

Summary

Meeting dates:	March 18-19, 2016
Agenda item:	Cougar Hunting Seasons and Regulations – Rule Briefing and Public Hearing
Presenter(s):	Anis Aoude, Carnivore Section Manager, Wildlife Program

Background:

Department staff will brief the Commission on the proposed amendments to WAC 232-28-297 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Cougar hunting seasons and regulations.

As described in the 2015-2021 Game Management Plan, the Department manages for stable cougar populations in all areas of the state, except the Columbia Basin and Puget Sound areas where the habitat is not suitable for cougar. To achieve that objective, the Department manages for a 12-16 percent harvest rate of an estimated cougar density within each of the 49 population management units or PMUs (PMUs not applied to Columbia Basin and Puget Sound units; see 2015-2021 Game Management Plan, pages 111-112). This 12-16 percent rate is based on research that indicated an estimated cougar population growth rate of 14 percent, plus or minus two percent.

Within each PMU, the Department has estimated cougar density based on the results from six study areas across the state. The Department is recommending a harvest guideline that represents a 12-16 percent harvest rate of the mean estimated density for each PMU. This recommendation balances recreational opportunity with cougar population management objectives. Other harvest guidelines that incorporate the uncertainty in density estimates will be discussed and may be considered by the Commission. The Department will provide information on these harvest rates and how they fit into the recreational opportunity and cougar population management strategies outlined in the Game Management Plan.

The Department is recommending a status quo hunt season framework; that is, an any weapon, early season from September 1 to December 31, followed by an any weapon, late season from January 1 to April 30. Each PMU has a harvest guideline that corresponds to a 12-16 percent harvest rate. Only recreational hunter-harvested cougar count toward the harvest guideline. The cougar season would not be closed in any PMU during the early season, even if the guideline is reached prior to January 1. If a PMU harvest guideline is reached during the late season, the Director (under existing Director authorities) may close the season. Starting January 1, cougar hunters may hunt in any PMU until April 30, or until the harvest guideline is reached and the Director closes the seasons, whichever occurs first.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

- Establish cougar hunting seasons with a 12-16 percent harvest rate guideline and apply that harvest guideline to each PMU.
 - Maintain an open cougar season from September 1- December 31. Under Director authority, close cougar hunt season in PMUs that reach or exceed the harvest guideline starting January 1.
 - Continue to conduct late-cougar season Jan 1 to April 30 of the following year.
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Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The Department conducted an extensive public involvement process to develop the 2015-2017 hunting season recommendations. The Department notified approximately 28,000 individuals and organizations informing them of the opportunity to provide comment on these proposed regulations. Additionally, these individuals and organizations were informed of the opportunity to provide verbal testimony at the March 18-19, 2016 Commission Meeting in Moses Lake.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

Take public comment. Adoption is planned for the April 2016 Commission meeting.

Draft motion language:

NA – Briefing and public hearing only.

Justification for Commission action:

NA – Briefing and public hearing only.

Communications plan:

WDFW Website
News Releases
Hunting Pamphlet
