

Changing the season to increase late season hunting opportunity

Description

The department should consider improving efforts to recruit cougar hunters and marketing cougar hunting opportunities. Currently, less than 1% of the licensed big game hunters in Washington are cougar-only hunters. Approximately 36% of Washington big game hunters hold a cougar tag. Through this option the Department would re-evaluate the current cougar season structure to provide dedicated cougar hunters improved opportunities, but as a result, may impact opportunity for the hunters that currently purchase a cougar tag and value the opportunity to harvest a cougar opportunistically (e.g. while deer or elk hunting).

Create late guidelines season

In this option, the cougar season would start after the general deer and elk seasons close. There guidelines would be in place immediately and the season could close when the guideline is met or exceeded. The season would go until April 30 and close during the kitten rearing time.

Pros	Cons
Develop cougar advocacy group	Could increase pressure on adult cougars
Increase selection	Could be understood as decreased opportunity
	Could upset deer and elk hunters
	Could decrease revenue (less incentive to purchase a big game package that includes cougar)

Implementation

Follow the current rule-making process used by the department; Work with stakeholders to assess the proposed option, request public comment, and present the proposed rule change to the Commission for consideration and adoption.

Other points

The working group discussed that these options may be outside of the scope of this project and may have negative perceptions from our hunting and conservation communities. However, the working group recognizes the value of cougar hunters and considers there to be a need for recruiting those interested in hunting cougars.