

EX WILDLIFE
CONSERVANCY
POSED

A PUMA WEEK SPECIAL REPORT

Know your neighbour.

What Canadians Told Us About
Living With Cougars

COUGARS

The report

Cougars live alongside communities across Western Canada, often without ever being seen. There's no doubt that these animals are capable of sharing the landscape, but perhaps a better question is:

How prepared are we to live alongside them?

In 2026, Exposed Wildlife Conservancy (EWC) commissioned the Angus Reid Group to survey 1,506 residents of British Columbia and Alberta about their knowledge, experiences, and attitudes toward four apex predators: grizzly bears, black bears, wolves, and cougars.

Perhaps most importantly, the research shows that **people overwhelmingly believe coexistence with apex predators is both important and achievable.**

When asked about cougars, people conceptually support coexistence, but many do not feel equipped to respond confidently to a cougar encounter.

In addition to the survey, EWC has reviewed more than 75 studies and reports examining tools used to reduce conflict between people and large carnivores. This research revealed another gap: **relatively few Western Canadian studies identified in our review evaluated interventions intended to reduce conflict or support coexistence with cougars.**

THE OPPORTUNITY:

Better research and improved, more accessible education, along with practical tools that help people and cougars to successfully share the landscape.



Key Metrics

75%

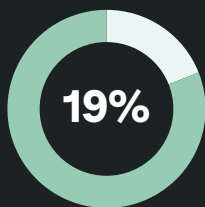
High Confidence in Coexistence

75% strongly/somewhat agree that humans & cougars can safely co-exist.

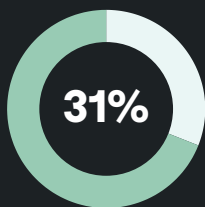
75%

High Support for Non-Lethal Management

75% are confident conflicts can be resolved without killing the animal.



Urban
Residents



Rural
Residents

Least Encountered

Cougars are the least encountered animal in the wild. Just 19% of urban residents and 31% of rural residents across BC and Alberta have at some point, encountered a cougar in the wild.

37%

Low Awareness of Correct Response to Encounters

Just 37% responded correctly on how to respond to a cougar encounter in the wild. There were more incorrect than correct answers across all groups.

12%

Lowest Confidence in Calm Response

Only 12% hypothetically say they would feel calm when encountering a cougar in the wild.

65%

Confident Cougars are Misunderstood

65% strongly/somewhat agree that cougars are often misunderstood.

44%

Highest Perceived Risk

36% perceive cougars as a risk, and 8% perceive cougars as dangerous.



PUBLIC PERCEPTION SURVEY

Cougars present the greatest opportunity for education.

The research identifies an opportunity for targeted education that could increase confidence and encourage behaviour change.

WHAT THE NUMBERS TELL US

People conceptually support coexistence, but many do not feel equipped to respond confidently to a cougar encounter.

Residents generally agree that coexistence is possible and conflicts can be prevented

Yet they lack confidence in their ability to respond calmly in an encounter

This is reflected in the respondents knowledge of how to respond to a cougar encounter, with many misunderstandings

Despite this, cougars are perceived as the least misunderstood animal

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Clear, species-specific prevention & encounter guidance should be widely available to people living and spending time in cougar country.

People are willing to change their behaviours

79% are likely to change their
behaviour with clear guidance.

The opportunity. is clear

People want to coexist. They recognize the need for better understanding. And they're willing to change their behaviour.

What does the science say?

THE SCIENCE

Research on cougar coexistence remains a significant research gap.

EWC recently reviewed more than 75 studies and reports examining coexistence tools, including attractant management, deterrents, fencing, livestock management, lethal control and translocation, recreation management, education, stewardship, and community engagement.

The review:

75+

Studies and reports reviewed.

4

Western Canadian studies identified that evaluated cougar coexistence interventions or conflict.

0

Western Canadian studies identified evaluating education or hazing interventions for cougars.

