



IDAHO

Spring/Summer 2023
Volume 19 Issue 1

GAME WARDEN

MAGAZINE

A Win for Wildlife

A snared mountain lion is successfully released

PLUS

POOCHES BE POACHING

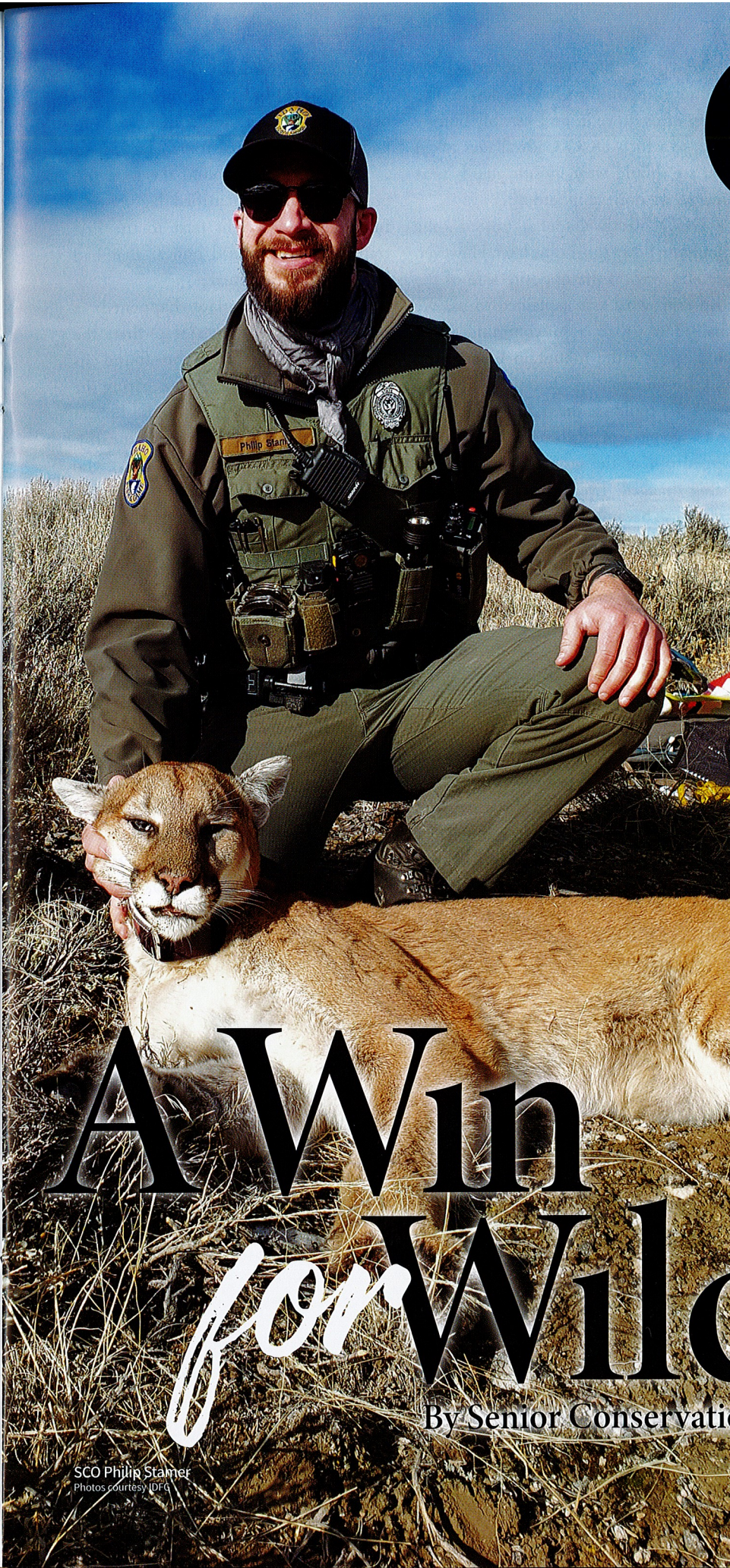
Despite their lovable antics, man's furry friends are creatures of predatory instinct, which can lead to conflicts with deadly consequences

CAMELIDS AT OCALKENS LAKES

A conservation officer finds success with a different kind of pack animal for backcountry trips

Written by members and friends of the Idaho Conservation Officers Association





On the evening of January 2, 2023, Region 3 conservation officers received a Citizens Against Poaching (CAP) email containing a photo of an adult mountain lion with a front foot caught in a foothold trap near Sheep Creek located in Owyhee County, Idaho.

Sheep Creek is well over 100 miles away from Boise and the sun was already setting that evening. I spoke with my supervisor, District Conservation Officer (DCO) Ben Cadwallader, to formulate a plan. We decided it would be best to travel the two plus hours the following morning to safely tend to the cat.

As conservation officers in Idaho, we work to protect the wildlife of the state and as such, we occasionally find ourselves working with trappers to release bycatch. "Bycatch" are animals that are not the intended target of trapping efforts. (It should be noted that many, if not all, trappers are consciously aware of this and take extra precautions to avoid bycatch).

Typically, conservation officers get a call about lion or bear in a trap as bycatch and need to act fast. Normal tools to aid in releasing a large predator are a loose jacket found somewhere in the truck, a catch pole, and some testicular fortitude. However, in this instance, time was on our side. DCO Cadwallader reached out to some of our biologists and got two volunteers to meet us at Sheep Creek in the morning. The biologists, David Bernasconi and Rachel Curtis, not only provided extra manpower, but they brought a dart gun!

