

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5356

As Passed Senate, March 7, 2011

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

Brief Description: Allowing the use of dogs to hunt cougars.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Marine Waters (originally sponsored by Senators Morton, Swecker, Ericksen, Schoesler, Delvin, Hatfield and Roach).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Marine Waters: 2/07/11, 2/16/11 [DPS, DNP].
Passed Senate: 3/07/11, 37-11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & MARINE WATERS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5356 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Regala, Vice Chair.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: General Prohibition on Hunting Cougar with Dogs. Generally, a person is prohibited from hunting or pursuing specified wildlife, including 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, 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

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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.

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 Substitute Bill: The current cougar pilot project for hunting cougars with the aid of dogs is extended for five years, and is now scheduled to end in 2016. The stated goals of the pilot project remain public safety, property protection, and cougar population assessments and include conservation and management of cougar populations. All hunting activities under the pilot project must be conditioned on a participating hunter not being permitted to exchange payment to a commercial enterprise for the use of dogs.

A county who requested inclusion and is currently participating in the pilot project may continue to participate in the additional five years of the pilot project.

By September 1, 2015, DFW must provide a report to the Legislature that includes a summary of the pilot project and any recommendations for more effective or efficient cougar management.

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 on Original Bill: 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.