



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDRESS ONLY THE DIRECTOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

In Reply Refer To:
FWS/TE/CCU00-00726

JUN 21 2000

Todd Lester, President
Eastern Cougar Foundation
P.O. Box 74
North Spring, West Virginia 24869

Dear Mr. Lester:

Thank you for your March 20, 2000, letter to Secretary Babbitt and the Fish and Wildlife Service requesting protection for the eastern cougar (*Felis concolor cougar*) under the Endangered Species Act throughout the eastern United States. You base your request on reports that cougars are living in the wild in several eastern States.

The Service has been reviewing information on this matter for decades. We acknowledge that occasional sightings of cougars have been reported and that some animals have been recovered, but none of these animals has shown any evidence of belonging to a remnant, wild, breeding population of the eastern cougar. Therefore, the Service's position remains that the eastern cougar is extirpated.

As you noted in your letter, the wild breeding population of cougars in Florida, listed as the subspecies *Felis concolor coryii*, is further protected through listing all free-living cougars in Florida under the Similarity of Appearance provision of the Act. We believe that use of the Similarity of Appearance provision in Florida is appropriate because of the presence of a wild, breeding population there. Use of the Similarity of Appearance provision for the eastern cougar in the remaining eastern States is neither biologically nor administratively justified at this time.

We appreciate your concern for protecting the eastern cougar and would be glad to consider any information you may have that scientifically documents the presence of a wild, breeding population of this subspecies.

Sincerely,



DIRECTOR