

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESHB 2438

C 8 L 08

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Extending a pilot project that allows for the use of dogs to hunt cougars.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Kretz, Williams, Blake, McCune, Newhouse, Takko, Chandler, Condotta, Armstrong, Dunn, McDonald, Warnick and Pearson).

House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources
Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation

Background:

General Conditions for Hunting Cougars with the Aid of Dogs.

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 be allowed only 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 (WDFW).

The Commission may authorize the use of dogs in public safety cougar removal efforts if the WDFW 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 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 1 and March 15 in most game management areas.

Cougars may be hunted with modern firearms, bows, or muzzleloaders outside the public safety cougar removal program; however, the use of dogs is prohibited.

Pilot Project for Hunting Cougars With the Aid of Dogs.

In 2004 the Legislature directed the Commission to adopt rules that establish seasons for pursuing and hunting cougars that allows the use of dogs. The seasons were limited to a three-year pilot program located only in Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan counties, and were to occur only within identified game management units. The pilot program was required to be designed to provide for public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments.

In establishing the pilot 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 composed of representatives from the WDFW and the local counties. The task teams were also directed to develop a more effective and accurate dangerous wildlife reporting system.

In 2007 a fourth year was added to the pilot project and, for the first time, counties other than the original five were allowed to petition the Commission for inclusion in the pilot project. The legislative authority of any county that was not included in the cougar hunting pilot project could request the Commission to include its county in the pilot project if the legislative authority adopted a resolution requesting inclusion, documented the need to participate by identifying the number of cougar interactions within that county, and demonstrated that the existing cougar management tools for that county are insufficient.

Summary:

The pilot project to allow for the hunting of cougars with the aid of dogs is extended for three additional years. The conditions, limitations, and requirements of the original pilot project are retained.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	66	29
Senate	31	18

Effective: June 12, 2008