

Two cougar sightings reported in NE Bend

by Cheryl McDermott

Deputies responded to two reported cougar sightings Tuesday morning in Bend, in areas about three miles apart in the northeast part of the city.

The first report was received about 9 a.m. from a citizen who said he saw a bobcat or cougar in the area adjacent to Buckingham Elementary School and the east fire station off Hamby Road, said Sgt. Dan Swearingen with the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office.

Anyone who sees a cougar in a populated urban area is encouraged to contact Deschutes County 911 dispatchers at their non-emergency number, 693-6911.

Start and End on the map above show the general locations of the cougar sightings reported in northeast Bend Tuesday morning.

The second report came about an hour later and three miles away, where a cougar was spotted in a dry canal bed headed south, near Brinson Boulevard and Butler Market Road.

Deputies checked the areas but didn't see any sign of the animals, the sergeant said. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) biologists were notified of the sightings.

The last reported sightings of cougars in the Bend area was in mid-August of 2006, when Bend Police reported two incidents within a two-day period in a southwest Bend neighborhood near Pelton Place and McKinley Avenue.

Cougars -- also known as pumas, bobcats, mountain lions, and many other monikers -- are tawny-colored with black-tipped ears and tail. The large cats can run as fast as over 40 miles per hour, jump 20 feet from a standing position, and vertically leap eight feet. Adult males in North America may be more than eight feet long from nose to tail, and weigh an average of 150 pounds. Their bite strength is more powerful than that of any domestic dog.

According to Wikipedia, attacks on humans are rare, but do occur -- especially as humans encroach on wildlands and impact the availability of the cougar's traditional prey. There were around 100 cougar attacks on humans in the United States and Canada during the period from 1890 to January 2004, with 16 fatalities.

Keeping that number in perspective, about 40 people die in the US each year of bee stings; and humans are far more likely to get struck by lightning than to be attacked by a cougar.

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The ODFW, in their informative brochure "Living and Recreating in Cougar Country", offers the following tips should you encounter a cougar:

Stay calm and stand your ground. Maintain direct eye contact. Pick up any children, but do so without bending down or turning your back on the cougar. Back away slowly. Do NOT run. Running triggers a response in cougars that could lead to an attack. Raise your voice and speak firmly. If the cougar seems aggressive, raise your arms to make yourself look larger, and clap your hands. If a cougar attacks you, fight back with rocks, sticks, garden tools or any other items available.

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