
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

HB 1756

Brief Description: Authorizing one additional hound hunting cougar season.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Upthegrove, B. Sullivan, Blake, Takko and VanDeWege.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to allow one additional season for pursuing or hunting cougars with the aid of dogs to the ongoing pilot project.
- Provides a mechanism for counties other than Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan to participate in the cougar hunting pilot project created by the 2004 Legislature.

Hearing Date: 2/5/07

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 for protection from cougars [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 Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) [WAC 232-12-243].

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Commission may authorize the use of dogs in public safety cougar removal efforts if WDFW believes, based on complaints or observation, that 11 interactions occurred between humans and cougars in a given year. Of those 11 confirmed interactions, at least four must have resulted in incidents where livestock or pets were killed or injured by a cougar [WAC 232-12-243].

If the necessary number of 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 1 and March 15 in most game management areas [WAC 232-12-243].

The use of dogs is prohibited outside of the public safety cougar removal program; however, cougars may be hunted with modern firearms, bows, or muzzleloaders [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 a pursuit season and a kill for cougars that allows the use of dogs. The seasons are limited to a three-year pilot program located only in Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan counties, and may only occur within identified game management areas. The goal of the pilot program is to provide for public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments.

In establishing the 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.

To date, two pilot cougar seasons have been authorized and carried out. The final report by the WDFW on the success of the pilot program is scheduled to be released after the third and final season. The report should be available after the 2007 legislative session, but before the end of the 2008 legislative session.

Summary of Bill:

The WDFW is authorized to allow one additional season for pursuing or hunting cougars with the aid of dogs. The season is intended to occur in the time between the scheduled end of the cougar hunting pilot project and the commencement of the legislative session following the WDFW's report based on the findings of the pilot program.

The legislative authority of any county that is not included in the cougar hunting pilot project may request the Commission to 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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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