

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: April 5-6, 2019

Agenda item: Cougar Update

Presenter(s): Kelly Susewind, Director

Background summary:

Cougar occur throughout most of the forested regions of Washington State, encompassing approximately 49% of the state. Cougar have been classified as game animal since 1966 and cougar harvest methods have changed over that time. Prior to 1996, cougar hunting with hounds comprised the majority of sport hunting. Since 1996, the use of dogs was banned for sport hunting by a voter initiative, except during a limited pilot project granted by the State Legislature between 2004 - 2010. Since 2010, dogs have not been used to aid in sport hunting, but the Department has used them to address cougar conflicts with livestock and pets.

Between 2000 and 2013, cougar research projects were conducted collaboratively between WDFW, Washington State University, and University of Washington. The scientific findings from those projects have resulted in numerous publications in peer-reviewed science journals and have been incorporated into how the Department currently manages cougar (2015-21 WDFW Game Management Plan (GMP) pp 107-115). As described in the GMP, cougar management is aimed at maintaining a stable cougar population, minimizing human/cougar conflicts, and sustaining hunting opportunities.

Some constituents have voiced concerns about cougar predation impacting deer and elk herds and have asked WDFW to reduce cougar populations in some parts of the state through increased hunting. Other constituents have voiced their support for a stable cougar population and have asked WDFW to take management steps to ensure those results. Historically, the Department has utilized the 3-year hunting season package process to address controversial hunting season issues due to the inherent, robust public engagement that comes with that process. The next 3-year season setting process is currently scheduled to begin in the spring of 2020 (for 2021-23 seasons), however, the Department has received requests to address the cougar hunting season structure sooner.

Director Susewind will provide an update on existing cougar management policy and provide an analysis of options for addressing potential changes to cougar management.

Staff recommendation:

Briefing Only

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

- Cougar Hunting season structure and rule adoption options – Briefing Only
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Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

NA

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Briefing only.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Briefing only.

Draft motion language:

None, briefing only

Post decision communications plan:

Briefing only.