

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5482

As of February 17, 2025

Title: An act relating to the use of dogs to hunt black bear, cougar, or bobcat.

Brief Description: Concerning the use of dogs to hunt black bear, cougar, or bobcat.

Sponsors: Senators Liias and Chapman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/17/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Removes the exemption allowing an employee or agents of a county to hunt black bear, cougar, or bobcat with the aid of a dog.
- Provides that the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife may authorize an employee or agents of a county agency to conduct a cougar public safety response with the aid of a dog or dogs.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: 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. The passage of Initiative Measure No. 655 in 1996 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 a county, state, or federal agency, while acting in their official capacity, to hunt black bears, cougars, or bobcats with the use of dogs in order to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or for public safety.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill: The exemption authorizing an employee or agent of a county to hunt black bear, cougar, or bobcat with the aid of a dog for the purpose of protecting livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety is removed. WDFW may authorize an employee or agents of a county agency to conduct a cougar public safety response with the aid of a dog or dogs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: WDFW is the primary responder for safety issues with wildlife and have trained staff. Klickitat County has used dogs numerous times to remove cougars, presenting trespass and public safety issues. Cougars are part of a healthy ecosystem, and displacing adult cougars causes more disruption. Local control is great until it is abused with unnecessary and unsafe hound hunts. Wildlife belongs to the state, and it is a state duty to manage wildlife. By having WDFW in control of wildlife response, it will prevent needless deaths of cougars. Untrained volunteers are hunting cougars and this is not reported to WDFW. This work should be left to the professionals.

CON: Local control is necessary and is much quicker than waiting for WDFW. If it is after hours or on a weekend or holiday WDFW may not respond. There is a public danger and a worry about livestock and children. The bill takes away a necessary tool for public safety. Cougars are not rare and attacks occur frequently on livestock and small animals. Public safety is a sheriff's number one duty, and is not a primary issue for WDFW. Hound hunting does not increase conflict. Local trust is needed.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marko Lias, Prime Sponsor; Rachel Haymon; Pat Arnold, Friends of the White Salmon River; Josh Rosenau, Mountain Lion Foundation; Francisco Santiago-Ávila, Washington Wild First; Dan Paul, Humane World for Animals.

CON: Brad Manke, Stevens County Sheriff's Office; Mark Streuli, Washington Cattlemen's Association; Kathleen McKay, K-Diamond-K Guest Ranch; Clarence Rushing; Richard Eich.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.