Across the literature reviewed, proactive approaches generally had stronger evidence of effectiveness than relying primarily on reactive measures after conflict occurred. Effectiveness, however, varied considerably by landscape, and circumstance.

For cougars specifically, the Western Canadian evidence base remains limited. Much of the additional research identified in our review comes from the US, Chile, and Argentina. These studies provide important insight, but interventions that work elsewhere may not translate directly to Western Canadian landscapes, communities, livestock systems, and wildlife-management contexts.

This matters because our public-perception research shows both a need and an appetite for better coexistence education and practical guidance.

Coexistence tools



COEXISTENCE TOOLS

There is no single solution to conflict.

The scientific review also cautions against looking for a single universal solution.

Some proactive measures do show promise, but effectiveness depends on context. Night enclosures, for example, have shown evidence for reducing cougars' access to livestock, although more research is needed to understand their effectiveness in North American contexts (Eklund et al., 2017). Other livestock-management research suggests that limiting predator access can help reduce depredation.

Evidence also raises important questions about relying on reactive lethal management to reduce conflict. In BC, researchers found that cougar hunting was associated with increased conflict reports (Teichman et al., 2016). Similar findings were reported in the US, where increased cougar harvest was associated with increased complaints and livestock depredations the following year (Peebles et al., 2013).

Translocation has also been studied as an alternative to lethal removal, but results have been mixed (Ross & Jalkotzy, 1995).

The evidence points to coexistence as a toolkit, rather than one single tool that works everywhere.



Coexistence isn't one tool. It's access to the right tool, in the right context.

EDUCATION

People are looking for guidance, education, and support.

Desire to Learn:

84%

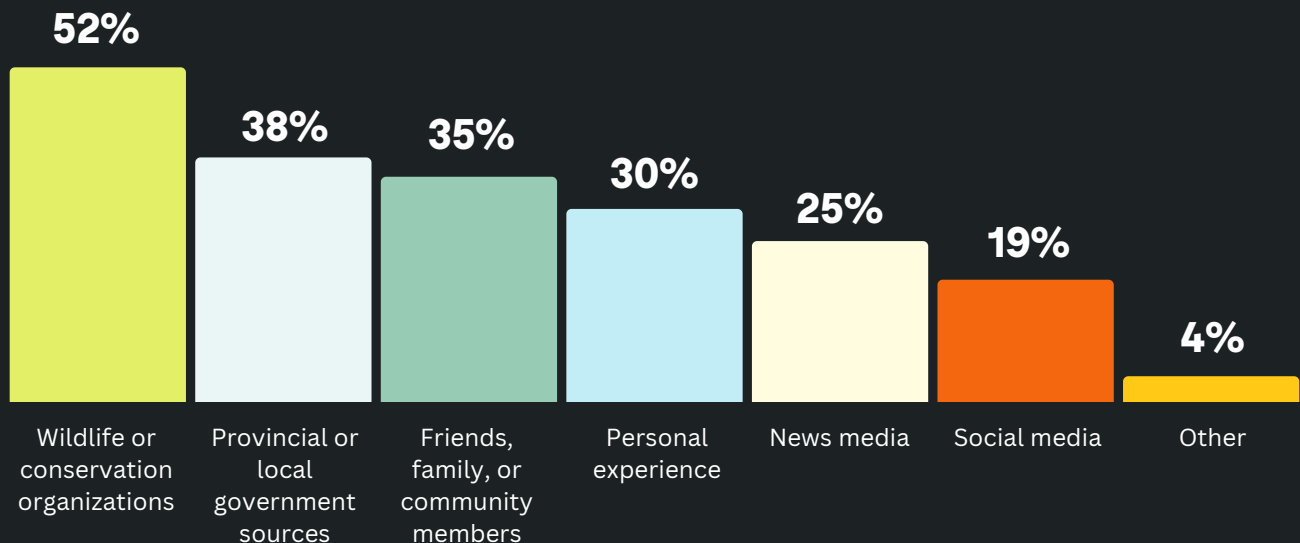
Actively seek out information on apex predators and living safely near wildlife.

