RECOMMENDED ACTION: At the request of Mayor Pro Tem Pierson, authorize the Mayor to send a letter requesting that the California Fish and Game Commission list Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions in sensitive areas, including the Santa Monica Mountains, as “threatened” under the California Endangered Species Act, and that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife cease the issuance of depredation permits in these areas.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action.

WORK PLAN: This item was not included in the Adopted Work Plan for Fiscal Year 2019-2020. This project is part of normal staff operations.

DISCUSSION: Mountain lion hunting has been banned in California since 1990. In 2014, an exception to the law was enacted allowing for permits, known as depredation permits, to be issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife allowing a landowner to take lethal action when a mountain lion has killed or injured livestock or pets after other deterrents have failed to stop the lion from returning to the property. In the Santa Monica Mountains and Santa Ana Mountains areas, where the mountain lion populations are isolated and at risk, an individual must allow for a “three-strike” policy, which went into effect in 2017, requiring a landowner to submit three reports of separate attacks before a permit can be considered. The applicant must also provide proof of varied actions taken to stop the mountain lion from returning.

In January 2020, a mountain lion monitored by the National Park Service since 2017, identified as P-56, was killed near Camarillo. A landowner had been issued a
depredation permit after P-56 was reported to have killed over a dozen of the owner’s animals and despite numerous attempts by the landowner to thwart the lion’s return.

P-56 was the first mountain lion killed in the Santa Monica Mountains area under the State’s depredation permit law. The death of P-56 has put the entire population of mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountains area at risk as he was one of just two known males in the area.

On February 12, 2020, State Senators Henry Stern and Ben Allen, and Assembly Members Richard Bloom and Laura Friedman, co-signed a letter to the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (attached) offering support for any effort to protect the State’s mountain lion population. The legislators also indicated support for a petition that was filed with the California Fish and Game Commission to start the process of protecting mountain lions in most of the state, including Southern California, under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA).

In addition, one day after the killing of P-56 was announced, Los Angeles City Councilmembers Paul Koretz and David Ryu announced a proposed resolution seeking to halt depredation permits and to request the City of Los Angeles’ support for listing Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions as threatened under CESA.

Mayor Pro Tem Pierson is requesting the City of Malibu join these local officials by authorizing the Mayor to send a letter requesting that the California Fish and Game Commission list Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions in sensitive areas, including the Santa Monica Mountains, as “threatened” under CESA, and requesting that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife cease the issuance of depredation permits in these areas.

ATTACHMENT: February 12, 2020 letter from Senators Stern and Allen, and Assembly Members Bloom and Friedman to the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife
February 12, 2020

Mr. Charlton H. “Chuck” Bonham  
Director, Department of Fish and Wildlife  
P.O. Box 94209  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090  

RE: Depredation permit issuance and death of mountain lion “P56”

Dear Director Bonham,

We write today because we cannot sit idly by as the Southern California mountain lion approaches extinction. The Department of Fish and Wildlife’s issuance of a depredation permit at the end of January in the Camarillo area, which authorized the killing of a mountain lion “P56,” was tragic and avoidable. P56 was one of only two known breeding males in the region. This young lion, though likely responsible for the death of some livestock over the last few years, did not represent an immediate threat to public safety. P56 was also radio-collared, and part of a multi-year study by the National Park Service of local mountain lion populations.

Now he is gone. His mother died from rodenticides. His brethren have died alternatively on our freeways that slice through their habitat. His death puts the entire population closer to the brink of extinction.

We write to urge you, in light of the varied pressures on this unique apex species, to help lead this Administration, working with the Governor and other agencies, to develop a comprehensive solution to save the lions of Southern California from becoming our state’s newest contribution to the mass extinction event occurring globally in the new climate emergency.

As you know, Californians passed Proposition 117 in 1990 providing special protection to mountain lions in the state. Where they occur, mountain lions play an important role in the state’s varied ecosystems. The current population statewide is unknown, and may be as high as a few thousand. However, despite this protection, mountain lions and other wildlife face poisoning risks from rodenticides and other chemical measures used for pest control. We also know from researchers that development has resulted in the genetic isolation of the mountain lion populations in the Santa Monica Mountains, and, more generally, in southern California that is placing the ongoing viability of those populations at considerable risk. This science is so compelling that recently a petition was filed with the Fish and Game Commission to start the process of protecting mountain lions in most of the state, including southern California, under the California Endangered Species Act.
Numerous state agencies, in addition to local and private efforts, have devoted significant resources over many years to protecting and enhancing the population of mountain lions and other wildlife in the southern California region. For example, efforts are underway, with funding in part from your Department, to provide for a wildlife crossing at Liberty Canyon to facilitate the travel of mountain lions and other wildlife across the Ventura Freeway. The untimely and unnecessary death of P56 places these and other efforts in jeopardy.

We ask that you use your authority to ensure that every effort is made to avoid any additional unnecessary loss of mountain lions. We look forward to working with you and Governor Newsom if legislation is needed to support those efforts to achieve the vision codified in Proposition 117 thirty years ago.

This moment demands partnership, urgency, and accountability. P56 and those killed before him cannot have died in vain. This is our moment to act boldly to save these noble creatures, the linchpins of the largest urban facing biodiversity hotspot in the world, before it’s too late.

Sincerely,

Henry Stern
Senator, 27th Senate District

Richard Bloom
Assembly Member, 50th Assembly District

Ben Allen
Senator, 26th Senate District

Laura Friedman
Assembly Member, 43rd Assembly District

cc: Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency
    David Kim, Secretary, California State Transportation Agency
    Jared Blumenfeld, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency
    Rachel Wagoner, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom
    Clark Blanchard, Office of Legislative Affairs, Department of Fish and Wildlife
    Anna Ferrera, Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs and External Partnerships, California Environmental Protection Agency
    Alejandro Espinoza, Deputy Secretary for Legislation, California State Transportation Agency
    Ben Turner, Assistant Director, Office of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs, Department of Conservation