

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1516

As Passed House:
March 4, 2019

Title: An act relating to establishing a department of fish and wildlife directed nonlethal program for the purpose of training dogs.

Brief Description: Establishing a department of fish and wildlife directed nonlethal program for the purpose of training dogs.

Sponsors: Representatives Blake, Dent, Chapman, Kretz, Walsh, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Springer, Pettigrew, Hoff and Shea.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources: 2/8/19, 2/15/19 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/4/19, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Fish and Wildlife Commission to establish and administer a training program for nonlethal pursuit of black bears, cougars, or bobcats with dogs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE, & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chapman, Dye, Kretz, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Ramos, Schmick, Springer and Walsh.

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

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.

Generally, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) may authorize the removal or killing of wildlife that is destroying or injuring property, or when necessary for wildlife management or research. In 1996 the passage of Initiative Measure No. 655 prohibited, with certain exemptions, the hunting of black bears, cougars, bobcats, or lynx with the use of dogs. One of the exemptions allows for employees or agents of county, state, or federal agency, while acting in their official capacity, to hunt black bears, cougars, bobcats, or lynx with the use of dogs in order to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety. Other exemptions allow for the pursuit, relocation, or capture for scientific purposes, or the hunting of black bears, cougars, or bobcats in order to protect endangered species. Lynx are classified as both a state and federal endangered or threatened species and may not be hunted or killed.

The WDFW must post on its Internet site the known details of all predatory wildlife interactions with humans, pets, or livestock within 10 days of receiving each interaction report. For this purpose, predatory wildlife means cougars, wolves, and grizzly bears. Certain information related to wolf depredations is exempt from public disclosure and is not required to be posted.

Summary of Bill:

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) must establish and administer a program by which certain individuals may be selected as agents of the state to engage in nonlethal dog training to pursue black bears, cougars, or bobcats in order to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety. The Commission rule must outline the requirements an applicant must meet in order to qualify as an agent of the state, including undergoing a criminal background check.

The Commission's authority to allow hunting lynx or pursuing lynx with the aid of dogs is removed, and the exception to allow for the "killing" of black bears, cougars, or bobcats in order to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety is changed to allow for the "hunting" of black bears, cougars, or bobcats in order to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety. Nonlethal pursuit under the Commission-established training program is added as an exemption to the prohibition on the hunting of black bears, cougars, or bobcats.

Language requiring the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to post information on all reported cougar interactions is deleted, but maintained elsewhere in statute for predatory wildlife interactions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This was a concept that stakeholders brought to the sponsor this summer. Many groups worked to perfect this bill in a collaborative process. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) law enforcement officers often call on dog handlers to address problem cougars. Recently, 80 cougars have been removed, more than in previous years. Handlers under the program will work as agents of the state. The WDFW will monitor and administer the program. Dog handlers often take dogs out to keep them in shape in case they are needed to address cougar problems. During that time, handlers must discourage dogs from chasing cougars, but handlers must require the opposite behavior when called by the WDFW, which can be confusing to the dog. This is a concept that has been supported in the past. There have been more anecdotal reports of cougar sightings recently and this is an important bill to allow for dog training to keep dogs ready for when they are needed to protect rural property owners.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Blake, prime sponsor; Dan Chadwick, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Buddy Woodberry, Working Dogs for Conservation; and Tom Davis; Washington Farm Bureau.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.