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Nevada Site Office Environmental Management

EM NEWS FLASH

Puma #3 Comes into NNSS Wildlife Study

Researchers recently added a new subject to their two-year study on pumas living on and around the Nevada National Security Site (formerly the Nevada Test Site). On April 19, 2011, trappers captured and sedated a male puma, and then fitted the animal with a tracking device before releasing it back into the wild.

This latest capture is the third puma in a study, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy,



This 140-pound male puma was sedated and collared before being released.

National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office, that aims to shed light on the ranging and hunting behaviors of pumas in the region. Using Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite collars, researchers are documenting each animal's location six times per day, over continuous 24-hour periods, and physically visiting clusters of several grouped locations to gather information on recent kills.

“It is important to know what is being hunted and under what circumstances in order to better understand the risk to potential prey,” said wildlife biologist, David Mattson, who is heading up the study. Dr. Mattson of the U.S. Geological Survey, along with a field team from National Security Technologies—NSTec (the Management and Operating contractor for the Nevada National Security Site), eventually wants to track at least eight pumas, whose diets are known to include mule deer, young horses, and rabbits. The study will address concerns over potential risks to workers, who have experienced an increase in puma sightings over the past five years.

Trappers captured the 140-pound puma in the Timber Mountains, located in the west-central area of the Nevada National Security Site. Since April, the animal has been tracked all the way to the Panamint Mountains west of Death Valley, which indicates a large home range, says NSTec Senior Scientist, Derek Hall. “We typically expect the males to overlap the home range of several females,” Hall explained, “but it will be very revealing to see where this puma goes next.”

Two female pumas, which were captured and collared several months ago, are already providing insights on the survival strategies of cats in the area. Scientists have tracked both of the animals on and off the Site, documenting their kills along the way. Unfortunately, the second capture—a five to six year-old female—was discovered dead in January... presumably from starvation.

The latest puma, a five to six year-old male, appeared to be in good condition upon capture. Prior to collaring and releasing the animal, scientists retrieved several measurements and blood and hair samples for laboratory analysis.

Trappers are currently on hiatus and will return to the Site in August or September to resume their search for more subjects. Meanwhile, researchers will continue to track the activities of the collared pumas.

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