

January 29, 2015

Pat Flanagan  
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Sonke Mastrup, Executive Director CA Fish and Game Commission  
Via EMAIL ONLY [fac@fac.ca.gov](mailto:fac@fac.ca.gov)

RE: Support for Complete Statewide Ban on Bobcat Trapping following Passage of The Bobcat Protection Act of 2013

Dear Executive Director Mastrup;

I am speaking for rural Mojave Desert communities where bobcats pass their lives as predators, a necessary and important component of our desert ecology. Particularly, the Morongo Basin area is significant because it links the wildlands of Joshua Tree National Park to (believe it or not) the wildlands of the Marine Corp Air Combat Center and is in an ecological transition zone between the Mojave and Sonoran (Colorado) Desert. It is also home to the aware citizens that banded together to initiate and applaud the successful passage of the Bobcat Protection Act of 2013.

In 2008 the South Coast Wildlands issued *A Linkage Design for the Joshua Tree – Twentynine Palms Connection*.<sup>1</sup> From this document we learned the importance of our bobcat population to our regional ecology. The bobcat was chosen as a one of the seven mammal focal species because it is an “excellent species to evaluate functional habitat connectivity at the landscape level because they are an area-dependent species that is sensitive to habitat fragmentation. Research has shown that there is a lower probability of finding bobcats in smaller and more isolated habitat patches...Bobcats are more sensitive to disturbance than coyotes and mesopredators (i.e., smaller carnivores like native raccoon and skunks and exotic species like opossum that prey on birds and other smaller vertebrates)...*Bobcats may utilize a wide range of habitats, including coastal and desert scrub, chaparral, sagebrush, oak woodlands, and forests. Within these habitats they make use of cavities in rocky outcrops, logs, snags, and stumps, and dense brush for cover, and to site their dens. They show a marked preference for expansive natural areas with steep and rocky terrain.*” (Page 14, italics by PF for emphasis)

In 2010, South Coast Wildlands prepared for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the California Department of Transportation the *California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project: A Strategy for Conserving a Connected California*.<sup>2</sup> This document supports the CDFW Habitat Connectivity program.<sup>3</sup> The following three paragraphs are copied from the CDFW website for your convenience.

### **Why Connectivity Is Important**

A functional network of connected habitats is essential to the continued existence of California's diverse species and natural communities in the face of both human land use and climate change. Habitat is key to the conservation of fish and wildlife. Terrestrial species must navigate a habitat landscape that meets their needs for breeding, feeding and shelter. Natural and semi-natural components of the landscape must be large enough and connected enough to meet the needs of all species that use them. As habitat conditions change in the face of climate change, some species ranges are already shifting and wildlife must be provided greater opportunities for movement, migration, and changes in distribution. In addition, aquatic connectivity

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<sup>1</sup> [www.scwildlands.org](http://www.scwildlands.org)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/Connectivity>

is critical for anadromous fish like salmon that encounter many potential barriers as they return upstream to their places of origin.

### Strategy

Protect connectivity while habitat is still intact, through permanent conservation and adaptive management

### Example

More than 60 federal, tribal, state and local agencies contributed to the [California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project](#),<sup>4</sup> a statewide assessment of large, intact blocks of natural habitat and a “least-cost” modeling of connections between them. Agencies use this statewide map and model to collectively build coarse-scale networks of conserved lands.



### CALIFORNIA ESSENTIAL HABITAT CONNECTIVITY PROJECT

#### Figure 3.1 Essential Habitat Connectivity Network

##### Essential Connectivity Areas

- Gold: Least Cost Union
- Green: Natural Landscape Blocks

Please compare this map with the Draft **Bobcat Trapping Zones** map in the CFGC Dec. 3, 2014 briefing material.

#### Remembering **Why Connectivity is Important,**

I reference the **Bobcat Harvest Assessment Report for 2013-14** prepared by CDFW.<sup>5</sup>

- 48/52 counties statewide (and long) contributed 1,639 bobcats harvested during 2013-2014. (Table 2)
- The average pelt price for 2013-14 was \$390. When compared with 2008-09 (\$78) the average pelt price rose by 373%. (Page 9)
- The number of successful trappers = 93. (Page 9)

There is no question that bobcats, a medium sized predator, are an essential component of natural habitats where ever they are naturally found statewide. Bobcats can be especially important because of their wide ranging tastes in landscape and housing preferences, although they are sensitive to disturbance. Joshua Tree is a good example of how trapping can devastate a local bobcat population. The dynamics of repopulation of an area (where are the refugia) is unknown, as are the results of bobcat elimination from an area.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/hunting/uplandgame/reports/bobcat.html>

Habitat connectivity depends on populations of animals available to roam and breed. Hunting and trapping have an unknown effect on local populations and their connections to regional populations throughout the state. We need to allow intact natural systems to work as best they can in the face of human land use pressures and climate change. It is time to get out of the way of the more than 60 federal, tribal, state, local agencies and land trusts working statewide to collectively build networks of conserved land. Hunting and trapping of predators is not a Best Management Practice for conserving California's diverse species and natural communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Flanagan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Pat Flanagan  
Board Member, Morongo Basin Conservation Association  
Member, Morongo Basin Municipal Advisory Council