



Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

1/25/2024

Agenda item:

Petition that asks the commission to begin rule making for a limited-entry depredation/management-based spring bear hunt in Washington.

Presenter(s):

Anis Aoude, Game Division Manager, Game Division, Wildlife Program

Background summary:

This petition asks the commission to begin rule making for a limited-entry depredation/management-based spring bear hunt based on the reliability of density and abundance estimates provided by WDFW Staff on December 14-15, 2023, which would address certain management objectives, such as reducing timber damage, ungulate neonate predation, or human-wildlife conflict. The petitioner asserts that the commission's decision to end spring bear hunting on November 18, 2022 disregarded science and was contrary to the commission's mission and responsibility, and that the commission has publicly acknowledged the need to address historical unscientific black bear season rule changes. The petitioner then references the December 14-15, 2023 meeting where WDFW scientists stated that the bear population is robust and stable and that the highest densities are in the Northeast, the Blue Mountains, and the western Olympic Peninsula, which were all former spring bear permit hunting zones. The petitioner also mentions the approval of the Black Bear Timber Damage rulemaking and a statement made by a commissioner during the December 2023 meeting supporting that we have enough bears to sustain a spring bear hunt. Despite a robust bear population, Department staff currently do not have any new or clearly identifiable management-based needs to justify a limited-entry spring black bear hunt beyond what has been presented to the commission in the past. This hunt would be considered recreational without a specific management-based need identified by Department staff, and the commission decided via a vote on November 18, 2022 that it would not approve recreational hunting of black bear in the spring. Thus, Department staff are not prepared to recommend a depredation/management-based spring black bear hunt. The Department may consider a management-based spring black bear hunt in the future after developing specific thresholds on which to base these recommendations, which may require additional guidance from the commission. For these reasons, department staff recommend denying this petition.

Staff recommendation:

Department staff recommend denying this petition based on the commission's prior votes on similar issues and the lack of newly identified management-based needs for a spring black bear hunting season.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

If this petition is denied, no rule making will take place to consider a spring black bear hunting season.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

The fiscal impact of this decision is minimal and is not different from the status quo, based on commission direction.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The public were given notice of this petition through the commission agenda and had an opportunity to submit written comment. There was no public involvement directly related to this petition prior to its submission. A public engagement process will occur if rule making occurs in the future.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Dependent on Commission decision.

Draft motion language:

I move we deny this petition.

Post decision communications plan:

Communicate the outcome of the Commission's decision to the petitioner.
