



Food Webs: Predators and Prey

What is a predator?

An organism that lives by capturing and consuming other organisms, usually a carnivore.

What is prey?

An organism hunted and captured by another organism.

Can you think of any examples of predators and prey?

In the picture below who is the predator and who is the prey?

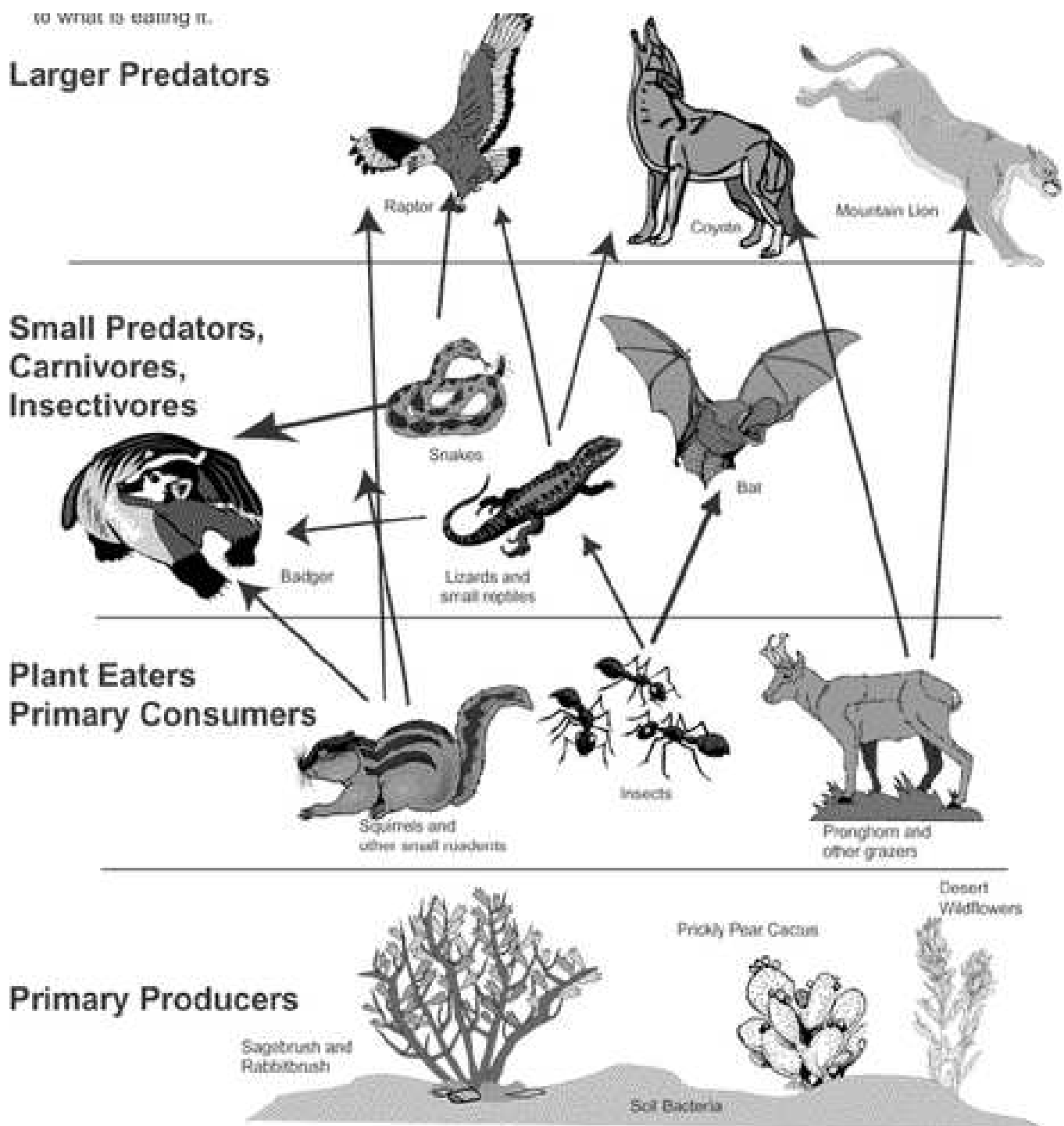


Predator:

