The news of a possible cougar sighting in Obion County has generated a lot of interest recently. Why has this trail camera photo generated so much interest? After all, the TWRA receives many photos and "eye witness" reports every year. The reason this one is different is because the location is verifiable, there is no doubt the animal is, in fact, a cougar, and there is no evidence of tampering with the photo. In past photos received, there have been issues with the photos. Either there is evidence that someone "photoshopped" a cougar image, taken from the internet, into a Tennessee background, or a photo copied from the internet is claimed to have been taken in Tennessee, or the image is so indefinite that it could be a photo of a dog, housecat, bobcat, fox, or some other animal. In this recent incident, the elements required for TWRA to verify the authenticity are met.

First… The photo is date stamped and the individual who got the picture on his trail camera provided the original SD card to the TWRA for analysis. The photo is stamped Sept 19, but he informed the TWRA that he set the date wrong by a day and the photo was actually taken on Sept 20.

Although the head of the animal is not visible, enough of the animal is clearly seen to definitively identify it as a cougar. However, it is difficult to be certain of the size of the animal. Since the original

SD card was provided, expert analysts looked at other photos taken around the same time. Both photos are of deer.

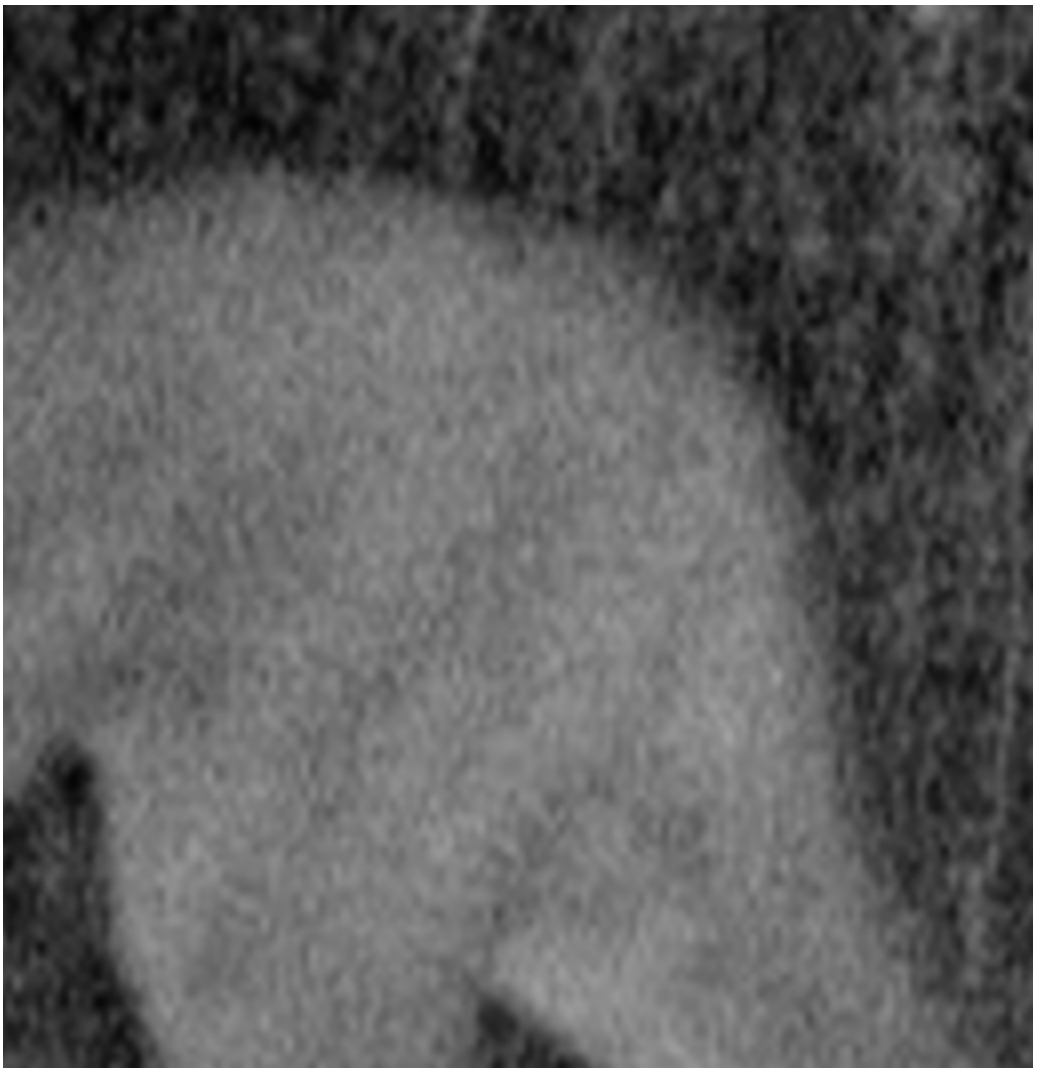
Then, to get an estimate of size, a deer photo was superimposed onto the cougar photo.

Obviously, the animal in the photo is too big to be a housecat. It is almost as long as a deer, even though not as tall.

In order to show, definitively, that the photo was, in fact, taken in Tennessee, an agent of the TWRA went to the location of the trail camera a couple of days later and took a photo from the same vantage point as the trail camera. The soybeans in the cougar photo had been harvested, but in all other respects, the trial camera photo matched the photo taken by the TWRA agent almost exactly.

The tree trunk on the left, and the lower leaves in the center of the photo, matched in both photos, confirming that the cougar photo was taken in Obion County at the location of the trail camera.

There was also no evidence that a cougar photo had been cut and pasted into a background photo. When the cougar image is zoomed up close, there is no evidence of irregularities around the edges.



Unfortunately, there were no tracks, hair, or other physical evidence of a cougar found at the site, and without physical evidence with DNA to be tested, the TWRA cannot verify whether the cougar in the photo is an escaped pet, a western cougar, or a Florida panther (cougar).

So, the TWRA can confirm there was, on September 20, 2015, a cougar in Obion County Tennessee. Currently, however, the TWRA does not know for certain the origin of the cougar, whether it is a truly wild cougar or a pet, or where it is now. Small numbers of cougars are known to exist in the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas, and there have been many confirmed sightings. However, the research conducted by the Missouri Department of Conservation has found only young male cougars, probably

expanding their ranges from western states. They have not found any female cougars in Missouri, so they do not, at this time, believe they have a self-sustaining, reproducing population yet.

If cougars continue to expand their ranges from western states, as they have been doing for the past several decades, there will be cougars in Tennessee. West Tennessee will probably be the first affected by any range expansion. It is important to note, any natural range expansion of cougars into Tennessee will be animals that are protected by law. The TWRA has never opened a hunting season on them. Therefore it would be illegal to kill a cougar in Tennessee .