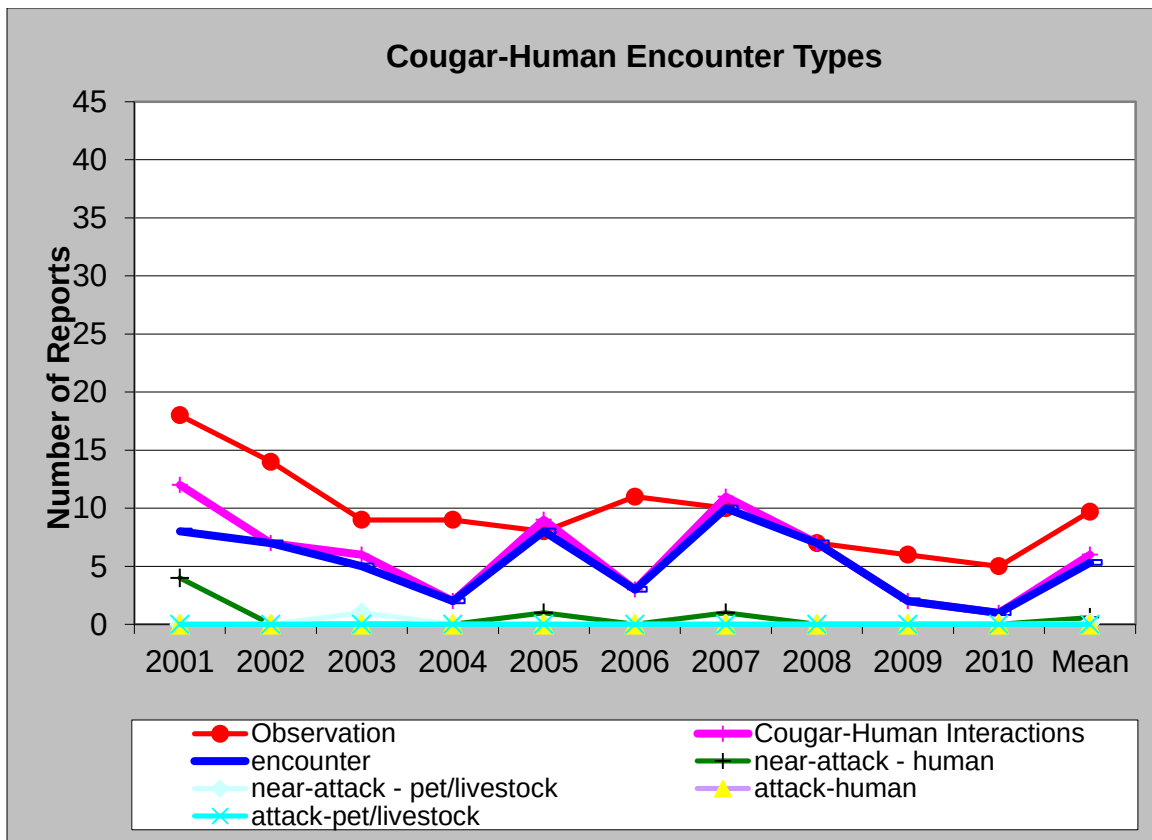


Figure 3. Reliable, reported cougar-human interactions, Olympic National Park 1993-2010.

Over the past 18 years, the majority of cougar reports (70%) have been from the front country (e.g. within a mile of roads), with the majority of those coming from observers in vehicles (62% of front country reports and 44% of all reports). In 2009 and 2010 there were a total of 10 observations in the front country, of which 9 were from a vehicle. There were a total of 3 observations during this time in the backcountry.

