April 2, 2020

Mr. Erik Sklar, President
California Fish and Game Commission
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1320
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted via email to fgc@fgc.ca.gov

RE: Support Candidacy Status for Southern California and Central Coast Mountain Lions under the California Endangered Species Act

Dear President Sklar and Commissioners:

We, the undersigned members of the California State Legislature, write today with great urgency because California Endangered Species Act (CESA) protections for Southern California and Central Coast Mountain Lions cannot come soon enough. These highly imperiled icons of the Golden State are fast approaching extinction due to habitat loss and fragmentation, genetic isolation, vehicle strikes, rodenticide poisoning, depredation kills, poaching, disease and the increasing impacts of climate change, but it is not too late to save them. CESA protections for mountain lions would improve habitat connectivity, increase conservation management tools, and require crucial planning for species recovery, giving these animals a fighting chance at survival. We strongly recommend the California Fish and Game Commission advance the petition to list all mountain lion populations in the proposed evolutionarily significant unit (ESU) as threatened under CESA, thereby initiating a full status review of the species and providing vital interim protections as a candidate species.

As you know, the loss of the Southern California mountain lion known as P56 last month was a tragedy. He was one of only two known breeding males in the Santa Monica mountains, and a radio-collared member of a long-term National Park Service study. P56's death put the entire population closer to the brink, but his loss will not be in vain if it drives this Administration, the Legislature and the public to work together to develop a comprehensive solution to save our lions from becoming California's latest

contribution to the global biodiversity crisis.[1] Providing CESA protections is an important step in the right direction.

Scientific research demonstrates that California mountain lions are profoundly impacted by human activity, particularly suffering from habitat loss and fragmentation due to roads and poorly sited development projects.[2] Lion populations in the Santa Ana and Santa Monica mountains could disappear within our lifetime from myriad threats that combine to create an "extinction vortex," including habitat destruction, lack of genetic diversity, increasing wildfires, disease and human-caused mortalities.[3] Other populations within the proposed ESU, including those in the Santa Cruz, San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains, exhibit similarly concerning patterns.[2]
As apex animals, mountain lions play a critical role in maintaining our state's biodiversity, and are important drivers of ecosystem function, structure and dynamics. Protecting these wide-ranging top predators would benefit a multitude of other sensitive, imperiled and important species by assisting in the maintenance of diverse habitats that support a variety of wildlife. Conserving mountain lions could help galvanize a modern, landscape-scale approach to habitat connectivity in California, while the elimination of these iconic cats could lead to further ecosystem degradation and biodiversity decline.

Protecting mountain lions would also benefit public health and safety. Every year, vehicle strikes kill approximately one hundred mountain lions as they attempt to cross our busy California roadways. Citizens report thousands of additional collisions with other large mammals, primarily deer, to state agencies and insurance companies. Listing mountain lions under CESA would facilitate planning for wildlife crossings that allow safe passage across roads and freeways, not only improving gene flow between isolated lion populations but also ensuring safe passage for many other species and reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Since Californians passed Proposition 117 (The California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990) more than three decades ago, our state has recognized the special importance of mountain lions and afforded them unique protections. Numerous state agencies, as well as local and private stakeholders, have devoted significant resources over the years to preserve and enhance our lion populations. For example, efforts are underway to provide a wildlife crossing at Liberty Canyon to facilitate travel of mountain lions and other wildlife across the Ventura Freeway, with funding in part from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. These efforts are laudable, but given the current threats facing the species, we must do more if we are to ensure our lions persist into the future.

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[1] Díaz *et al.* Pervasive human-driven decline of life on Earth points to the need for transformative change. *Science* 366, eaax3100 (2019); Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.* (IPBES Secretariat, Paris, France, 2019).
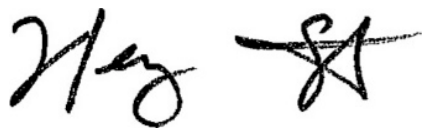[2] Gustafson, K.D. *et al.* Genetic source-sink dynamics among naturally structured and anthropogenically fragmented puma populations. *Conservation Genetics*, 20, 215 – 227 (2019).
[3] Benson, J.F. *et al.* Extinction vortex dynamics of top predators isolated by urbanization. *Ecological Applications,* 29(3), p.e01868 (2019).

Now is the time to act to save these noble creatures. Protecting Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions under CESA will provide us with the legal tools and policy guidance to do so, before it's too late.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

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Senator Henry Stern
Senate District 27
Chair, Senate Natural Resources and
Water Committee

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Senator Ben Allen
Senate District 26
Chair, Senate Environmental Quality
Committee

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Assembly Member Richard Bloom
Assembly District 50
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee
#3 for Resources and Transportation

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Assembly Member Laura Friedman
Assembly District 43
Chair, Assembly Natural Resources
Committee

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Assembly Member Kevin Mullin
Assembly District 22
Speaker pro Tempore