

Nonlethal Pursuit Pass Program Update

Becky Elder - Enforcement Communications Manager

Captain Mike Jewell – North Central Region

December 2024



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

WDFW Public Safety Response



Agency Directives- Priority in providing the best public service related to dangerous wildlife incidents

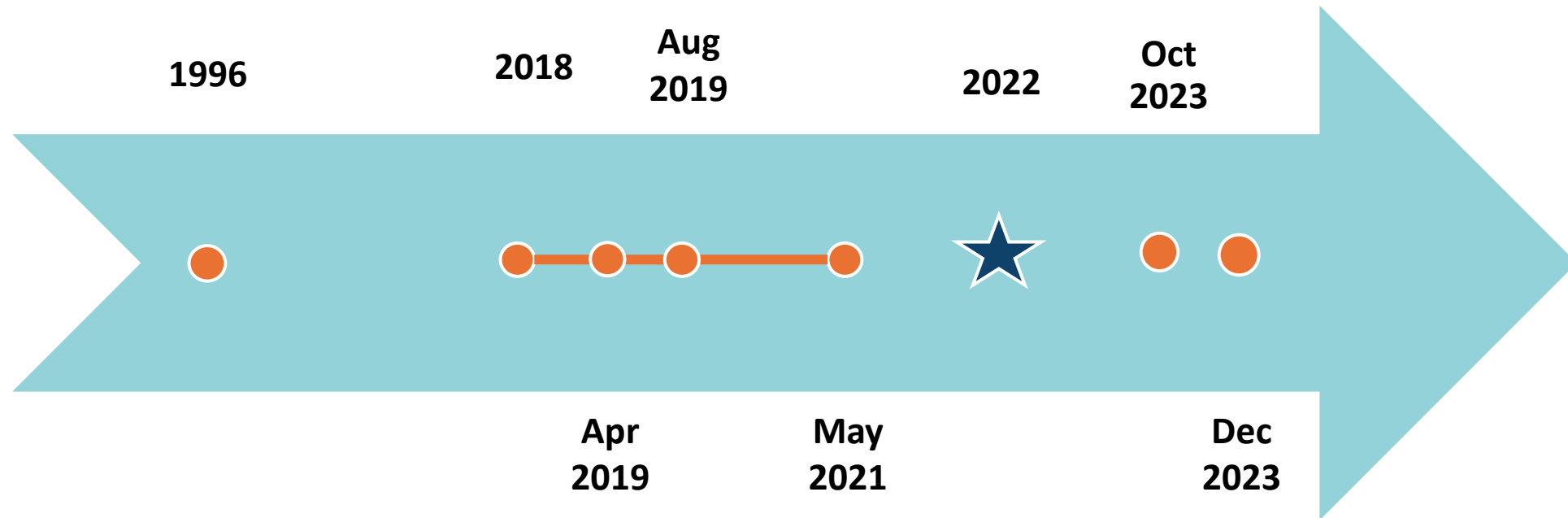
- Primary authority on dangerous wildlife incidents.
- WDFW Police frequently call upon dog handlers to assist in locating the involved animals.
- In these cases, handlers are acting under the purview as agents of the state.
- The NLPP program allows for handlers to keep dogs trained in between calls for service in Washington.

WDFW has received over 1500 calls for service specific to cougars in 2024

The objective of the non-lethal pursuit training pass program includes

1. Improving dog handler/Department relations,
2. Effective detection of target species when requested by the Department,
3. And the ethical treatment of working dogs and wildlife.

Background



RCW 77.15.245 Changes

2 (a) Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to prohibit the ((killing)) **(hunting)** of black bear, cougar, or bobcat(, ~~or lynx~~) with the aid of a dog or dogs by employees or agents of county, state, or federal agencies while acting in their official capacities for the purpose of protecting livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety.

2 (d) Nothing in this subsection may be construed to prohibit nonlethal pursuit training of dogs by persons selected through the process established in RCW [77.12.077](#) for future use for the purpose of protecting livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety.

