

Spring Bear and Cougar Petitions

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Housekeeping

- Anis Aoude will cover the 2 Spring bear petitions and the cougar hunting petition.
- Jim Brown Conflict Section Manager in New Landowner Services Division will cover 1 of the 2 cougar petitions.
- Commission policy vote 11.18.2022.
 - Have since received numerous petitions for various management purposes.



Spring Bear Petition - Infanticide

- July 14, 2023.
- Asks for rulemaking on a 2024 recreational spring black bear hunting season and argues that a spring season would protect female bears and cubs from male bears that could prey on cubs in the spring.
- Carnivore Section Manager Stephanie Landry will present more on this topic.



Spring Bear Petition – Infanticide

Staff recommendation:

- Department staff recommend denying this petition as it is unlikely to have the intended result.



Spring Bear Petition – Social Science

- August 20, 2023.
- Asks for rulemaking for 2024 and future year spring black bear hunting seasons and asserts that public opinion and “conservation social science” related to this topic favors a spring black bear season.
 - The department has not conducted any public opinion surveys related to spring black bear hunting since the commission gave the staff policy direction against a recreational spring black bear season.
 - Public comment received included multiple perspectives on this topic and do not suggest that public opinion on this issue has changed.
 - The petitioner cites no conservation social science to support the rulemaking request.



Spring Bear Petition – Social Science Staff recommendation:

- Department staff recommend denying this petition.



Cougar Petition – Year-round Season

- July 19, 2023
- Asks for rulemaking to amend WAC 220-415-100 (Cougar hunting seasons and regulations) to allow for a year-round cougar hunting season.
- The petitioner argues that this is needed to keep nature in balance in a human-dominated landscape and to help curtail predation on ungulate neonates that are usually born in May and June.



Cougar Petition – Year-round Season

- The department currently manages cougars for stable numbers at the Population Management Unit (PMU) level.
- Guidelines for harvest in each PMU are based on research-derived densities and population growth rates. The guidelines are not intended to be harvest targets, instead they are suggested upper limits on the recreational harvest in each PMU.
- These guidelines are intended to maintain populations at levels that presume all cougar territories in the habitat are occupied. Research shows that, absent any harvest, cougars will maintain those territories without an increase in density.
- The petitioner argues that many PMUs do not reach the guideline and could remain open for harvest.
- We currently provide ample opportunity to hunt cougar. Hunting cougars year-round is unlikely to change the harvest significantly as the units that remain open do not lend themselves to successful cougar harvest opportunity in general and spring and summer conditions are not conducive to cougar harvest success.



Cougar Petition – Year-round Season

- The petitioner argues that many wildlife species give birth in the Spring and that cougars benefit from that birth pulse. This is a true statement that also applies to cougars themselves.
 - Although cougars can have young any time of the year, there is a birth pulse in the spring likely related to abundant ungulate numbers.
 - Even though it is illegal to kill spotted kittens, or an adult cougar accompanied by spotted kittens, cougar young are not mobile for the first few weeks of life and usually do not travel with the female during that period. Thus, hunting cougars during that period could increase the likelihood of orphaning their young.
- The department has other tools to consider when there is evidence that cougars are the limiting factor for ungulate population growth. Absent that need, cougars are managed as any other game species for continued abundance and ecosystem function, which includes utilizing a limited harvest season approach.
- The department recently recommended that the cougar rule remain unchanged until the Game Management Plan (GMP) is complete, or until the Commission provides department staff direction in the form of a policy related to carnivore hunting.
- Given all these complexities and potentially undesirable consequences of a year-round season, the department recommends denying this petition.



Cougar Petition – Year-round Season

Staff recommendation:

- Department staff recommend denying this petition as it is not necessary and may have undesired consequences.



Questions?

