



December 15, 2008

Larry D. Voyles, Director
Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD)
5000 W. Carefree Highway
Phoenix, AZ 85086-5000

Via E-mail

Dear Mr. Voyles:

Thank you for your reply (October 15, 2008) to our letter of July 6, 2008, requesting that your agency work to conserve habitat for jaguar in Arizona. We appreciate the role that the Governor played in facilitating a response.

We are encouraged to hear that AZGFD is concerned about barriers to jaguar movement, and that "habitat is and must be at the core of any conservation effort." However, your letter did not indicate what strategies and actions the Department has adopted, or will adopt, to ensure that urbanization, land development, highways, and other factors do not prevent the free movement of jaguars and other wildlife within the greater landscape. As you know, natural habitats in Arizona face accelerated fragmentation and loss.

Recall that we never received a reply from Mr. Terry Johnson and Mr. Bill Van Pelt of your Department, regarding specific questions on Jaguar Conservation Team plans to address barriers and other habitat issues (our letter of March 4, 2008, a copy previously enclosed and again attached here). We would still appreciate this information in order to better plan our work on behalf of the jaguar, in cooperation with your agency and others.

We are puzzled by your policy premise that habitat conservation is not of primary concern for the jaguar since there is still an abundance of black bear, mountain lion, deer, and javelina in Arizona. The logic escapes us. First, habitat loss in the State is of major concern for many species, and especially those that are endangered, as recognized in Arizona's *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy*. Second, for a variety of behavioral and ecological reasons, some species are more sensitive to direct and indirect human effects on habitat than others (jaguars and grizzly bears as compared with mountain lions and black bears, for instance). Third, studies show that even relatively common species, such as mountain lion, are being adversely impacted by loss and

degradation of habitat. Lastly, the Jaguar Conservation Team wisely committed to jaguar habitat conservation in its founding plans and agreements, but failed over a period of more than ten years to follow through on its commitments. As you probably know, the reason has to do with team politics, not biology.

In your letter, you also stated a belief that “no habitat in the United States is critical to recovery (survival) of the jaguar as a species.” This is highly debatable, as many conservation scientists understand the importance of peripheral populations and habitats to long-term species survival. Regardless, your statement has no bearing on the need to recover this native species in Arizona. We are appalled that our State wildlife agency would hedge on this matter.

While we may disagree on the importance of the jaguar in Arizona, I believe we share a common interest in conserving southern Arizona’s wildlife movement corridors, as identified by the Arizona Wildlife Linkages Workgroup, the wildlife corridor research group at the Northern Arizona University, The Wildlands Project, and/or our Jaguar Habitat Campaign. These critical habitat areas are threatened by major highways and related development, US-Mexico border fencing, intensive agricultural development and urban and exurban sprawl (for a quick geographical reference, please see [Google map](#)):

Cross Interstate Highway

Pinaleno Mountains-Dos Cabezas/Chiricahua Mountains
Little Dragoon Mountains
Rincon Mountains-Santa Rita/Whetstone Mountains
Tumacacori Highlands-Santa Rita Mountains
North Peloncillo-South Peloncillo Mountains

Cross Border

Peloncillo Mountains-Mexico
Chiricahua Mountains-Mexico
San Pedro Valley-Mexico
Patagonia/Huachuca Mountains-Mexico
Tumacacori Highlands-Mexico
Altar Valley/Baboquivari Mountains-Mexico

Others

Chiricahua Mountains-Dragoon Mountains
Huachuca Mountains/Canelo Hills-Whetstone Mountains
Santa Rita Mountains-Patagonia Mountains

Many of these habitat linkages are at high risk of being severed in the near term. Urgent action is needed to save them.

We challenge the Arizona Game and Fish Department to take the lead, as Arizona’s wildlife agency, in working to secure these habitat linkages for jaguar and other wildlife in southern Arizona over the next 3-5 years, and to prevent further degradation or loss of these linkages in the interim. This effort will require vigorous planning with county and

local governments, developers and private landowners, federal agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management, the Western Governor's Wildlife Council, other state agencies (especially the Arizona Department of Transportation and Arizona State Lands), state and federal elected officials, local and national private conservation organizations, and Governor Janet Napolitano, likely soon to be U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security.

Can you commit your agency to meet this challenge? We can offer help to you in developing a conservation strategy and work plan for each of these wildlife linkages. Given the fast pace and pattern of land development in Arizona, bold leadership by AZGFD is urgently needed.

Sincerely,

Tony Povilitis

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Attachment: Letter to Johnson and Van Pelt

cc:

Governor Janet Napolitano
Arizona Game and Fish Commission
Benjamin N. Tuggle, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 2
Bruce C. Thompson, Director, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
Jaguar Conservation Team