RCW 77.12.077 Creation

Use of dogs to hunt/pursue black bear, cougar, bobcat—Rules—Training program—Nonlethal pursuit.

(1) The commission shall adopt by rule a process and criteria to select persons who may act as agents of the state for the purpose of using one or more dogs to hunt or pursue black bear, cougar, or bobcat to protect livestock, domestic animals, private property, or the public safety. The commission rule must outline the requirements an applicant must comply with when applying for the program including, but not limited to, a criminal background check.

(2) The department shall administer a training program to enable persons who have been selected pursuant to subsection (1) of this section to train dogs for use consistent with this section. The purpose of this program is to provide dog training opportunities using nonlethal pursuit.

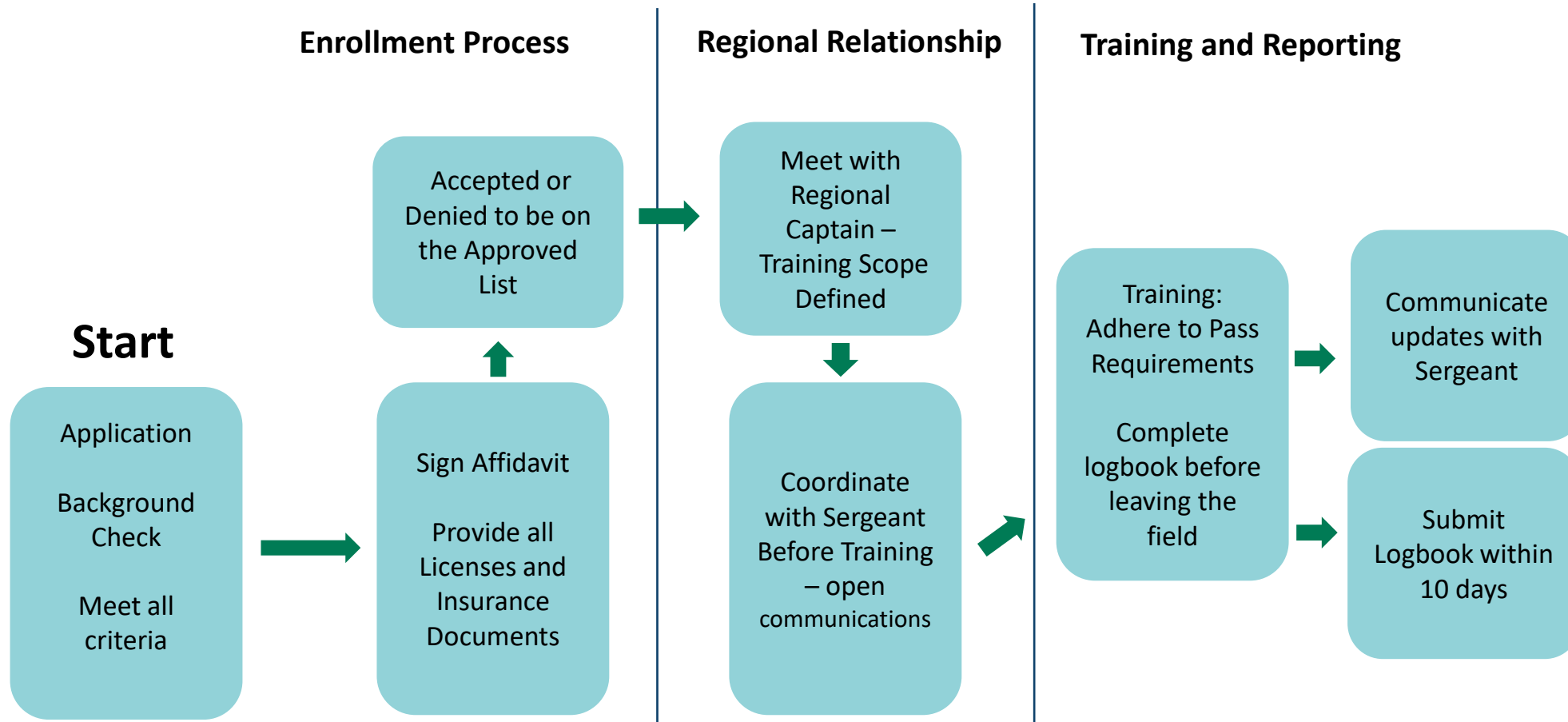
[[2019 c 226 § 1.](#)]