AWW *for* Wildlife

By Senior Conservation Officer Philip Stamer



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January 3, 2023 was a typical windy, cold morning in the Owyhee desert. The group of us drove in on a terribly bumpy road, to which DCO Cadwallader joked that we should wear mouth guards next time so we don't chip a tooth.

DCO Cadwallader spotted the mountain lion a short time later. However, the lion was on the opposite side of the road than what was explained to us. We chalked it up to a miscommunication, until we saw the mountain lion get up and begin running (hobbling quickly) away. We could see the trap was anchored to a large piece of sagebrush that had been ripped out of the ground and was now being dragged. Eventually the wire and sage brush became entangled with another piece of sage brush and the lion was halted. With the lion now immobile, David was able to get a dart with sedation drugs into the lion.

While the lion was drifting into the dream world, DCO Cadwallader and I took time to survey the area for other traps. DCO Cadwallader was able to locate the spot where the lion was trapped as all the sage brush was turned to mulch and trampled in a 10-foot radius centered by a large hole where a large piece of sage brush had been uprooted by the powerful feline.

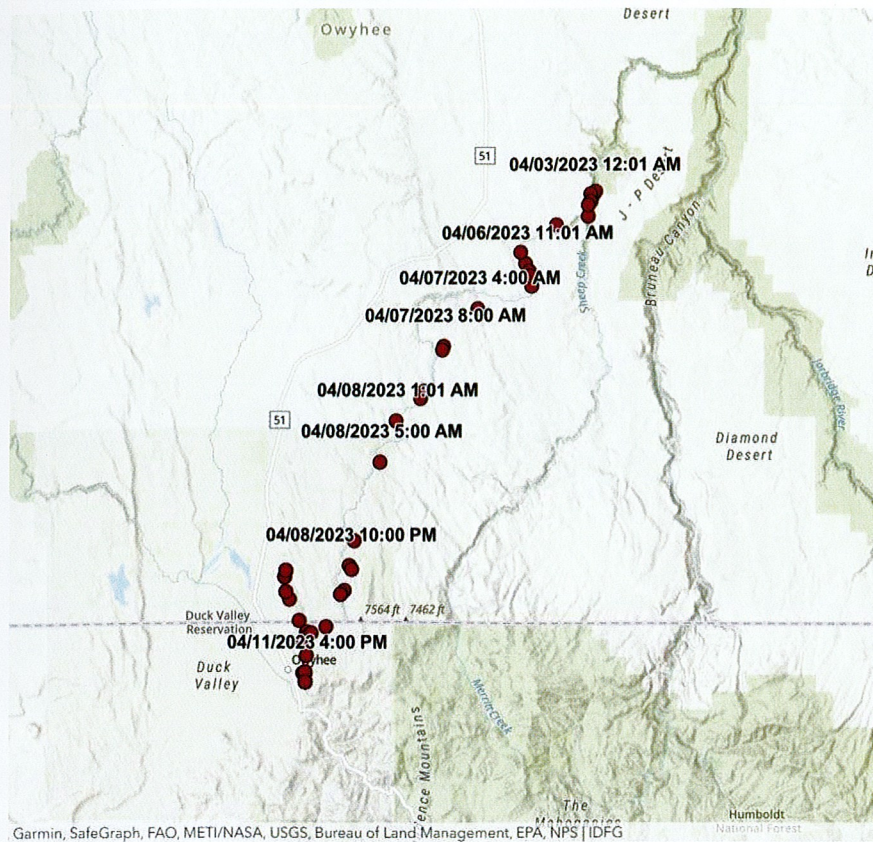
About 20 yards to the north along the rim we found more traps that had been placed, some undisturbed, others, had animals inside the traps...half eaten.

In one trap, we found the foot and nose from an unidentified lagomorph. In another trap right next to the first trap we found a dead bobcat that had been mostly consumed.

What we speculate happened: a rabbit was caught in a trap first, the along came a bobcat who found its favorite meal stuck. As it was eating the rabbit or immediately after, the bobcat then got caught in a second trap nearby. Next came the mountain lion, who stumbled upon a pleasant surprise, rabbit stuffed bobcat, a true delicacy in the feline world. After eating its fill, the mountain lion went for a stroll along the rim where it was eventually caught in a foot hold trap that was intended for bobcats.

DCO Cadwallader and I returned to Rachel and David. They were monitoring the lion who was now counting sheep. We freed the paw from the trap, treated the paw for a minor laceration and placed a GPS collar on the female lion. We gathered our equipment and gave the lion a reversal drug. After a few attempts to spook the





dazed lion, she eventually got up and took off heading towards Mary's Creek. Happy with the outcome, we packed the trucks and made the journey back to Boise.

DCO Cadwallader, SCO Greg Milner, SCO Steve Ross, and I would return to this site countless times over the next month as we monitored the actions of the trapper. Unfortunately, we found this trapper was not sticking to the mandatory 72-hour check laws required when trapping in Idaho. The trapper was later cited with several misdemeanor violations and plead guilty

in court. The trapper paid fines and had his trapping license revoked for a minimum of 6 years during the court process.

The happy ending to the story is the female mountain lion that was caught in the trap is alive and doing well. With the collar attached, we can see the lion made it all the way down to Nevada and then back up into the Owyhee Desert at the time I wrote this article.

Philip Stamer is the south Boise senior conservation officer after starting out in Glenns Ferry.

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