

# Camper has tussle with mountain lion

- **July 15th, 2009**
- (2) comments

By Eric Barker of the Tribune

## Moscow man suffers minor scratches in encounter near Elk Creek Falls

A Moscow man camping near Elk River escaped serious injury Saturday when he was attacked by a mountain lion and fended off the predator by stabbing it during a tussle.

The man, who did not want to be identified, received minor scratches and abrasions and did not need medical attention, according to conservation officer Barry Cummings of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

According to a news release, the man was gathering firewood for his camp near the Elk Creek Falls trailhead when the animal pounced on his back and knocked him to the ground. The man and lion rolled down a hill and came to stop when they hit a log. The man was able to grab a knife and plunge it into the lion's side, causing it to run away.

"I don't think the mountain lion was very serious," Cummings said. "My guess, as it is with most mountain lion attacks, is that it was a case of mistaken identity. I don't see how a mountain lion could jump on a guy's back and not leave teeth marks. My guess is the mountain lion pounced on him and thought better of it."

After the attack the man returned to his campsite, and he and his girlfriend quickly broke camp and returned to Moscow, where they reported the attack. Cummings and the man returned to the area Sunday morning with local hunting hounds. Cummings said the dogs showed some interest but did not pick up a strong scent.

"We had the dogs out there six hours plus and nothing," Cummings said. "My guess is he probably killed it. It probably died somewhere if he stabbed it as well as he said he did."

Cummings said dogs trained to hunt mountain lions don't typically stay long on a dead animal if they find one. Instead they stop for a short time and then continue to search for live animals. The dog handlers typically turn the dogs loose and then struggle to keep up with the animals as they run through the woods. Cummings said he and the houndsmen tried to follow the dogs as best they could, but if the hounds found a dead lion and then moved on, the men could have missed it.

"Their fun is in treeing something and tracking a live animal," he said. "The trailing conditions were pretty hard. It was fairly dry and it was 90 degrees on Sunday. They don't leave a very good scent in stuff like that."

If the lion had been located alive, Cummings said he would have had to kill it.

"I don't want a lion that even thinks of a person as prey around and I wouldn't want a wounded lion." Senior Conservation officer Mark Hill, said the department will continue to monitor the area and try to find the animal. Although mountain lions do occasionally attack people, such occurrences are quite unusual.

"Mountain lion sightings are rare and attacks are even rarer," said Jay Crenshaw, regional wildlife manager for the department at Lewiston. "However, keeping yourself informed and prepared is the best way to avoid a confrontation."

If people do encounter mountain lions in the wild, Fish and Game officials recommend the following:

I Do not run. Stay calm and keep eye contact with the animal. Move slowly and try to back away. Running away may trigger the animal's instinct to chase.

I Remain in an upright position. Do not crouch down as mountain lions are more likely to go after shorter prey. Do what you can to appear large by raising and waving your arms or opening your jacket. Yell in a loud, firm voice.

I Never turn your back on a mountain lion. Always maintain eye contact and face the lion. Convince the lion that you are not a deer, which is the lion's chief prey.

I When you walk or hike in lion country, go in groups and make enough noise to avoid surprising a lion. While lions are not likely to approach humans, they are even less likely to approach a larger group.

I Keep children close and in sight at all times. Pick up small children if a lion is near.

I Never approach a mountain lion. Give the lion a way out of a close situation.

I If a lion behaves aggressively, arm yourself with a large stick, rock, or other object and face the lion. In the extreme case a mountain lion attacks, remain standing and fight back with whatever object you have.

I Pepper spray can be very effective in deterring a mountain lion and other carnivore attacks.

Department officials say people who encounter a mountain lion demonstrating any unnatural behavior such as showing no concern or reaction to the presence of people, or acting aggressively towards people or pets, are asked to immediately notify a fish and game officer or local sheriff's office.

---

*Barker may be contacted at [ebarker@lmtribune.com](mailto:ebarker@lmtribune.com) or at (208) 848-2273.*