

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5001

As Passed Senate, February 11, 2000

Title: An act relating to hunting cougar.

Brief Description: Authorizing hunting of cougar with the aid of dogs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Parks & Recreation (originally sponsored by Senators Morton, Deccio, Honeyford, T. Sheldon, Swecker, Hargrove, Rossi, Hochstatter, Oke and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Parks & Recreation: 1/27/99 [DPS].
Passed Senate, 2/12/99, 33-14; 2/11/00, 31-13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, PARKS & RECREATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5001 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; T. Sheldon, Vice Chair; Hargrove, Morton, Oke, Rossi, Spanel and Stevens.

Staff: Ross Antipa (786-7413)

Background: A prohibition on the hunting of cougar with dogs was approved by the voters with the passage of Initiative 655 on November 5, 1996. Currently, the Fish and Wildlife Commission is authorized to allow hunters to harvest cougar without the use of dogs.

Since the initiative was enacted, cougar populations, cougar sightings and incidents of cougar damage to livestock have increased. Cougars have also attacked humans since the passage of the initiative.

Hunting cougar without the aid of dogs is difficult due to the cougar's secretive nature. Prior to the prohibition of cougar hunting with dogs, over 90 percent of the harvest of cougar was with the aid of dogs.

Summary of Bill: The provision of Initiative 655 that prohibits the hunting of cougar with dogs is repealed. The Fish and Wildlife Commission shall allow cougar hunting with dogs only if hunting is conducted within game management units, no other practical alternative exists, specific cougar population control or public safety needs must be addressed, the department adopts rules regulating cougar hunting with dogs, and confirmed cougar/human safety incidents or depredations have occurred.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: The most effective way to hunt cougar is with the use of hounds. Cougar populations are expanding and human interaction with dangerous cougar are increasing. The department does not have the financial resources to control dangerous cougar.

Testimony Against: Hunting cougar with hounds is cruel and other control methods should be used. People should respect the role cougar play in the ecosystem and learn to live with them.

Testified: PRO: JoAnn Fleshman; Wilbur H. Barker, Tacoma-Lake City Sportsmen's Club; David Reynard; Tom Ryle; Jim Haase, WA State Grange; Scott Barr; Karla Fullerton, WA Cattlemen's Assn.; Al Woodbridge, Western Fish and Wildlife Federation; Allan Hollingsworth; Shirley, Malcolm Thompson, M & M Llamas; Linda Johnson, Farm Bureau; CON: Lisa Wathne, Humane Society of U.S.; Joe Haptian, NW Animal Rights Network; Ralph Turner; Holly Beuthin; Jacqueline Blue; Joan Huddleston; Jack Lavfer, Wolf Haven; Eunice Grubb; Rev. Bob Chorush, Church of the Earth; Karen Baker; Cathy Slee; Peter Brandt; Stephanie Bell, Kay Joubert, PAWS; Lea Lucky.

House Amendment(s): The commission may approve hound hunting for cougar only within selected areas of game management units. The director may not authorize removal of black bear, cougar, bobcat or lynx for scientific purposes. Cougar, black bear or bobcat may be killed in order to protect threatened or endangered species. The commission may only allow hound hunting of cougar for public safety purposes.