

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1832

As Reported by House Committee On:
Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks

Title: An act relating to disclosure of cougar incidences.

Brief Description: Requiring the posting of cougar interactions with pets, livestock, or humans.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Blake, Grant, Holmquist, P. Sullivan, Buri, B. Sullivan, Kristiansen, Serben, Linville, McCune, Orcutt, Sump, Condotta, Cox, Walsh, Clements, Roach, Newhouse, Haler and Pearson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks: 2/22/05 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to post the known details of all reported interactions between cougars and humans, pets, and livestock onto their internet website.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Upthegrove, Vice Chair; Buck, Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Blake, DeBolt, Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Orcutt and Williams.

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.

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. 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 (Department).

The Commission may authorize the use of dogs in a public safety cougar removal effort if the Department believes, based on complaints or observation, that 11 interactions occurred between humans and cougars in a given year. Of those 11 confirmed interactions, at least four must have resulted in incidents where livestock or pets were killed or injured by the cougar.

If the necessary interactions occur, and no practical alternatives exist, the Department 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 1 and March 15 in most game management areas.

Summary of Bill:

The Department must post the known details of all reported interactions between cougars and humans, pets, and livestock onto their Internet website. The postings must contain the location and time of the incidents, as well as any known details when livestock are involved.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Good reporting of cougar incidents are important, and this bill attempts to improve that system for everybody. Past reporting mechanisms have come and gone, and the public is confused as to how information is distributed. As a result, they have lost confidence in the system and choose instead to not report interactions with cougars. When reports are not made, the Department can not collect important data that it needs to manage the species. By increasing information, the public will increase its trust and the state can get the information it needs for management.

Cougar incidents are on the rise in forests, but the information posted on the Internet will not just benefit rural areas. Suburban areas have faced cougar threats, and this information will benefit those communities as well. Any new avenue for providing public information should be supported.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; Bruce Borjk, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Bill Packell, Washington Contract Loggers Association; Jack Fields, Washington Cattlemen's Association; Merrill Ott, Stevens County Commissioner; and Bob Brooke, Backcountry Horseman.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (With concerns)Mike Ryhard, Northwest Eco System Alliance.