

Documentary film: The “Ghost Cats” of The Santa Monica Mountains

Project Summary

I've been working with biologists from the National Park Service for the last two years, documenting the mountain lion study they have been conducting since 02,' in order to tell the compelling story about the last remaining lions in the Santa Monica Mountains and their struggle to survive in this isolated and fragmented landscape.

“It’s something we noticed her doing several times...

...trapped in her shrinking territory by new housing developments and the concrete monolith of the 101 freeway, her whereabouts known only to biologists tracking her by GPS. Known as P2 (puma 2) she has been monitored walking repeatedly to a ridge above an off-ramp to gaze across the freeway at thousand of undeveloped acres as if she was seeing the promised land.” –excerpt from Los Angeles Times article

The story of these lions, which represents a microcosm of events happening across the country (urban encroachment, habitat fragmentation), transcends the Santa Monica Mountains... As similar events play out we see an escalation in human wildlife encounters, and witness more and more wildlife wandering lost into suburban neighborhoods.

Rather than the drumbeat of doom, the goal of the film will be to entertain, educate, and bring awareness to this increasing problem; it attempts to explain why this is happening and, backed by scientific research, offers viable ideas and solutions. For example, wildlife crossings like the proposed Liberty Canyon wildlife crossing in the Santa Monica Mountains.

The Liberty Canyon wildlife crossing will be a landmark conservation project and a case study. Designed to run under the 101 freeway and connect the Santa Monica Mountains with the Santa Susanna Mountains, the crossing will create an unbroken corridor that will link three mountain ranges; it will give these beautiful and mysterious creatures a safe passage around man-made-barriers and the ability to find new mates, and new genetic material critical for their survival. Without this crossing, the mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountains will continue to inbreed which will lead to them dying off.

As critical as the issue of shrinking habitat is, the film will also address the presence of rodenticide (rat poison) being found in wildlife. Scientist have been discovering this anti-coagulant poison in the food web, killing mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, owls, hawks and other predators. In the Santa Monica Mountains alone, three adult mountain lions and a lion cub have succumbed to this secondary poisoning, dying a horrific death.

This is not just a local issue, but a world issue. This film will help people understand the vital role all wildlife play in their particular ecosystems and the challenges they face today. While promoting ways we can balance the needs of nature and people, it will stress the vital need to conserve and protect our natural world. *By Michael Harris*

The "Ghost Cats" of the Santa Monica Mountains

FILM COMPLETION BUDGET

10-day shoot to complete filming. October 15, thru October 26, 2011.

Camera Package Rental (Sony HDWF 900/3 HDCAM)	3,448.00
Director of Photography, 3 days to shoot interviews	1,200.00
Purchase of Film and Development	400.00
Production Insurance (1 million general liability)	606.00
Miscellaneous- Gas, Camping fees, Food, Expendables	<u>846.00</u>

Total Budget \$6,500