

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5356

As of February 9, 2011

Title: An act relating to allowing the use of dogs to hunt cougars.

Brief Description: Establishing seasons for hunting cougars with the aid of dogs.

Sponsors: Senators Morton, Swecker, Ericksen, Schoesler, Delvin, Hatfield and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Marine Waters: 2/07/11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & MARINE WATERS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: General Prohibition on Hunting Cougar with Dogs. Generally, a person is prohibited from hunting or pursuing specified wildlife, black bear and cougar, with the aid of dogs. Several exemptions to this general rule exist and include the use of dogs:

- by a public agency to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or public safety;
- to specified entities for scientific purposes, and or the protection of threatened or endangered species; and
- four cougar only, in selected areas of a game management unit to address a public safety need presented by one or more cougar where no practical alternative to the use of dogs exists.

Pilot Project for Hunting Cougars with the Aid of Dogs. In 2004 the Legislature established a three-year pilot program that allowed the use of dogs to hunt cougar in select game management units within Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan counties. The stated goal of the pilot program was to provide for public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments.

In 2007 a fourth year was added onto the pilot project, and other counties were allowed to petition the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) for inclusion in the pilot project. In order to participate, a county had to request inclusion and present specified information documenting a need to participate.

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 2008 the Legislature authorized an additional three years for the pilot project. The stated intent of the additional seasons was to allow the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to gather information necessary to determine whether a permanent program is warranted.

Summary of Bill: Provides DFW Permanent Authority to Establish Seasons for Hunting Cougar with Dogs. The Commission is authorized to adopt rules to establish seasons for hunting cougar with the aid of dogs. Implementing rules must be adopted by September 30, 2011, and must:

- ensure viable cougar population levels;
- reflect best available science on cougar management and conservation;
- be developed in collaboration with stakeholders; and
- allow the use of dogs only in game management units where DFW has determined that the use of dogs is necessary to conserve and manage cougar populations, to protect public safety and private property, or to address a localized concern that cougar populations exceeds community tolerance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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 pilot project for hunting cougar with dogs has been successful, and should be continued. This is a sensitive issue, but DFW is trying to use it as a tool to address public safety and better cougar management. Livestock producers have noticed a decrease in cougar depredation in areas where the pilot has occurred. This program has worked in the field, and the date indicates the pilot is working.

CON: Citizens have banned the use of dogs for hunting cougar by initiative. This is not extension of the pilot, but instead is a permanent and broader bill. Outfitters should not be able to profit from facilitating cougar hunting with dogs. This program is not responsible cougar management, and is not supported by good science.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Donny Martonello, Dave Ware, DFW; Lee Barker, citizen; John Stuhlmiller, WA Farm Bureau; Heather Hanson, Cattle Producers of WA; Jess Kasger, Jack Field, WA Cattlemen's Assn.; Brad Cameron, Klickitat Co. Cattlemen.

CON: Jennifer Hillman, Humane Society of WA; Sylvia Moss, PAWS; Bob Aegerter, citizen; Seth Cool, Conservation NW.