

Daily Camera

Commentary

Guest opinion: David Neils: Protect bobcats, lynx and mountain lions from hunting and trapping

By [DAILY CAMERA GUEST OPINION](#) | openforum@dailycamera.com | Boulder Daily Camera

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By David Neils

A “yes” vote on Proposition 127 will protect bobcats, lynx and mountain lions from hunting and trapping in Colorado. It will allow on a permit basis the killing of these animals under certain circumstances, such as livestock depredation.

As a lifetime hunter and fisherman and most importantly, wildlife conservationist, I understand both sides of this issue. Hunters and trappers want to protect the opportunity to hunt and trap. Wildlife advocates, enthusiasts and conservationists are interested in viewing wildlife as well as the welfare of each wildlife species.

After spending over 30,000 hours in the field studying and filming mountain lions and bobcats I’ve learned that these animals, as keystone species, have an outsized positive impact on the ecosystems they inhabit. They deserve wildlife management that supports their welfare and works to maximize the overall health of their populations. Mountain lions and bobcats do not benefit from being hunted or trapped. Only hunters and trappers benefit. From a wildlife conservation standpoint, that’s unacceptable. Solid

science and research support the fact that mountain lions, bobcats and lynx self-regulate their populations. There is no scientific evidence that hunting or trapping is necessary to control their populations.

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission Policy states that Colorado wildlife is managed for the use, benefit and enjoyment of Colorado visitors and residents.

Every wildlife species has a set of biological and ecological factors they are dependent upon for a healthy population. Every wildlife management plan should support these factors as the primary goal of the plan. The current goal for mountain lion and bobcat management is simply maintaining a population that can be hunted and trapped. But if the act of hunting and trapping mountain lions and bobcats does not improve the welfare of these species, then the activity must be called into question.

One of the most important biological factors that determines the health of these wild feline populations is kitten survival. Each year, mountain lion kittens are orphaned because a female mountain lion was killed by a hunter. Colorado Parks and Wildlife does not count these kittens that starve to death because they aren't of breeding age. Respected mountain lion biologists and researchers will tell you that if you are going to hunt mountain lions, no more than 22% of the harvest should be female lions of breeding age. In Colorado, roughly 40% of the mountain lions killed by hunters each year are female lions.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAM) is often cited as the gold standard of wildlife conservation by hunters, trappers, fishermen and outfitters. NAM was a response to the market hunting that was decimating wildlife in North America.

A key tenet of this model is: elimination of markets for wildlife.

This was put in place to prevent the selling of any part of an animal for profit. The trapping and hunting of bobcats and selling their pelts is a clear violation of this tenet.

Fair chase is a term used by hunters to describe an ethical approach to hunting big game animals. It refers to the pursuit and taking of any free-ranging wild game animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper or unfair advantage over the game animals.

The use of any of the following methods in the killing of a game animal is considered Unfair Chase. This is how [Fair Chase is violated in Colorado](#): artificial light; electronic devices for attracting game (bobcat); use of aircraft or other motorized vehicles (mountain lion); use of drugs to immobilize animals; use of dogs to pursue or take game (mountain lion, bobcat); use of bait to attract game (bobcat).

A "yes" vote on Proposition 127 would maintain the flexibility of CPW to kill mountain lions and bobcats when they are preying on livestock and at the same time support

the positive impact these animals have on the ecosystems they inhabit.

David Neils has spent the last twenty years studying and filming mountain lions in the wilds of Colorado and Montana. He developed a system that allows him to pinpoint mountain lion activity throughout the Americas, Canada and Chile. His work supports wildlife education, conservation, and research. Neils lives in Loveland.

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