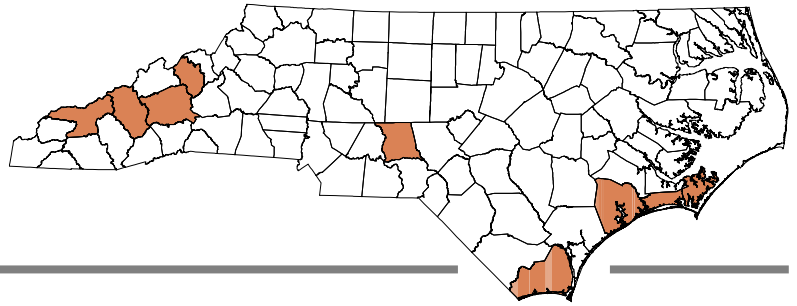


# Eastern cougar

*Felis concolor cougar*

(Panther, mountain lion, puma)

Endangered, possibly extirpated  
(June 4, 1973)



**Description:** This large, long-tailed cat may measure up to 7.5 ft (2.3 m) in total length and 150 lb. (67.5 kg) at adulthood. Fur is light yellowish to tawny brown, with dull white underparts. The sides of the muzzle, the backs of the ears, and the tip of the tail are dark brown to black. Paw prints are up to 4 inches (10 cm); the claws are retractable and therefore are usually not seen in paw prints. Cubs are light brown with irregular brownish to black spots and a ringed tail.

**Life History:** Cougars are solitary, mostly nocturnal, and active in all seasons. They are adept at climbing but stalk prey and leap upon it from the ground. Preferred food is deer, but they will prey upon rabbits, rodents, turkey, squirrel, beaver, fish, birds, and arthropods. An adult may require 25-50 square km area for range. Females mature at 2-3 years; males mature at 4-5 years. Females breed at 2-3 year intervals and produce one to four cubs after 90 days gestation. Cubs disperse after 2 years with mother. Cougars normally shun human contact and attacks are extremely rare.

**Habitat:** Remote areas with dense vegetation and rocky crevices, such as hilly woodlands, mountains, gorges, and

Southern swamps with large deer populations. Often uses caves as temporary shelter. Home range depends on age, sex, reproductive status, and food availability.

**Distribution:** Historically the most widespread mammal of North America and statewide in North Carolina. May exist in remote areas of the coastal plain and mountains. Within the last couple of decades, undocumented sightings have been reported from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, the Blue Ridge Parkway, northern portions of Uwharrie National Forest, and from southeastern counties. Sightings are usually fleeting, in poor light, and lack definition. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and National Park Service have conducted tracking surveys and constructed scent stations, but have found no hard evidence of eastern cougars to date. Some of the animals that have been reported have been escaped or released pets of the non-endangered western subspecies. Records indicated in Brunswick\*, Buncombe\*, Carteret\*, Haywood\*, Montgomery\*, Onslow\*, Swain\*, and Yancey\* counties.

**Threats:** Destruction of habitat by residential, commercial, and recreational development. Intentional eradication of species by hunting, poisoning, and trapping may have extirpated species from state. Severe reduction of white-tailed deer herds would also have adversely affected this species.

**Management Recommendations:** Set aside extensive wild areas as in designated national forest where vast wilderness provides undisturbed habitat and sufficient white-tailed deer population.

\* No record has been reported in the county in the past 20 years.

Sources: Cooper et al. 1977, Lee 1987, Linzey 1995, Murdock