WAC 220-412-130

In order to effectively manage and train hound handlers and their dogs to be agents of the state used for cougar conflict response, the department establishes the nonlethal pursuit training pass program.

Program steps



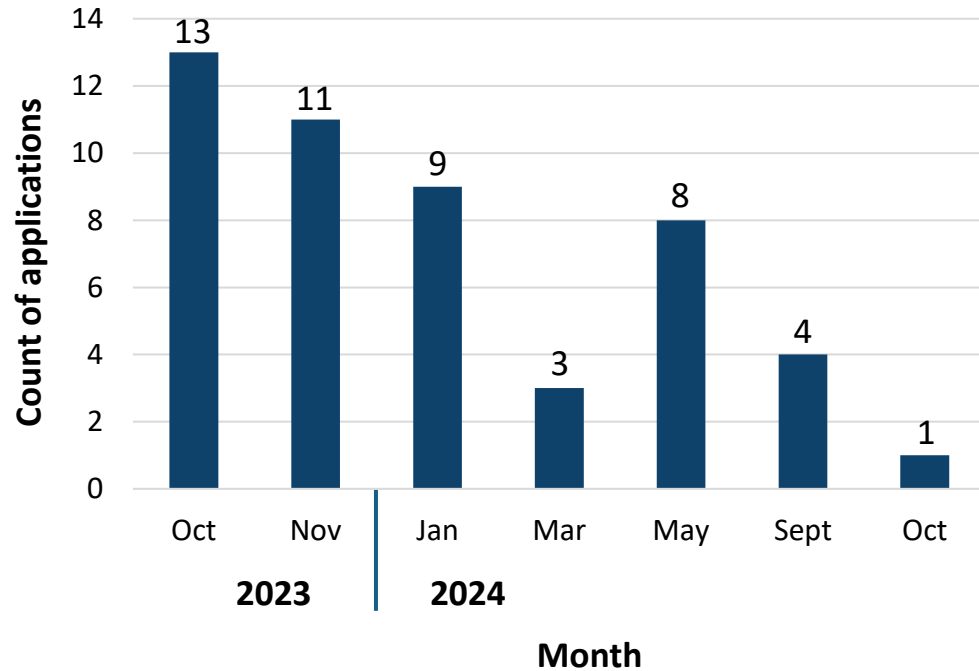


Year One Program Update

Oct. 1, 2023 – Oct. 31, 2024

