Commission Request to Department "Blue Sheet"

Date of Request: August 13, 2022
Title of Request: Statewide Population Status, Trend, and Limiting Factors of Deer and Elk
Commissioner: John Lehmkuhl
Request Due Date: October 27, 2022 for Colville Commission meeting, or December 8 for Clarkston Commission meeting, or when feasible ASAP.
Priority Level (put one check in each row):
Importance: [X] High [] Medium [] Low
Urgency: [] High

Knowledge or Action Being Requested (narrative). Describe what you want to know. Be specific.

[X] Medium
[] Low

The Commission has heard a steady drumbeat of written and oral complaints from the hunting public at 2022 Commission meetings (e.g. August 5-6, 2022 from five eastern Washington County Commissioners) about very low populations of deer and elk as a result of predation by increasing populations of cougars, bears and wolves. For example, the status and the management of the WA Blue Mountains elk herd is a major controversy about elk and cougar population status, cougar predation effects on elk population status and hunting opportunity, and cougar removals. The controversial issue of spring black bear hunting also revolves, in part, around impacts on ungulate populations. In addition to the impacts on hunting opportunity, the public claims there are grave impacts to local economies and cultures from loss of hunting opportunity and revenue, and issues of human safety from expanding cougar populations. There are many opinions among the public, but many are based on false assumptions or not knowing or understanding the science.

I have looked for information to responsibly respond to the public about the population status of deer, elk, and predators, but found it hard to synthesize and discuss. Hence, I cannot respond. The 2021 Game Status and Trend Report is a logical place to get this information. However, there are no statewide summaries of status and trend for deer and elk. Rather, deer status and trend are given for 18 deer and 10 elk management units. Moreover, the deer assessment is complicated by the fact that there are three deer species to consider. Please summarize data on the predator population status and trend as well.

In the requested state-wide deer and elk population status and trend report (this Blue Sheet), it is imperative to describe the underlying factors contributing to the observed trends. Are cougar, bear and wolf populations expanding ("out of control", some say) throughout the state (at least in eastern WA) as claimed? If so, are they the main cause, as claimed, of low deer and

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elk populations? Bears and wolves are also implicated, but cougars remain the top predator issue with the public. We know much about wolves already from the annual wolf status report, but their predation impacts should be discussed along with the other predators.

These issues hit at the core the Department's mission to preserve and protect wildlife, and to maximize sustainable hunting opportunity. These issues are tops among the many current, significant, and acrimonious controversies before ethe Department and Commission. Therefore, I think it is an urgent issue to address. The public deserves some answer to these queries.

Output Requested (e.g., telephone call, memo, material from files, new report, presentation, other):

New report and presentation to the Commission and public at a regular or wildlife committee meeting. Ideally, the presentation would be made at an eastern Washington Commission meeting (see above for 2022 dates), or otherwise at a web/hybrid meeting. The report need not be an exhaustive literature review.

I would think much of this information is already being assembled for the 2022 Game Status and Trend Report. The requested report, anyway, would be important information to include in the 2022 GST Report. The blue-sheet report could be less than 10 pages if tables and graphs were used with explanatory text. Or, you could make it as long as you think appropriate to answer the questions.