



Smithsonian  
*National Zoological Park*

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Dear Holly and Jim

I am enclosing a book with a chapter I wrote that included observations I made on my time on Big Creek, that is now 30 years ago. I had not written of that time before. I usually write something like this to bring a time, or place, or experiences or set of observations to closure. In re-reading this I see that rather than closure it is more like a step in bring it all back on line in my mind. May people have asked how I could live in Washington DC after experiencing something as grand as the Idaho Primitive Area - I will always think of it in this name. So I have tried to answer this for myself here.

I have recently changed jobs here from senior curator and head of the Animal Department to senior scientist in the Department of Conservation Biology. I could not have asked for a better shift. I am spending some time going through my mind and reworking some long held notions assessing just what the best and most practical way ahead will be. In this I am also taking up again the notion of research sites. Our own research site, the Conservation and Research Center - the 3000 acres we have near Front Royal Virginia, is under threat from budget cutters. And the other day Steven Daley Laursen came through and we had lunch. As always when I talk with the DNR folks, the issue of the Taylor Ranch came up and it reminded me that as long as I was thinking about CRC I may as well also think about Taylor Ranch. So I will.

In doing so I will give some thought to a broad set of questions that would drive a scientific research agenda as we move into this century. The questions I asked 35 years ago regarding the principals that govern the regulation and organization of populations and communities in time and space have stood for a long time but I think it is time to revisit, especially give the recent reviews our cougar work received recently in the reviews of the Desert Puma. Our observations and analysis from that time stand on their own merit but the way we think about wilderness and ecological change and environmental stress and concepts of pristine and nature and middle landscapes and urban and "balance of nature" are changing or have changed, as they should. I see this as a chance to go back and re look at how I thought then and how I think now, always a good idea. And where it might go in the future. I have some time now for the first time in a long time to do this.

Note: I had written the above on March 22 but had not finished my thoughts and then I received your letter of March 28.

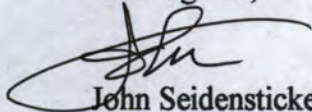
Thanks for writing and sending along the abstracts and reports of your works in progress. Lots of very interesting shifts going on both in behavior and numbers as a results of the introductions of wolves and the fires that have consequences in the sizes of populations and the assembly large mammals. There are other very strong factors at work here as well such shifts in climate, shifts in anthropogenic influencers, and others that I am too far away to really appreciate.

I am very interested in collaborating with you all. I have not looked in my file for some time but I have all my raw and summarized data here in Washington. (It is in another building.) And it is in pretty good order, if I recall, and much of it on punch cards. Not the computer punch cards, but the old kind. I'll take a look at it all. In general this is what I recall having:

- All kills with the vital information from each. I have both cougar kills and a whole bunch of coyote kills. Coyote kills were much harder to characterize because in many cases all there was left was blood on the snow and hair and a stomach contents. But coyotes killed deer and not elk. I was fascinated in how the distribution of an individual's cougar kills worked out over time. This one will be fun to look at and see if there has been a shift in the clumping of kill sites by cougars with the advent of wolves or a shift in ungulates composition in the assemblage.
- I have all the cougar locations in various forms: actually mapped, and in a grid format (actually had to create my own for the whole Primitive Area.) Each location had a punch card once but those were lost here at the Smithsonian while I was in Nepal. I have the original sheets. From shoptalk with both Howard and Maurice I understand that with less snow there have been some changes in the ways cougars have used Big Creek.
- Cougar reproduction and intra-specific strife are reported on in the Monograph. Basically we didn't record any strife between cougars. Cougars killed coyotes when they could catch them as they did bobcats. I don't recall seeing an actual bobcat kill but there may have been one. I recall Wilber telling me about some incidents he had seen. I too in very interested in the shifts in the kind of competition we see in carnivore assemblages as condition change.
- I have all the information on distribution of deer and elk and sex ratio and daily counts and one year a helicopter winter census.
- I have all our bird observations on cards.

The predation portion of the work from that time was never published. I focused on cougar social organization for my dissertation was going to do it but then I was in Nepal and then Indonesia and I got back Maurice and I agreed on doing it but then I got involved with raccoons and giant pandas and writing about tigers and I just didn't get my head out of the tropics and back into Idaho. I'll send this off to you now and get back to you shortly when I have gone through my records.

Best regards,



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PS: I am sending your books under separate cover.