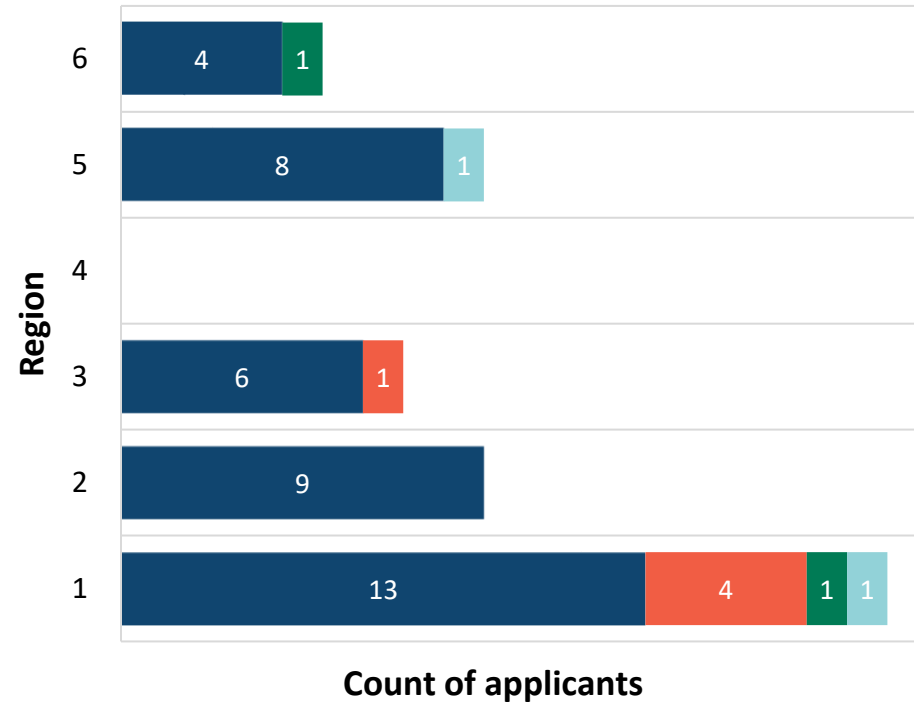
Application Phase

Count of Applications by Year & Month



49 Applications Received

Approved Denied Pending Withdrawn



40 Approved
5 Denied
2 Withdrawn

Applicants Training

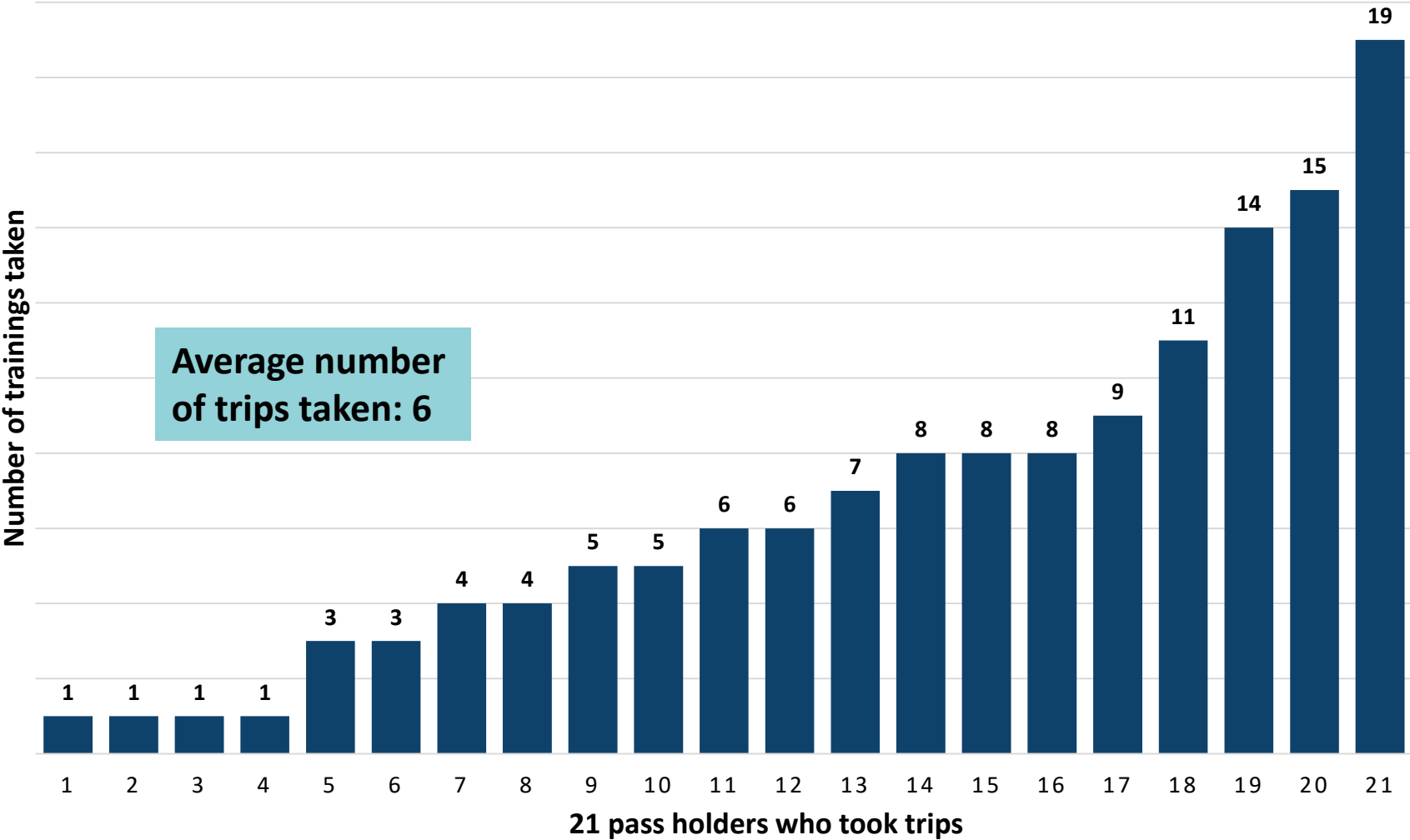
40 applicants passed and accepted into the program

