

# Ranchers & Jaguars

Fred Nelson

One of the most extraordinary wildlife recovery stories in recent North American history first broke out in 1996, when rancher Warner Glenn captured the first photos ever taken of a wild jaguar in the United States of America. The encounter, which occurred while Glenn was hunting mountain lions near his home in the Arizona-New Mexico borderlands, was the first documentation of jaguars in the USA since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequently, further sightings and the use of infrared camera traps in the region have revealed the regular occurrence of a handful of male jaguars in southern Arizona and New Mexico. All of these animals are long-range wanderers from the northernmost population of jaguars, a group of about 120 animals, which resides in Mexico's Sonora region.

With the re-discovery of the Americas' largest felid in the USA, at least as transients, a range of new cross-border conservation initiatives have emerged during the past decade. While some environmental organisations continue to campaign for stricter habitat protections for the jaguar in the USA borderlands under the United States Endangered Species Act, the fate of this sub-population primarily hinges on developing effective conservation strategies in the animals' northern Mexico home range.

The Winter 2007 edition of PERC Reports, published by the Property and Environment Research Center in Bozeman, Montana, contains an article<sup>1</sup> describing the emergence of several conservation initiatives using collaborative and incentive-based strategies to conserve this jaguar population. Efforts in Sonora, Mexico have been spearheaded by a coalition of Mexican and American conservation organisations, most notably the Defenders of Wildlife, the Northern Jaguar Project, and the Naturalia.

The Northern Jaguar Project has been at the heart of efforts at the ground level, leading efforts to purchase 45,000 acres of land in the heart of the jaguars' range in Sonora, Mexico. More creatively, the project has initiated a Wildcat Photo-Survey Contest on other private ranches surrounding the new reserve. Ranchers are paid between USD50 and USD300 for photographs taken by infrared camera traps positioned on their land, creating a direct economic incentive for ranchers to allow jaguars on their property.

Across the border, in Arizona and New Mexico, the Malpai Borderlands Group is one of the most prominent community-based conservation initiatives in the USA. A coalition of ranchers manage a mosaic of private and federal lands at the ecosystem scale, working to

reintroduce fire as a tool to recover degraded rangelands and developing collaborative strategies for endangered species conservation.

Other innovative ideas that are being floated, according to the PERC Reports article, include marketing and labeling beef from ranches that agree to permit jaguars to live on their property as 'jaguar-friendly beef', and efforts to channel private sport hunting revenues to landowners in Sonora, Mexico.

## For more information visit:

<http://www.northernjaguarproject.org/> (Northern Jaguar Project)

<http://www.malpaiborderlandsgroup.org/> (Malpai Borderlands Group)

## Endnote:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.perc.org/perc.php?id=1016>

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