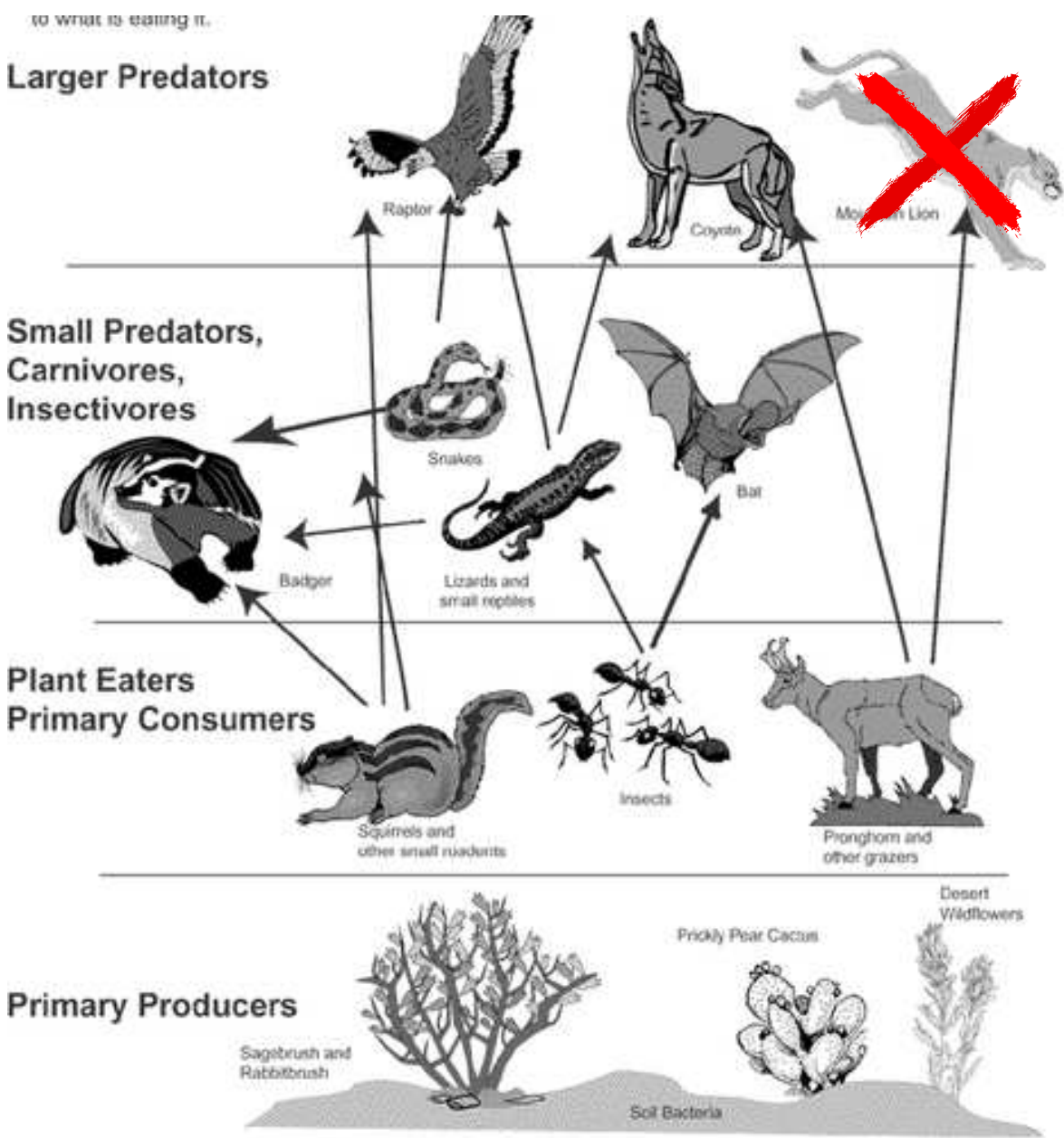
Prey:

Predator and prey relationships are very important for keeping a balanced ecosystem! Predators play an important role in the food chain, they keep the prey organisms at healthy population sizes that are suitable for that ecosystem.

For example, the food web below. All of these organisms interact. If one of the organisms disappear the entire food web will collapse.



Imagine if the mountain lion disappeared? Follow the arrows to see what animals would be effected by the disappearance of the mountain lion (a top predator)? What do you think would happen?



So what would actually happen if the mountain lion disappeared?

If the mountain lion disappeared from the food web, there would be drastic consequences. When a top predator is no longer present, populations of herbivorous prey, like the pronghorn, will increase rapidly. Without a top predator, like the mountain lion, these animals will eat all of the vegetation. Herbivores require a large amount of food, and with increasing population numbers, they will destroy the existing plant life.

