

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1756

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the department of fish and wildlife's hound hunting cougar season pilot project.

Brief Description: Authorizing one additional hound hunting cougar season.

Sponsors: Representatives Kretz, Upthegrove, B. Sullivan, Blake, Takko and VanDeWege.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/5/07, 2/8/07 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to add one additional season for pursuing or hunting cougars with the aid of dogs to the ongoing pilot project.
- Provides a mechanism for counties other than Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan to participate in the cougar hunting pilot project created by the 2004 Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Blake, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Grant, Hailey, Lantz, McCoy, Newhouse, Orcutt, Strow and VanDeWege.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

Pilot Project for Hunting Cougars With the Aid of Dogs

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In 2004, the Legislature directed the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) to adopt rules that establish a pursuit season and a kill for cougars that allows the use of dogs. The seasons are 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.

In establishing the seasons, the Commission was required to cooperate and collaborate with the legislative authorities of the impacted counties. This coordination took the form of local dangerous wildlife task teams that were composed of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the local county. The task teams were also directed to develop a more effective and accurate dangerous wildlife reporting system.

To date, two pilot cougar seasons have been authorized and carried out. The final report by the WDFW on the success of the pilot program is scheduled to be released after the third and final season. The report should be available after the 2007 legislative session, but before the end of the 2008 legislative session.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The WDFW is authorized to allow one additional season for pursuing or hunting cougars with the aid of dogs. The season is intended to occur in the time between the scheduled end of the cougar hunting pilot project and the commencement of the legislative session following the WDFW's report based on the findings of the pilot program.

The legislative authority of any county that is not included in the cougar hunting pilot project may request the Commission to include its county in the fourth and final year of the pilot project if the legislative authority adopts a resolution requesting inclusion, documents the need to participate by identifying the number of cougar interactions within that county, and demonstrates that the existing cougar management tools for that county are insufficient.

The additional pilot season is not intended to be used as part of the study reported to the Legislature later this year.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill specifies that any involvement of counties other than the initial five pilot counties may only be for the additional fourth season and that the results of the fourth season are not to be included in the study period.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) It is important to maintain the pilot program for an additional year so that progress is not lost while the 2008 Legislature analyzes the report scheduled to be produced by the WDFW and decides on a permanent policy for cougar management. The original bill in 2004 included an avenue for all counties to participate, but the section was vetoed. This bill recaptures that original intent.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; Ed Owens, Hunters Heritage Council; and Bruce Bjork, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (In support) Steve Pozzanghera, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; and Jack Field, Washington Cattlemen's Association.