

## Briefing on Jaguar Capture

Terry B. Johnson and Bill E. Van Pelt

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In its April 27, 2006, the Jaguar Conservation Team (JAGCT) voted to recommend that the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, should an opportunity present itself, capture and radiocollar a jaguar. This recommendation followed two years of discussion in JAGCT and two of its committees. Neither AGFD nor NMDGF has yet made a decision on the recommendation.

The need to capture and radio-collar a jaguar was first identified while the Conservation Strategy guiding JAGCT was developed in 1997. It was endorsed as a component of the Strategy when signatory agencies executed a Memorandum of Agreement for jaguar conservation. By 2006, the topic had been discussed in more than 20 public meetings.

Lack of detailed scientific information on jaguar movements and habitat use in the AZ-NM/Mexico borderlands was in 1997, and remains today, an impediment to conservation. The information that can be collected by monitoring jaguar movements via radio-collars would significantly improve understanding of jaguar habitat use, dispersal behavior, and other aspects of jaguar ecology that could serve as an invaluable guide for conservation efforts.

The possibility of capture was discussed at the January 13, 2005 JAGCT meeting as a part of a report by Bill Van Pelt and a standing Work Group led by Mr. Jack Childs, a private citizen and an invaluable JAGCT volunteer. Some Work Group members present did not support capturing jaguars. They felt the risk was too great and supported less intrusive methods. Others supported capture and collaring as an effective way to gather information that is much needed. Although JAGCT discussion was hampered by lack of a written assessment by the work group assigned to evaluate capture techniques, JAGCT member-agencies present unanimously agreed that a final decision on capture should be made by the appropriate State, after further review of the pros and cons of the capture techniques available.

JAGCT relies on a Scientific Advisory Group for guidance on many issues, including capture. The Advisory Group includes most of the world's scientific experts in jaguar conservation and ecology: Alan Rabinowitz, Howard Quigley, Brian Miller, Raul Valdez, Carlos Lopez, and Michael Tewes. The Advisory Group has played a key role in applying considerable field expertise from throughout the Americas, literally from the United States to Tierra del Fuego, to developing and implementing the JAGCT's Conservation Strategy. All Advisory Group members, except one, support capture and collaring, as long as it is done following criteria established by the Wildlife Conservation Society.

The following steps have been taken since the January 2005 meeting to lead to an AGFD decision:

1. The Work Group led by Mr. Childs, and overseen by Bill Van Pelt, met on January 26, 2005 to evaluate the pros and cons of each of the potential methods of capture, relative to

safety of the jaguar itself. The assessment looked at the use of hounds, leg-hold snares, and box traps. Box traps pose the least risk to jaguars, but they are the most labor intensive and least efficient. Hounds are the most efficient, but pose a challenge because of the International Border. Nevertheless, the Team recommended use of hounds.

2. Possible capture was discussed again with the public at JAGCT meetings in April and August 2005.
3. A capture protocol was completed, using the information from the Wildlife Conservation Society. The Capture Team would consist of no more than five individuals, including a veterinarian and biologists experienced in successfully handling jaguars.
4. JAGCT agreed the purpose of collaring a jaguar would be to identify travel corridors and areas of use. Use of GPS collars is necessary, due to the border and because it allows remote downloading of location data. A budget of no less than \$75,000 would be needed for satellite payments, monitoring, and analysis of data.
5. The Scientific Advisory Group reviewed the documents as they were being prepared and the majority are supportive of capture.
6. JAGCT held a final public discussion about possible capture in January 2006. Following discussion, JAGCT voted to recommend capture to AGFD and NMDGF. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred that AGFD has authority through its Section 6 work plan to move forward with capture. However, they would want a detailed capture plan in hand, similar to the Sonoran pronghorn, prior to capture.
7. May 29 briefing of Director Shroufe.
8. Director Shroufe will make the final decision on capture in Arizona. Before making a decision, he might opt to discuss the issue further with USFWS Region 2 Director Ben Tuggle.