21 took the opportunity to request a pass with their regional Captain

139 total trainings were conducted in the past year

6 trips, was the average number made by pass holders

Trips taken by Pass Holder

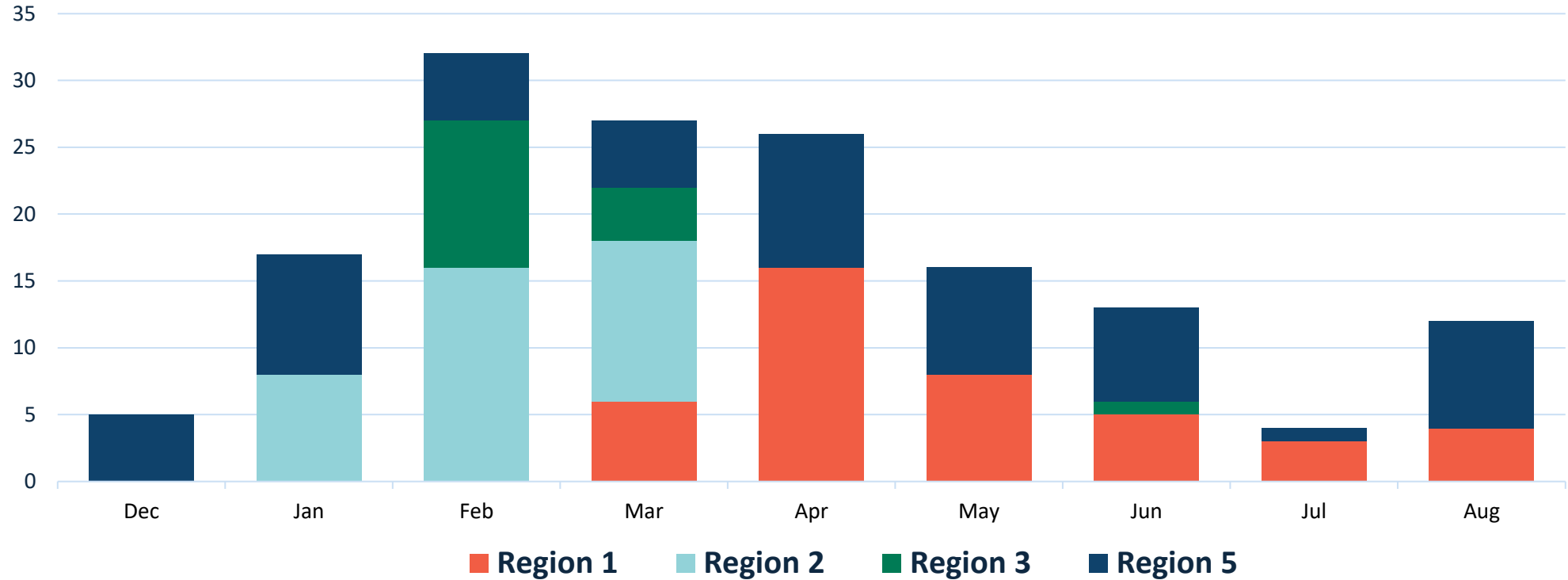


Trainings conducted by month

	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Apr	May
Training Conducted Statewide	5	18	32	27	16	12

