
**Fisheries, Ecology & Parks
Committee**

SSB 6118

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 Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Fish and Wildlife Commission to establish a three-year pilot program in five counties that allows for the hunting of cougars with dogs.

Hearing Date: 2/26/04

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

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 effort 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 number of 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].

Summary of Bill:

The Commission is directed to adopt rules that establish a pursuit season and a kill for cougars that allows the use of dogs. The seasons must be 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 areas. The goal of the pilot program is to provide for public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments.

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

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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