

Los Angeles freeway claims 3rd mountain lion in 2 months

January 28 2017



This June 22, 2016 photo taken by a National Park Service remote camera shows two of three mountain lion kittens, known as P-50, P-51, and P-52 in the eastern Santa Susana Mountains. P-51, one of the orphaned mountain lions has been struck and killed on the same stretch of Los Angeles-area freeway where her mother and one of her two siblings were killed separately in the past two months. It's not known if P-51 is seen in this photo. P-39 was fatally struck on the same freeway Dec. 3 and the sibling, P-52, was killed on Dec. 20. (National Park Service via AP)

A vehicle struck and killed an orphaned mountain lion on the same stretch of Los Angeles-area freeway where her mother and one of her two siblings died separately in December, wildlife authorities said Friday.

The death of the 8-month-old lion this month again illustrated the hazards that cougars face living among [urban sprawl](#) and networks of roads that are barriers to territorial roaming and genetic diversity among the puma populations.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife picked up the young lion's carcass Jan. 14 on State Route 118. National Park Service researchers who are studying lions in the region identified it as a kitten designated P-51.

Her mother, P-39, was struck and killed on the same freeway Dec. 3, and a sibling, P-52, died there Dec. 20.

A statement from the two agencies said the most recent death was the 17th known case of a [mountain lion](#) killed since 2002 on a freeway or road in the study area in and around the Santa Monica Mountains.

The fate of the third sibling, P-50, is not known, said Kate Kuykendall, spokeswoman and acting deputy superintendent of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, which spans more than 230 square miles west of Los Angeles.

The Park Service has studied mountain lions in and around the mountain range since 2002. The mother had a tracking collar, but her kittens were not outfitted with the devices.

The state Fish and Wildlife laboratory plans to perform a necropsy on P-51, as was done with her brother to determine how healthy he was

living without his mother for a few weeks until his death.

That examination found the male cub was thin at 24 pounds but had adequate internal fat reserves and had recently fed on a skunk, seen as a positive sign.

"Whether or not these kittens had the ability to feed was a subject of much discussion," Marc Kenyon, state Mountain Lion Conservation Program coordinator, said in a statement. "Apparently, their mother had taught them predatory skills within their first six to seven months, and we're hopeful the necropsy on P-51 confirms this, too."

The freeway where the cats died runs along the foothills of the Santa Susana Mountains on the northwestern edge of Los Angeles. Despite the deaths, it is considered less of an obstacle than parallel U.S. 101, about 10 miles to the south, which runs along the northern edge of the Santa Monica Mountains.

A special wildlife bridge over the multilane highway has been proposed to make it easier for cougars to move about.

Although the region's elusive cougars are rarely seen, the public has widely embraced them. P-22, a male, became a celebrity after somehow making his way into the heart of the metro area and taking up residence in sprawling Griffith Park.

The relationship is not always smooth. Last year, a mountain lion killed livestock on two ranches near Malibu, triggering debate when it emerged that the state had issued a permit to a rancher to kill the predator. The rancher did not use it.

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Citation: Los Angeles freeway claims 3rd mountain lion in 2 months (2017, January 28) retrieved 4 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-01-los-angeles-freeway-3rd-mountain.html>

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