

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5100

As of January 25, 2019

Title: An act relating to a pilot program for cougar control.

Brief Description: Concerning a pilot program for cougar control.

Sponsors: Senators Sheldon and Schoesler.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/24/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Reestablishes a five-year pilot project that allows for hunting cougars with the aid of dogs.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: With the passage of Initiative 655 in 1996, voters approved a prohibition on hunting cougar with dogs with certain exceptions. The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is authorized to allow the use of dogs to hunt or pursue cougars if there is a public safety need; to protect livestock, domestic animals, and private property; for scientific purposes; or to protect endangered species. In addition, the Commission is authorized to allow hunters to harvest cougar without the use of dogs.

Pilot Program for Hunting Cougars with the Aid of Dogs. In 2004 the Legislature established a three-year pilot program that allowed the use of dogs to hunt cougar in select game management units within Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan counties. The stated goal of the pilot program was to provide for public safety, property protection, and to conduct cougar population assessments.

In 2007, a fourth year was added onto the pilot program and other counties were allowed to petition the Commission for inclusion in the pilot project. In order to participate, a county

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needed to request inclusion and present specified information documenting a need to participate.

In 2008, the Legislature authorized an additional three years for the pilot project to allow the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to gather information necessary to determine whether a permanent program is warranted. The pilot program expired in 2011.

Summary of Bill: A pilot program for hunting cougars with the aid of dogs is re-instituted for a five-year period, expiring on July 1, 2024. DFW, in cooperation with participating counties, must establish dangerous wildlife task teams with representatives of the county and DFW. The stated goals of the pilot project are public safety, property protection, assessment, conservation, and management of cougar populations. The pilot program must be conducted in collaboration with participating counties including Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, Okanogan, Mason, and Klickitat. However, other county legislative authorities may request inclusion in the pilot project by adopting a resolution and presenting specified information documenting a need to participate.

All pursuits or hunts must be designed to protect public safety or property; reflective of the most current cougar population data; designed to generate data to support the pilot program reporting requirement; and consistent with the results of specified cougar research. DFW may authorize five seasons to hunt or pursue cougars with dogs.

By September 1, 2023, DFW must provide a report to the Legislature that includes a summary of the pilot program and any recommendations for more effective or efficient cougar management.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: There have been an increasing number of cougar sightings and incidents in Mason County. The pilot program for cougar control was successful in managing the cougar population and should be re-established. Hunting with a firearm and without the use of dogs results in indiscriminate harvest of cougars. By using dogs to pursue and identify a cougar allows for a more specific harvest management tool.

CON: The ban on the use of dogs to hunt cougars already includes exceptions for public safety, to protect livestock and private property, and for research. The pilot program did not result in a reduction in cougar complaints.

OTHER: Hunting with the use of dogs can be an effective management tool. DFW allows for approximately 40 cougar removals per year due to depredation or public safety concerns. There are cougar hunting seasons without the use of dogs and approximately 200 cougars are harvested annually.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Tim Sheldon, Prime Sponsor; Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau; Mic O'Brien, West Side Director, Working Dogs 4 Wildlife Conflict Resolution; Mark Streuli, Washington Cattlemen's Association.

CON: Carey Morris, Humane Society of the United States; Bob McCoy, citizen.

OTHER: Mick Cope, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.