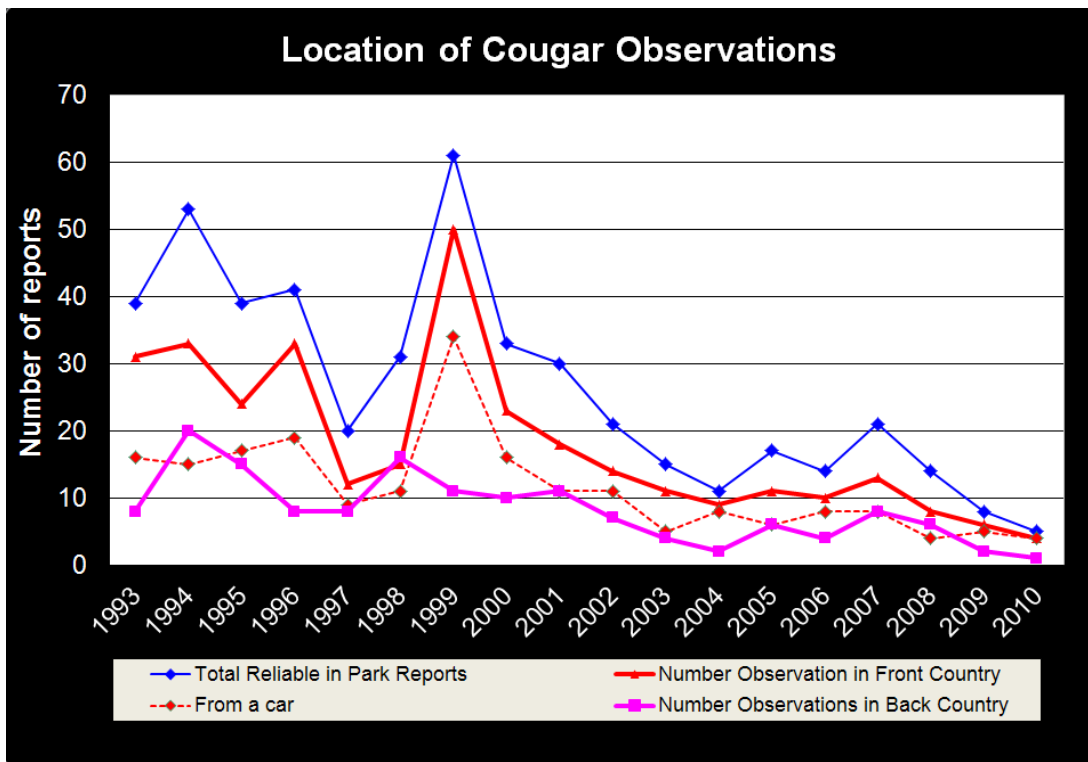


Figure 3. Location of reliable, reported cougar observations, Olympic National Park, 1993-2010.

Cougar observations and encounters were reported throughout most of the Park, with no real consistent area other than the 3 observations in the Sol Duc in 2009 (Table 2).

Park Area	# of Observations	# of Encounters	# Near-Attacks	Total # of Observations/ Interactions	% of Total Reports
Elwha River Valley, include Dodger Point		1		1	13%
Hurricane/Obstruction/Grand Valley	1			1	13%
Kalaloch					13%
Lake Crescent					13%
Lake Quinault		1		1	13%
Ozette Lake, North to Shi Shi, south to Norwegian	1			1	13%
Solduc River Valley	3			3	38%
Staircase/Skokomish River Valley	1			1	13%

Table 2: Park areas where cougars were reported, Olympic National Park, 2010
(reliability class 1 and 2 only)

Park Area	# of Observations	# of Encounters	# Near-Attacks	Total # of Observations/ Interactions	% of Total Reports
Elwha River Valley, include Dodger Point	1			1	20%
Hoh River Valley, Hoh Lake, Glacier Meadows	1			1	20%
Hurricane/Obstruction/Grand Valley	1			1	20%
Kalaloch					20%
Lake Crescent	1			1	20%
Ozette Lake, North to Shi Shi, south to Norwegian		1		1	20%

2009/2010 Summary

In 2009-2010 the number of overall cougar observations/interactions was down lower than they ever have been before. This could be due to lower numbers of cougars or it is possible that with the program being in its 18th year the observations of cougar and cougar awareness has become more common-place, we are receiving a decreasing proportion of cougar reports that are simple observations

2009 and 2010 Cougar-Human-Interactions summaries:

May 18 2009

Man was hiking with Bruce Klanke from Elkhorn to Hayes. Stopped near high point of trail to check ham radio reception to find "hot spot". Bruce was laying on ground about 75 ft from him when he spotted the cougar walking on a game trail towards Remans Cabin about 45' uphill from trail. He yelled "cougar" to Bruce who thought he was kidding and did not respond. He had a visual for about 45 seconds at a distance of about 45 feet.

June 4, 2009

Pat Loafman was riding his bike 150m downriver of the East Fork of the Quinault road washout, and thinks he came upon the cougar unaware until he yelled at it. Closest distance was 20 feet and encounter lasted 20 seconds

August 27, 2010

Ranger Rutter was walking down the beach at Yellow Banks near the woodbine. He looked towards the woods and observed a cougar jump off a small tree and disappear in the forest. Closest distance was 30 feet and visual was for about 3 seconds.

STAFF TRAINING

Park staff received general cougar management and biology training during Olympic National Park's seasonal training. The park wildlife biologist addressed the Cougar

Management Plan, showed graphs of cougar activity within the park, and explained appropriate measures to be taken in the event of a cougar encounter.

Patti Happe and Dave Manson stayed current on qualification with the Dan Inject darting rifle, in accordance of NPS-77. They both stayed current on shotgun slug training.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2011

Cougar observation database: Park staff should continue use of Cougar Observation Forms for ALL cougar sightings. These should be forwarded to the wildlife biologist immediately.

Reactive management strategies: Ensure that appropriate Warning and Closure signs are available in the event that a cougar begins to frequent a high visitor-use area. Maintain contact with local and state biologists who could respond immediately with tracking dogs if park staffs deem cougar capture and/or translocation necessary.

Proactive management strategies:

- Continue public education regarding appropriate behavior in cougar country. Ensure that signs are placed on all bulletin boards, and support Resource Education efforts to educate the public through evening programs or other such public educational forums.
- In partnership with the black bear management program, continue to maintain animal-resistant garbage and food-storage facilities, and enforce clean camping policies park-wide.
- Convene the Cougar Incident Management Team to review the cougar management plan and updates to management techniques.
- Attempt to increase funding to support more dedicated staff time to Nuisance-Hazard wildlife management.