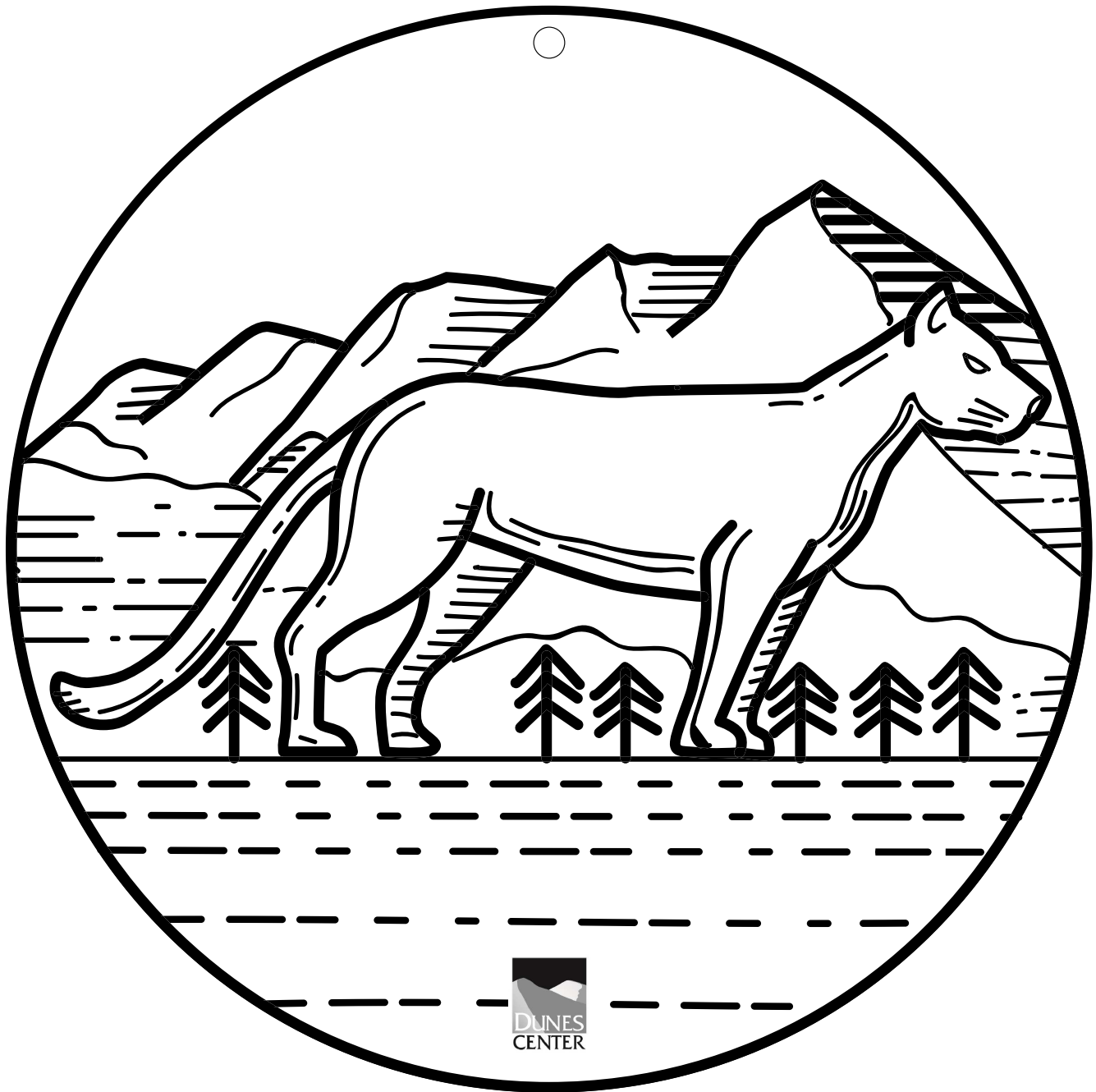
This will affect all of the other herbivores as well. There will be a higher competition between species for the remaining plant life. As a result of the heightened competition, the weaker species will lose out to stronger ones, leading to the potential loss of weaker animals, as well as plant species.

As you can see, an ecosystem is a fragile balancing act. As humans we have to be more aware of how our activities affect the ecosystem.

Unfortunately, as human populations continue to grow, cities also grow. As cities and towns increase in size, we encroach on the mountain lion's territory. Meaning, as cities grow the mountain lions do not have a place to live and lose food resources. Mountain lions do not have any natural predators, however humans have had a major impact their population size.

They are an important species we must protect. Cohabiting with these animals is essential for their survival.

Color in the picture, cut the picture out, attach a ribbon and hang up your art!



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