

# Environmentalists Want to Declare Mountain Lions an Endangered Species

Los Angeles loves its mountain lions—so much, in fact, that we’ve given the iconic Puma 22 [his own holiday](#). But despite being some of the region’s most celebrated creatures, the big cats are also some of its most threatened.

Faced with freeways, development, pollution, and the other pressures of urban life, a handful of the state’s puma populations have seen steep declines in recent years—and according to [one recent study](#), they could be at risk of going extinct within our lifetime. Now, some environmental groups are trying to stop that from happening.

On Tuesday, the Mountain Lion Foundation and the Center for Biological Diversity submitted a [petition](#) to the state arguing for the inclusion of six subpopulations of lions on California’s endangered species list. While the lions are not technically threatened throughout the state, the petition argues that the selected populations, which inhabit areas between Santa Cruz to Mexico, have been particularly imperiled by human activity.

“Mountain lions in Southern California and along the Central Coast are primarily at risk because of habitat loss and fragmentation from freeways and developments,” says J.P. Rose, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity. “They’re also hit by cars, killed using depredation permits, and poisoned by rodenticides.”

Unable to easily traverse the man-made landscape, these lions are often sequestered to small areas, which has resulted in inbreeding, low levels of genetic diversity, and a higher levels of birth defects and diseases. If protected

under the state's Endangered Species Act, the state would be required to protect the land where they roam, making it far more difficult for developers to build there. Agencies like CalTrans would also have a legal mandate to build wildlife crossings that allow them to travel safely.

A keystone species in California, mountain lions play a critical role in maintaining the state's ecosystem. Rose cites some of the problems faced by states in the Eastern U.S., where cougars are now extinct. "Uncontrolled deer populations have overgrazed vegetation, leading to less biodiversity, more tick-borne illnesses, and a greater percentage of vehicle-deer collisions," says Rose. If California were to lose its lions, the state might face similar issues. "Their loss would have profound repercussions on people and wildlife," says Rose.

Now that the petition has been submitted, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be tasked with deciding whether to pass it on to the Fish and Game Commission, who would vote on it later this year.