

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6262

As Reported By House Committee On:

Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to transport tags for game.

Brief Description: Providing for the management of cougar population levels.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senators Morton, Rasmussen, Roach, Swecker, Hochstatter, Prince and Schow).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/20/96, 2/21/96 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Fuhrman, Chairman; Buck, Vice Chairman; Basich, Ranking Minority Member; Regala, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Beeksma; Elliot; Hatfield; Jacobsen; Keiser; Sheldon; L. Thomas and Thompson.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Pennington, Vice Chairman.

Staff: Susan Ronn (786-7292).

Background: The current cougar population is estimated at 2,600 to 3,200 animals. This is described by the Department of Fish and Wildlife as a "high level" of cougar. Due to this increase, it is argued, incidents of interaction between people and cougar have intensified.

Current law provides that wild animals may be killed on a person's property to protect that property. Also, if a person kills a wild animal to protect himself or herself or another human being, a necessity defense is available to a charge of violation of the law. This defense allows an individual to take an unlawful action to avoid a harm which social policy deems greater than the harm resulting from the violation of law.

In order to hunt cougar, a valid hunting license is required. If dogs will be used to hunt, a hound permit is also required. Cougar hunting seasons are divided into several different seasons: a "pursuit only" season, a general season during which cougar may be killed, and a cougar permit season for which a limited number of permits are issued by lottery. Specific areas are designated for the open seasons.

Additionally, a separate transport tag is required to hunt cougar. This must be purchased before hunting, and in the case of special permit hunts, it must be purchased at the time the special permit is issued. At the time of the kill, the hunter removes the notches on the tag to reflect the day and month of the kill, and the transport tag is attached to the animal.

Other restrictions specific to hunting cougar include a bag limit of one animal per year and the fact that it is unlawful to kill or possess an adult accompanied by spotted kittens or to kill the kittens themselves. All general hunting restrictions also apply, such as the type of firearm that may be used, hunter education program requirements for certain hunters, and presentation of the skull and pelt to state wildlife agents.

Summary of Bill: The Fish and Wildlife Commission may authorize the purchase of cougar transport tags subsequent to a hunt without hounds. The commission may stipulate conditions for the validation and use of the tags and must review the management of cougars on a regular basis.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This is a small, additional tool to help manage the cougar population. In some cougar units, the department may decide to issue a certain number of cougar tags under this, bill to help control cougars.

Testimony Against: Tags should not be sold "subsequent" to a hunt. This condones a form of incidental kill, which is not an appropriate big game management tool. No other state allows this nor does Washington allow it for any other animal.

Testified: Senator Morton, prime sponsor; Ted Orr, Washington State Hound Council (con); and Larry Popejoy, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (pro).