

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## ESHB 1756

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation, March 22, 2007

**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:** House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Kretz, Upthegrove, B. Sullivan, Blake, Takko and VanDeWege).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/28/07, 96-0.

**Committee Activity:** Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 3/19/07, 3/22/07 [DPA, DNP].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Stevens and Swecker.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Fraser, Poulsen and Spanel.

**Staff:** Kim Johnson (786-7346)

**Background:** In 2004, the Legislature directed the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) to adopt rules that establish both a pursuit season and a kill season for cougars that allow 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 (DFW) 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 DFW on the success of the pilot program is scheduled to be released after the third and

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final season. The report should be available after the 2007 Legislative Session, but before the end of the 2008 Legislative Session.

**Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:** The DFW 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 DFW'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, develops and implements an education program to inform about nonlethal cougar management methods, and demonstrate 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.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED AMENDMENT(S) AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation):** Changes are made to require DFW to hold one more pursuit and kill season for cougars using dogs under the pilot program for the five counties currently participating in the pilot program.

DFW is directed to implement a cougar control program that is based on and consistent with the final recommendations in the final report from the pilot program that is due prior to the 2008 Legislative session.

Under the new cougar control program, county legislative authorities are authorized to request inclusion in the program after: (1) adopting a resolution that requests inclusion in the program; (2) documenting the need to participate in the program by identifying the number of cougar encounters and depredations; (3) developing and implementation of an education program about predator exclusion techniques and devices; and (4) demonstrating that existing cougar depredation permits, public safety hunts and other management tools have not been sufficient to deal with cougar incidents in the county.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: The current pilot hound hunting program for cougars has been going on over the past three years and has been very successful. This bill extends the pilot program for one last season and allows other counties to opt in to the last season. The data from the last season will not be included in the report that is due to the Legislature before next session.

We would support removing the pilot program language and authorize a permanent cougar management program at DFW. The Cattlemen's Association strongly supports the bill and also supports moving forward with a permanent cougar management program at DFW. Moving forward with a permanent program is an excellent addition.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; Steve Pozzanghera, DFW; Jack Field, Washington Cattlemen's Association; Ed Owens, Hunters Heritage Council; Jim Potts, representing the five counties in the pilot program.