



United States Department of the Interior



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Southwest Arizona National Wildlife Refuge Complex
356 West 1st Street
Yuma, Arizona 85364
(928) 783-7861, (928) 783-8611 fax

April 23, 2008

Mr. Adam Draper
Staff Attorney
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
2000 P Street, NW
Suite 240
Washington D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Draper,

Thank you for your letter dated April 10, 2008 which puts forth your organization's concerns regarding the management of mountain lions on the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). As I understand it, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) seeks to insure that legal requirements are adhered to, and that sound science and transparency are used in the decision-making process related to this issue. I appreciate your concerns and want to assure you that we share your objectives.

As you know, the issues surrounding mountain lions on the Refuge are complex and controversial, especially when intertwined with the management of desert bighorn sheep. Both of these species are magnificent examples of the biodiversity found in the United States. As such, they often evoke a strong response from those who are interested in the preservation of our nation's rich natural heritage. We are aware of this and are sensitive to the concerns expressed by your organization and others.

The Refuge is committed to the development of an appropriate management program for mountain lions that properly addresses the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge and surrounding landscape, while meeting Refuge obligations in fulfilling its purpose related to the conservation of desert bighorn sheep. The process to complete a mountain lion management plan and associated environmental assessment has already begun. A public notice will be issued later this week to initiate the formal scoping period for an environmental assessment under the guidelines of the National Environmental Policy Act.

In support of this effort, both the Arizona Game & Fish Department (AGFD) and the Refuge announced in a recent news release the suspension of all removal actions, on or off the Refuge, for any mountain lions initially captured and fitted with transmitters on the Refuge. To clarify,

this is a commitment by both the Refuge and the AGFD that no removal actions will be taken for up to one year. Efforts to capture and attach transmitters to mountain lions on the Refuge will continue per the arrangement, and the information gathered will provide valuable site-specific information on mountain lion movements and diet on the Refuge.

Thank you again for your interest in the Refuge and this important issue. We look forward to receiving your input during the development of the management plan and environmental assessment. Please feel free to contact me for more information at (928)783-3371, extension 17.

Sincerely,



Mitch Ellis
Complex Manager
Southwest Arizona National Wildlife Refuge Complex