

SB 5881 - DIGEST

Finds that: (1) Washington's increasing cougar and human populations, and decreasing cougar habitat, create new management challenges;

(2) The Washington department of fish and wildlife, the agency with authority over cougar control, acknowledges responding to over five hundred complaints a year regarding urban sightings, attacks on livestock and pets, and cougar confrontations with humans;

(3) A 1996 initiative limited the hunting of cougars and some other species with the aid of bait or the use of hunting hound dogs, though the initiative did allow the state to authorize the use of hounds to control cougar populations for public safety; and

(4) The initiative has resulted in a reduction in the number of cougar harvested during the cougar hunting season, and this has in turn resulted in an increase in the number of cougar/human confrontations and cougar attacks on livestock and pets.

Declares an intent to initiate a survey of cougar populations and encounters to help the state and participating county legislative authorities create a dangerous cougar management program that minimizes cougar incidents and executes more timely and effective actions when incidents threaten public safety or property.

Requires the department of fish and wildlife to report survey results for each participating county to the fish and wildlife commission and the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 31, 2005. The report shall also recommend: (1) Legislative or other changes needed to improve the dangerous cougar management and incident response program;

(2) Methods to more effectively collect, share, and use incident reporting data to minimize cougar incidents and inform future cougar management decisions; and

(3) Legislative or other changes needed to foster more timely and effective response actions to protect public safety and property.