

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) mission is “sound stewardship of fish and wildlife” with the intent of serving Washington’s residents. WDFW recognizes the value of natural resources to Washington residents and aims to protect, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife; while providing sustainable recreational and commercial opportunities. WDFW spends significant resources managing carnivore populations while minimizing and mitigating negative encounters between carnivores and people. In spring of 2019, WDFW established a committee to review the current approach for cougar management and the corresponding rule which outline recreational harvest seasons. The objective of the committee was to prepare and provide rule recommendations for consideration for the upcoming 2020 season. The committee was tasked with reviewing the existing program, evaluating alternative options and preparing recommendations for Fish and Wildlife Commission consideration during the spring 2020 season setting process.

This document represents a summary of the committee’s work including the development of alternatives for the Commission to consider and identifying the other alternatives discussed by the committee. Given the time-line, some of the ideas will require more thought and could be considered through the regular 3-year season setting or 6-year game management planning cycle.

## Internal Cougar Working Group

The internal cougar group included wildlife program and enforcement staff. We tasked all committee members to convey information to and from colleagues in their Regions and/or work units, and help write and review the documents developed by the committee.

Once the discussion of alternatives finished a smaller subcommittee compiled the information and notes into a single document containing the material.

The full cougar working group met on:

Jan. 30-31, 2019

May 7-8, 2019

June 11-12, 2019

July 11, 2019 (conference call)

July 22, 2019

The cougar subcommittee met on:

Aug. 5

Aug. 9

Aug. 16

Aug. 21

## **Alternative Options**

Throughout these meetings, the cougar working group discussed several options for consideration to modify the current recreational cougar harvest rule. The working group fully acknowledged that changes to recreational harvest may not reduce or minimize human-cougar conflict. The subcommittee identified the items presented below in no particular order. You will find a fuller explanation of each in this document.

- Change the cougar harvest guidelines to adult-only
- Change the general season to Sept. 1 – April 30 with no harvest guideline
- Change the cougar harvest guidelines based on habitat quality and geography
- Change model structure to include multiple years, and include conflict removals
- Use hunters in conflict resolution
- Evaluate social dynamics and change guidelines accordingly
- Have a single season that strictly follows the guidelines
- Address areas with suppressed ungulate concerns
- Recruiting more dedicated cougar hunters.

The committee determined communication was a key theme throughout each discussion and determined regardless of changes or status quo the topic needed to be addressed. Therefore, the topic of consistent messaging is addressed below rather than in the document as an option. The Public Affairs Office worked closely with the committee to develop a strategic communications plan that includes internal and external communications. Once the director and commissioners are briefed, the cougar working group and other department staff will meet with stakeholders and begin the public engagement process.

- Media outreach methods/tools to use include:
- Internal staff talking points
- FAQ/fact sheet
- Videos (distributed on FB, YouTube, and to media)
- Live webinar with chat feature
- Facebook posts
- External stakeholder meetings
- Blog posts
- News releases
- Email templates (for Legislators, County Commissioners, etc.)
- Interviews to media
- One-on-one meetings with specific groups

Discussions topics ranged from: length of time for season to long term outreach needs. While not all topic alternatives had 100% full support of the entire committee; the alternatives which seemed more feasible, within the truncated time-line, and had general support are identified with a more thorough explanation.