
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

HB 2438

Brief Description: Making permanent a pilot project that allows for the use of dogs to hunt cougars.

Sponsors: Representative Kretz.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes permanent the pilot project that allowed for the hunting of cougars with the aid of hounds.

Hearing Date: January 30, 2008

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

General conditions for hunting cougars with the aid of dogs

Generally, the use of dogs to hunt or pursue cougars is unlawful in Washington. However, there are situations where the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is authorized to allow the use of dogs to hunt cougars. One such situation is when the Commission determines that there is a public safety need [RCW 77.15.245].

The use of dogs to hunt cougars when there is a public safety need must be limited to specific game management units, and may only be allowed after the Commission has determined that there is no practical alternative to the use of dogs [RCW 77.15.245]. Practical alternatives include seasons for hunting cougars without the aid of dogs, public education, cougar depredation permits, and relocation or euthanasia programs administered by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) [WAC 232-12-243].

The Commission may authorize the use of dogs in public safety cougar removal efforts if WDFW believes, based on complaints or observation, that eleven interactions occurred between humans

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and cougars in a given year. Of those eleven confirmed interactions, at least four must have resulted in incidents where livestock or pets were killed or injured by the cougar [WAC 232-12-243].

If the necessary interactions occur, and no practical alternatives exist, the WDFW may allow for the use of dogs to take one cougar per 120 square kilometers in rural or undeveloped areas, or one cougar per 430 square kilometers in urban or suburban areas. All public safety cougar removals must occur between December 1st and March 15th in most game management areas [WAC 232-12-243].

Cougars may be hunted with modern firearms, bows, or muzzleloaders outside of the public safety cougar removal program; however, the use of dogs is prohibited [WAC 232-12-243].

Pilot project for hunting cougars with the aid of dogs

In 2004, the Legislature directed the Commission to adopt rules that establish seasons for pursuing and hunting cougars that allows the use of dogs. The seasons were limited to a three-year pilot program located only in Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan counties, and were only to occur within identified game management units. The pilot program was required to be designed to provide for public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments.

In establishing the pilot seasons, the Commission was required to cooperate and collaborate with the legislative authorities of the impacted counties. This coordination took the form of local dangerous wildlife task teams that are composed of the WDFW and the local county. The task teams were also directed to develop a more effective and accurate dangerous wildlife reporting system [Chapter 264, Laws of 2004].

In 2007, a fourth year was added onto the pilot project and, for the first time, counties other than the original five were allowed to petition the Commission for inclusion in the pilot project. The legislative authority of any county that was not included in the cougar hunting pilot project could request the Commission to include its county in the pilot project if the legislative authority adopted a resolution requesting inclusion, documented the need to participate by identifying the number of cougar interactions within that county, and demonstrated that the existing cougar management tools for that county are insufficient [Chapter 178, Laws of 2007].

Summary of Bill:

The pilot project to allow for the hunting of cougars with the aid of hounds is made permanent. The conditions, limitations, and requirements of the pilot project are retained. Seasons are allowed in Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan counties without further county actions being required. The legislative authority of any other county may request the Commission include its county in the pilot project if the legislative authority adopts a resolution requesting inclusion, documents the need to participate by identifying the number of cougar interactions within that county, and demonstrates that the existing cougar management tools for that county are insufficient.

The goal of any pursuit or kill seasons must be to provide for public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments, and all seasons must be designed to protect public safety, reflect the most current cougar population information, and be consistent with any new recommendations resulting from state-funded research.

In establishing seasons, the Commission is required to cooperate and collaborate with the legislative authorities of the impacted counties. This coordination is to take the form of local dangerous wildlife task teams that are composed of the WDFW and the local county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.