

**Natural Resources, Ecology &
Parks Committee**

HB 1953

Brief Description: Allowing counties to be included in a cougar control pilot program.

Sponsors: Representatives Newhouse, Blake, Kretz, Kessler, Buri, Condotta, Roach, Eickmeyer, Haler and Orcutt.

Brief Summary of Bill

- 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: 2/22/05

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 a public safety cougar removal efforts if the WDFW believes, based on complaints or observation, that eleven interactions occurred between humans 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 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 units. The goal if the pilot program is to provide for public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments.

In establishing the seasons, the Commission is required to cooperate and collaborate with the legislative authorities of the impacted counties. This coordination takes the form local dangerous wildlife task teams that are composed of the WDFW and the local county. The task teams are also directed to develop a more effective and accurate dangerous wildlife reporting system.

Summary of Bill:

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 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: Requested on 2/14/05.

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