

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6118

As Passed Senate, February 13, 2004

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

Brief Description: Creating a cougar control pilot program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Parks, Fish & Wildlife (originally sponsored by Senators Morton, Stevens, Deccio, Mulliken, Roach and Swecker).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Parks, Fish & Wildlife: 1/20/04, 2/3/04 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 2/13/04, 33-15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON PARKS, FISH & WILDLIFE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6118 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Oke, Chair; Sheahan, Vice Chair; Doumit, Jacobsen, Morton and Swecker.

Staff: Vic Moon (786-7469)

Background: In 1996, an initiative was passed by the voters to limit the hunting of bear and some other species with the aid of bait or with the use of hunting hound dogs. The initiative also included other species, such as cougar, bobcat and lynx. The initiative did allow the state to authorize the use of hounds to control populations for public safety.

Studies recently have shown that there is an increase in cougar numbers and in cougar sightings in populated areas in the state of Washington. The present authority to control cougars rests with the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Summary of Bill: A three-year pilot program is established to be administered by county government and the Fish and Wildlife Commission to allow for limited hound hunting as a means to better control the cougar population, provide population numbers and reporting.

The county commissioners of Chelan, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Stevens, and Ferry counties will establish a three-year pilot program to control the cougar population in cooperation with the commission.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: To protect public safety, counties with cougar problems need more ways to control the cougar population.

Testimony Against: The use of hunting dogs is cruel. The program of cougar control is fine now.

Testified: PRO: Mary Lou Peterson, Okanagon County Commission; Ed Owens, Hunters Heritage Council; Joel Kretz, Okanagon Farm Bureau; CON: Steve Pozzanghera, Bruce Bjork, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Katherine Bragdon, Humane Society of the United States; Mark Skatrud, Northwest Ecosystem Alliance.

House Amendment(s): Language requiring Fish and Wildlife Department reports on the cougar pilot project are required. Additional counties may participate in the pilot project. All hunting must be to protect public safety or property.