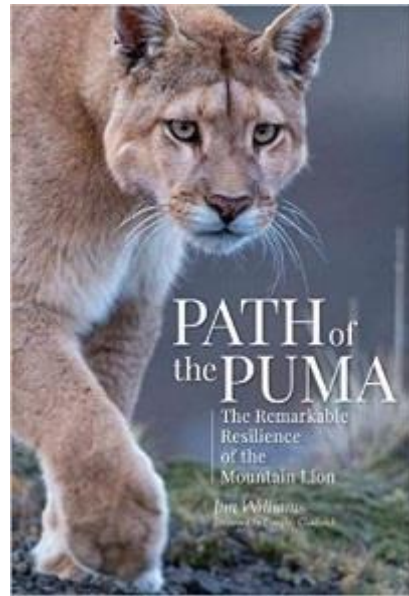


**Path of the puma: the remarkable resilience of the mountain lion, by Jim Williams.**

In 1992, unbeknownst to me, Jim Williams was finishing his Master's thesis on puma in the Sun River country of Montana. At the time, I was completely immersed in our own puma research in the desert mountains of New Mexico. If memory serves, I first met Jim in Sun Valley, Idaho, at the 9<sup>th</sup> Mountain Lion Workshop. By then, he'd been working on puma and other wildlife conservation issues for Montana Parks and Wildlife for 16 years. He was full of passion and ideas (and great stories), and exuded a deep appreciation for wild lands and the large carnivores that roamed over them. Fast forward another 10 years with the agency, and we are rewarded with this book as evidence his passion has not wavered. Jim has deftly managed to weave together his experiences learning about puma with an in-depth but uncomplicated look at the ecology, genetics, behavior and conservation of this cat throughout the Western Hemisphere. His reason for the book: "not only to share these amazing animals, but to offer yet another reason why we need to work together to protect wild places." He goes on to say that large carnivores exist on Earth for two simple reasons: freedom to roam over large blocks of connected land, and human tolerance. Historically pumas, and other large carnivores, were heavily persecuted; Jim discusses the cat's recovery, giving deserved credit to Maurice Hornocker for helping to dispel myths and fears, change attitudes, and lead the charge for regulated hunting, through his landmark research on pumas in the 1960s and early 1970s. People were becoming aware of the cat's importance as a both a Keystone and Umbrella species. Jim tackles some complicated subjects, including the puma's effect on prey. His descriptive story of the woodland caribou's plight caused by interwoven factors – anthropogenic landscape changes that expose caribou to greater predation – provides a great example of the complexity of the predator-prey relationship. Consequently, I was disappointed when he returned to a simplistic view that pumas "self-regulate their numbers through extreme territoriality" and that puma "densities are the same everywhere" (p. 135). Another supported hypothesis for the function of the puma's social system is tied to reproductive success and ultimately, to available food. That point doesn't detract from the importance of this book. Jim gives great perspectives on other controversial subjects including hunting, fair chase, and managing puma-human conflicts. When he says: "What's best for the cat, ultimately, may be to hunt a few, in order to secure public support for the rest," he reminds us that science matters, but it is not all about science. People and politics also play a large role in the puma's management. Jim then takes a deep dive down to the southernmost edge of the puma's range – Patagonia. This was of special interest to me because it was the least familiar. His descriptions of the landscape (along with the breath-taking photographs) can't help but instill a desire to experience this region first-hand. An unfolding of the relationships between the native wildlife, introduced species (red deer, hare, pines), livestock, and people reveals a different and serious set of problems there. The amount of human-affected landscape is much greater, sheep ranches are expansive (often comprising millions of acres), and there is a very low tolerance for predators. Wild prey have been replaced by domestics. For example, the guanaco, once a primary prey for pumas, has been reduced to possibly 1% of its numbers prior to European arrival. More engrossing stories about the wildlife (vicuna, huemul deer, condors, penguins and southern pumas) help us understand the challenges. "In Patagonia: we've undone the system to the point where it threatens to now undo us." (p. 235). There is also hope. Experiments with guard dogs and protective bomas for newborn lambs have had some success. The landowners feel empowered and less prone to kill cats. Research is revealing the importance of puma as apex predator and hinting of trophic cascades with the puma's loss. Efforts are underway to work with landowners, establish reserves and reclaim land. I picked three messages from Jim's closing remarks. Tolerance. Choice. Give Voice. I highly recommend this book.



~ Linda Sweanor