



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

May 10, 2006

The Editor
Kelowna Capital News

Editor:

I would like to clarify the facts about “Helena” the cougar, due to incorrect and misleading statements published recently in your newspaper.

The cougar was a malnourished, sub-adult carnivore preying on numerous family pets in a Kelowna subdivision in 2003. Subsequently, it was captured by the Conservation Officer Service in response to numerous complaints relating to public and pet safety.

This cougar was taken to the Northern Lights Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre at the request of the facility, with a clear agreement that it would either be permanently housed at a facility that they would build, or it would be sent to a zoo in another area. At no time have we told Northern Lights it must euthanize the cougar.

In November 2005, Ministry of Environment staff received a request by Northern Lights for permission to release the cougar. However, Conservation Officers, wildlife biologists and our program veterinarian decided not to allow the release as this animal posed an unacceptable risk to public safety. This cougar was unable to hunt natural prey and it's unlikely it learned the hunting skills necessary to survive in the wild while in captivity.

Predators that are unable to hunt for themselves are likely to die slowly of starvation or will hunt non-natural prey. Cougars are capable of travelling very long distances (up to 500 km), making it very difficult to move a cougar to a location where it cannot contact humans.

Our decision was based on the best science. In these circumstances, releasing a predator like a cougar is not a reasonable risk to take with public safety.

Barry Penner
Minister of Environment