

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Joann Freeborn at 3:30 p.m. on January 27, 2004 in Room 231-N of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Representative John Faber- excused
Representative Larry Powell- excused

Committee staff present:

Emalene Correll Legislative Research Department
Raney Gilliland Legislative Research Department
Mary Torrence, Revisor of Statutes
Mary Ann Graham, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Representative Tom Sloan, 45th District
Ed Martinko, State Biologist & Director, Kansas Biological Survey, 2101 Constant Avenue, Higuchi Hall, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66047
Dr. Mark Jakubauskas, Assistant Research Professor, Kansas Biological Survey, 2101 Constant Avenue, 116 Higuchi Hall, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66047

Others attending:

See Attached List.

Chairperson Joann Freeborn called the meeting to order. She introduced Rep. Oletha Faust-Goudeau, committee member replacement for Rep. Donald Betts, that was appointed to the Senate. She asked each committee member and staff members to introduce themselves and give a brief background history. Rep. Sharon Schwartz introduced her intern, Laura Dague from Kansas University; Rep. Lee Tafanelli introduced his intern, Branden Hall from Kansas State University; and Rep. Vaughn Flora introduced his intern, Laura Wood from Kansas State University.

The Chairperson welcomed Dr. Mark Jakubauskas, Kansas Biological Survey, to the committee. He gave a review on Mountain Lion existence in Kansas. The Kansas Biological Survey is a research and service unit of the University of Kansas, and a non-regulatory agency of the state. As such, the Biological Survey strives to provide accurate and objective information to decision-makers based on solid scientific research. Federal and state agencies, private industry, nonprofit organizations, and the general public routinely consult their scientists for unbiased information and advice concerning a wide range of environmental and biological issues.

The last official sighting of a wild cougar in Kansas was in 1904, in Ellis County. Wild cougars have been documented in every state surrounding Kansas in the past ten years. Numerous citizens have reported seeing cougars in Kansas for years and the Biological Survey has scientific proof that a cougar was on the KU West Campus in October 2003. Wild cougars, as opposed to merely escaped or released pet cougars, have been scientifically documented in every single state surrounding Kansas, including a cougar captured in downtown Omaha, Nebraska last fall, and a cougar struck and killed a year ago by a motorist on I-435 in Missouri just south of the Kansas City airport. For years, citizens across the state have reported seeing cougars, and this included at least two dozen sightings in Lawrence and Douglas County in the past several years. There have been nine reported sightings of a possible cougar on KU's West Campus alone, most recently a sighting of a pair of possible cougars just a month ago. In nearly every instance, there is no "hard evidence", a good picture, an animal dropping, or the animal itself, as proof. But the Biological Survey does have some proof. Last September, following reports of cougar sightings in the area, a motion detection wildlife camera was placed on KU's West Campus. This picture of an animal was taken by the camera on October 1. Some wildlife biologists have identified the animal in the picture as a cougar, while other biologists interpret it as a fox. Scientists often disagree about inconclusive evidence. A fresh animal dropping, an animal "scat", was sent to a laboratory in Michigan that specializes in identifying animals from their droppings using DNA analysis. They extracted DNA from the scat sample, and