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# THE DENVER POST

## Opinion: Why we need more lions in Colorado and less trophy hunting

Vote yes on Proposition 127



A young female mountain lion was euthanized after it swatted a girl in a chicken coop near Buena Vista. The swat left a puncture mark in the girl's face. (Photo by Matthew Jonas/Boulder Daily Camera)

By [Thomas Pool](#) | Guest Commentary

PUBLISHED: October 30, 2024 at 12:08 PM MDT

As a hunter, rancher, veterinarian, and lifelong member of the NRA, I believe that The Denver Post has badly misread Proposition 127 and does not understand the real dynamics

with trophy hunting of our native wild cats.

Proposition 127 would protect mountain lions and bobcats sufficiently to allow them to deliver essential ecosystem services that benefit all of Colorado. Lions in particular hold the key to the long-term protection of our billion-dollar deer and elk hunting economy.

I spent 26 years in the Army, and I commanded the U.S. Army Veterinary Command. I wrote peer-reviewed publications on tuberculosis and dengue fever, and I pay heed to sound science, which informs us, unambiguously, that the top threat to the long-term viability of deer and elk is the well-documented and dangerously rapid spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).

Mountain lions have honed their skills as deer hunters for nearly 8 million years, and with CWD at epidemic levels among deer and elk, lions are known to preferentially kill CWD-infected ungulates, cleansing the population of disease and strengthening its resilience and reproductive health.

There are a loosely estimated, 3,000 mountain lions in Colorado, down from numbers previously reported in recent years 7,000. Trophy hunters are taking as many as 20% of the lion population each year, impairing the ability of the population as a whole to conduct its disease-cleansing function.

CWD is now detected in an alarming 40 out of 54 deer herds and 17 or 42 elk herds. The infectious agents of CWD

are nearly indestructible “prions,” creating so-called “zombie” deer and transforming lithe, prancing deer into thin, frail and stumbling ghosts of themselves.

If we choose unwisely and do not adopt Proposition 127, we will continue to put at risk the future of the most important hunting programs in Colorado – deer and elk hunting.

We must not allow a small segment of big-cat trophy hunters to undercut the balance in our ecosystems. Nor should we countenance their inhumane, unsporting conduct. Unleashing dogs to attack lions and bobcats is a fringe practice. A trophy hunt with dogs culminates with shooting a terrified animal out of a tree.

We don't use dogs to chase elk, deer, or bears, and we don't bait deer into cages to shoot them, as we wrongly do to bobcats.

As a lifelong fair-chase hunter, I cannot condone this kind of unsporting behavior. It's not what my father and grandfather taught me, and I did not teach this kind of mistreatment of wildlife to my two hunting sons.

This commercial killing violates the norms of the North American Model of Wildlife Management, with the payment of \$8,500 to a trophy hunting guide to send his dogs out to attack and tree a lion. The client is not hunting, he is waiting. And he is shooting an animal perched on a tree limb, sometimes for hours until the shooter shows up. The lion might as well be shot at the Denver Zoo as so-called recreational fur

called recreational hunt.

This happens with about 500 lions a year so that trophy hunters may send the heads and hides to a taxidermist and make up a fake legend of the “hunt.”

Dogs are supposed to chase a trophy Tom. But last year nearly half of the lions shot were females. That means orphaning of dependent young by the thousands. Real hunters don't orphan the young, and that's why we time our seasons for the fall. The problem with wild cats is they breed year-round.

Stopping trophy hunting is not some radical experiment. California reports a stable lion population today that has held over the last five decades without any trophy hunting of the big cats. That state has six times fewer lions killed for depredation as Colorado, even with six times as many people and twice as many livestock.

Peer-reviewed studies of lion behavior tells us that trophy hunting creates social chaos among surviving lions, and increases risk to livestock.

Trophy hunters are stealing the lions we need most – the most experienced and mature males and females. They are allowing CWD to gain an ever-expanding foothold.

Any mainstream hunter is shooting himself in the foot by opposing 127. We need to protect the reputation of our sport, and we need to protect the animals that enable our ethical hunts of prey animals.

Deer and elk are in crisis. There's no cure, no vaccine for CWD-infected animals. Thankfully, we have the lions. And the balance of nature.

Please vote yes on Prop 127 to preserve our deer and elk and the hunting that we cherish.

*Thomas Pool earned his advanced degree in public health from Harvard University and his doctor of veterinary medicine degree from Oklahoma State University. He is a 30-year diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine. He spent 26 years in the U.S. Army and retired as a colonel.*