

Injured cougar on mend

HOWL tries to save I-5 hit-run victim

BY CONSTANTINE ANGELOS
Seattle Times staff reporter

LYNNWOOD — Staff of a wildlife rehabilitation center are fighting to save a young cougar seriously injured in a hit-and-run incident on Interstate 5 south of Bellingham.

Thanks to orthopedic surgery by a local veterinarian to repair a broken front and hind leg, the 110-pound, 2-year-old male cat has a chance to be returned to the wild — if it will eat.

It hasn't in two weeks — not since it was taken to the Help Our Wildlife (HOWL) Center of the Progressive Animal Welfare Society in Lynnwood. All the animal's sustenance has been fluid — while it is tranquilized. It's down about 15 pounds.

Found the morning of July 14 by a retired game warden, the injured cougar was lying in a ditch near the I-5 Samish exit. After tranquilizing it, Sharon Wolters, director of the Sardis Wildlife Center at Ferndale, decided to bring it to HOWL "because it could get better care there."

That care included 4½ hours of surgery two days later by Dr. Steven Stoll of the Seattle Veterinary Hospital for Surgery in Lynnwood.

HOWL's veterinarian, Dr. Flo Tseng, turned to Stoll because he is a nationally recognized wildlife surgeon who has treated animals at the Bronx, Kansas City, St. Louis and Seattle zoos.

Stoll inserted an 8-inch metal plate to repair the cougar's broken left foreleg and a 10-inch metal plate to fix a fractured right hind leg. "This was like operating on a massively-muscled kitty-cat," Stoll said.

Usually, plates are removed in nine months to a year. But since this involves a wild creature, that will be impossible, Stoll said, especially if it recovers quickly and is released.

Jeanne Wasserman, director of the PAWS facility, said if the animal recov-



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The injured cougar rests in a small cage at the HOWL headquarters. A retired game warden found him in a ditch near the I-5 Samish exit.

ers, it will be outfitted with a radio-transmitter monitoring collar.

"In case he breaks a leg or has other problems, we could go in there and find him," Wasserman said.

Jennifer Tobias, HOWL's mammal supervisor, said the concern now is getting the animal to eat. Now they're trying a variety of foods and ways, including offering the cougar road-killed deer.

At Ferndale, Wolters said she has received some donations from area residents for her shelter's costs (about \$250). She said she plans to forward any donations above that to help the Lynnwood center.

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JEANNE WASSERMAN OF PAWS
discussing a monitoring collar