June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
13	4	12	0	0

Trainings conducted by Region

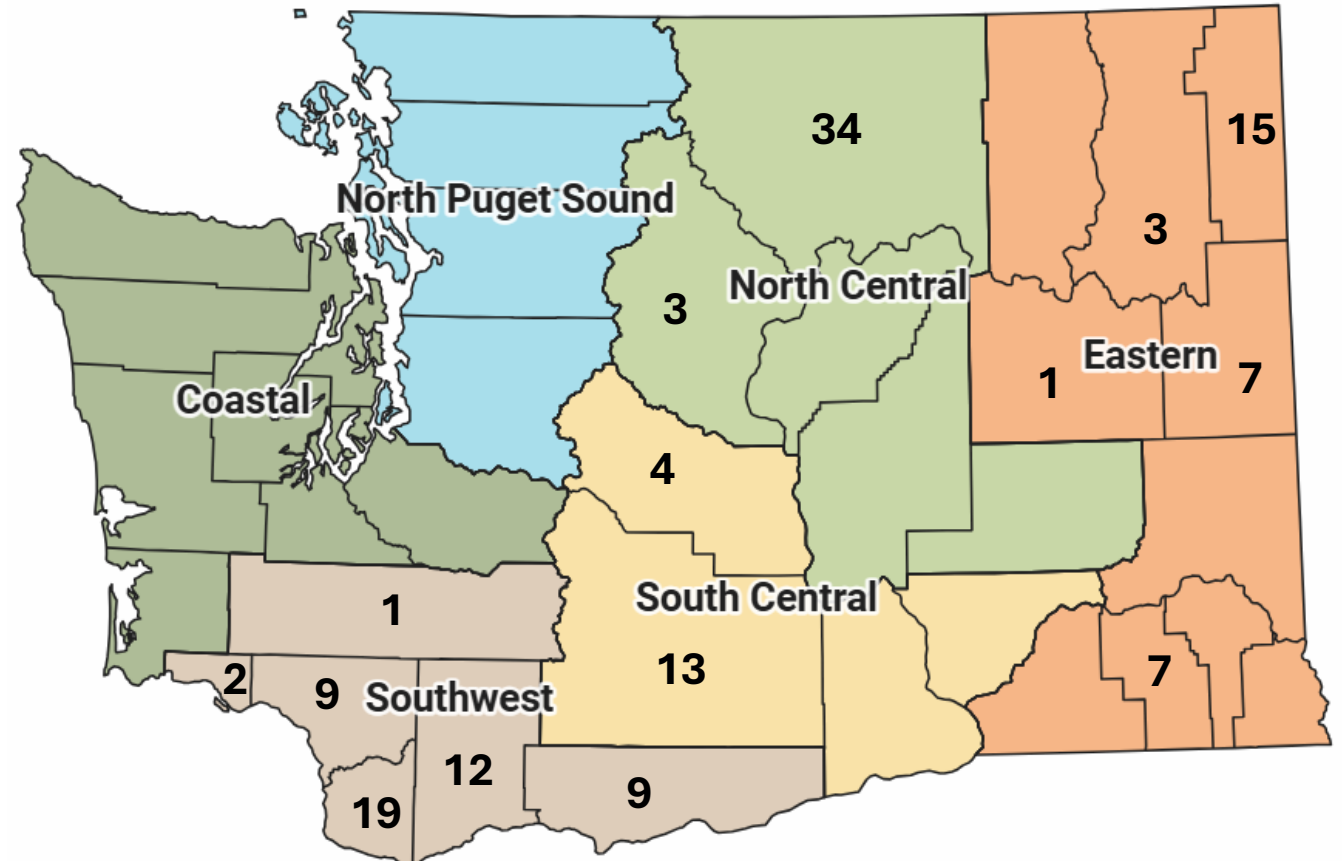


	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Region 1	0	0	0	6	16	8	5	3	4
Region 2	0	8	16	12	0	0	0	0	0
Region 3	0	0	11	4	0	0	1	0	0
Region 4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Region 5	5	9	5	5	10	8	7	1	8
Region 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Trainings

December 2023 – October 2024¹

3	Chelan
19	Clark
7	Columbia
9	Cowlitz
4	Kittitas
9	Klickitat
1	Lewis
1	Lincoln
34	Okanogan
15	Pend Oreille
12	Skamania
7	Spokane
3	Stevens
2	Wahkiakum
13	Yakima



Training Insights

Average number of dogs used: 4

Average start time: 8am

Average finish time: 2pm

Trained alone 88 trips or 63% of the time

31 trips taken with another approved NLPP applicant

20 trips where family accompanied (wife, son, daughter)

Trainings - Wildlife

Animals detected

- 103 trips or 75% of the trips No animal was seen or detected (often primary focus was not on locating a cougar)
- 21 trips or 15% of the trips had “strikes” or detection of cougar scent (not seen)
- No cougar family units (adult with young) seen or detected

Animals seen

- 14 trips where a cougar was seen
 - 1 Cowlitz
 - 2 Kittitas
 - 4 Okanogan
 - 2 Skamania
 - 5 Yakima
- 5 cougars in total treed (unconfirmed 3 females, 2 males)

Other species

- Bobcat seen (1 treed)
- Bear seen (4 treed)
- Deer
- Turkeys
- Domestic Kittens

Program Insights

- No non-lethal measures have been deployed (bear spray, air horn)
- No negative interactions with dogs-wildlife have occurred.
- No firearms have been used.
- No applicant has been found to be engaged in any unlawful activity.
- No applicant has had a pass pulled due to investigation or activity concerns.
- No internal or external comments or complaints have been received.
- One letter to the Director by an applicant expressed concerns with lack of cougar activity