Willingness to Adapt:

79%

Are likely to change their behaviours when spending time in apex predator regions, if they had clear guidance on how to do so.

Sources of Information:



This data shows the significant trust held in conservation organizations and the reliance the public has on them to provide clear, practical guidance and education. With over half of the respondents choosing to seek information and education from wildlife and conservation organizations, this demonstrates the value of continued funding and increased accessibility.

Follow the research

Where do we go from here?

OPPORTUNITIES

People want to coexist with cougars, and they want clearer information to help them do it.

Our research tells us two things:

First, people want to coexist with cougars and are willing to change their behaviour, but many lack the practical knowledge and confidence to respond appropriately during an encounter.

Second, the literature review identified significant gaps in Western Canadian research that evaluates the tools intended to support coexistence with cougars.

Closing both gaps will require research and action: clearer species-specific guidance, stronger evaluation of coexistence interventions, and **meaningful collaboration with the communities and people** who share cougar habitat.

This Puma Week, know your neighbour.

Coexistence isn't simply believing people and cougars can safely share a landscape. It's giving people the knowledge and practical tools to make it possible.

Explore

Living With the Wild

Exploring Public Attitudes Towards Apex Predators in British Columbia & Alberta

→ Full Public Perception Survey Coming Soon

Coexistence Tools & Stewardship Effectiveness Report

What works, what doesn't, and where the evidence gaps remain.

→ Full Literature Review Coming Soon

About the research: EWC commissioned Angus Reid Group in 2026 to survey 1,506 people, 50% from BC, 50% from Alberta, about attitudes, experiences, and knowledge relating to four apex predators. Literature-review findings are drawn from EWC's Coexistence Tools & Stewardship Effectiveness Report, which reviewed more than 75 studies and reports.

exposedwildlifeconservancy.org



SELECTED RESEARCH

The following studies are among the research used in EWC's review of cougar coexistence, conflict, and management. They represent research relevant to the questions explored in this report and are not intended to represent the full body of cougar research in Western Canada or elsewhere.

WESTERN CANADIAN RESEARCH:

Knopff, A.A. et al. (2016), *Tolerance for cougars diminished by high perception of risk*. Examined how perceptions of risk influence public tolerance for cougars, highlighting the importance of the human dimensions of coexistence.

Louchouart, N.X. & Treves, A. (2023), *Low-stress livestock handling protects cattle in a five-predator habitat*.

Evaluated livestock-management practices intended to reduce vulnerability to predators, contributing to the evidence base for proactive livestock protection.

Ross, P.I. & Jalkotzy, M.G. (1995), *Cougar translocation in Alberta*.

Examined the outcomes of translocating cougars in Alberta as an alternative to lethal removal, demonstrating mixed outcomes and limitations associated with translocation.

Teichman, K.J. et al. (2016), *Hunting as a management tool? Cougar-human conflict is positively related to trophy hunting*.

British Columbia research found a positive relationship between cougar hunting and subsequent human-cougar conflict reports, raising questions about increased harvest as a conflict-reduction strategy.

BROADER EVIDENCE BASE:

Eklund, A. et al. (2017), *Limited evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to reduce livestock predation by large carnivores*.

A review of interventions used to protect livestock from large carnivores. Highlights the limited evidence available and includes evidence on the use of night enclosures.

Peebles, K.A. et al. (2013), *Effects of remedial sport hunting on cougar complaints and livestock depredations*.

Research from Washington State found that increased cougar harvest was associated with increased complaints and livestock depredations in the following year.

A research gap is not an absence of knowledge. Cougar ecology has been studied extensively. The gap identified by EWC is more specific: relatively few studies within the scope of our review have evaluated the effectiveness of coexistence interventions in Western Canadian contexts.

Thank you

Supported by:

THE | **AUDAIN** FOUNDATION