*The handler that responded to the King Co biking incident is in our NLPP program (the first approved applicant) resides in region 3 which is why it took an hour and a half for him to get there, which is very fast considering he got the call and was able to immediately get on the road. I am hopeful we get interest in Region 4 but having folks in Regions 3 & 2 available is helpful.

Notes from Logbook

“Dogs found Cougar Scat in Road. Really good practice for Dogs to follow old scent. After a few hours I called dogs back, Dogs did not tree or disturb any animals.”

“6" fresh snow. Conditions were great. A lot of windblown tracks. Treed one adult female under 100lbs.”

“Weak Scent detection, Great Training for the young dog, difficult track, Older Dogs Tried to follow the slow-moving and we spent about 1.5 hours trying to figure it out heading into a Large Road-less area, after a while I called them back due to the slow-moving trail, Temps were warming up and I needed to get into work.”

“Tried to go in the other area, but my GPS'S roads didn't match the map area. I decided not to take the chance and be in wrong area. Did see a bear cross the Oakloma rd about the 7-mile marker.”

“Dog struck on a scent, then I stepped on a hive and had to leave the field ASAP”

“Old track dogs trailed it about 1 mile. We pulled them off when they crossed the road headed towards an area where we do not have permission to train on yet.”

“Took a litter of seven pups out to train alongside adult dogs.”

“Found 5 sets of lions tracks throughout the day.. really wet conditions, hardly any scent”

“Snow conditions were 5 days from last snow. Snow was hard and icy. Many trucks and sxs have destroyed the spring creek area. Dogs moved the track well and ended up making a loss in the melted-out dirt areas.”



Thank you. Questions?

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