

Carnivore conflict

Regarding large wild carnivore conflict management

HB 2365 & SB 6139



Problem: The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is responsible for maintaining the state's fish and wildlife populations, while also addressing the safety and property of its human residents. This can present a challenge in managing large carnivores such as cougars and bears. Although attacks on humans are rare, WDFW routinely responds to public concerns about risks these animals pose to livestock, pets and personal safety.

Black bears, with an estimated statewide population of 25,000 animals, are the large carnivore that Washingtonians are most likely to encounter. Each year, WDFW receives 300 to 800 bear-related complaints, which tend to peak in years when natural bear foods such as berries are in short supply. In most cases, complaints stem from situations where bears become habituated to artificial food sources – either because people feed them deliberately or because bears gain access to garbage, bird feeders or other attractants.

Like bears, cougars range throughout most forested lands in Washington and draw the second-highest number of complaints each year.

Wolves, meanwhile, are naturally recolonizing Washington and are expected to generate complaints in future years.

Experience in Washington and other states has shown that public awareness is an important step in minimizing conflict between people and large carnivores.

Personnel are needed to provide public information on ways to avoid conflicts with carnivores; monitor carnivore locations, movements, and survival; and respond quickly to human-carnivore conflicts.

Compensation for commercial livestock losses is another important factor in building tolerance for large carnivores. The Legislature approved RCW 77.36 – which allows compensation for commercial livestock losses – but does not currently authorize payment for claims.

Solution: This proposal would improve carnivore management in several important ways including:

- Supporting reimbursement to livestock operators for losses resulting from carnivore predation.
- Improving wildlife protection by increasing penalties for illegally killing wolves
- Preventing carnivores becoming habituated to humans through feeding

Benefits: Large carnivores are essential to a healthy and functioning natural ecosystem. This proposal would improve carnivore management, increase public safety and compensate livestock losses.

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Carnivore conflict management— Proposal detail:

The proposed legislation would:

- Modify RCW chapter 77.36 to allow payment to landowners for livestock losses due to large carnivores.
- Create a new statute under RCW chapter 77.15, making it illegal to feed dangerous wildlife.
- Modify RCW 77.08.030 to classify wolves as big game and add a \$4,000 penalty for illegally killing wolves.

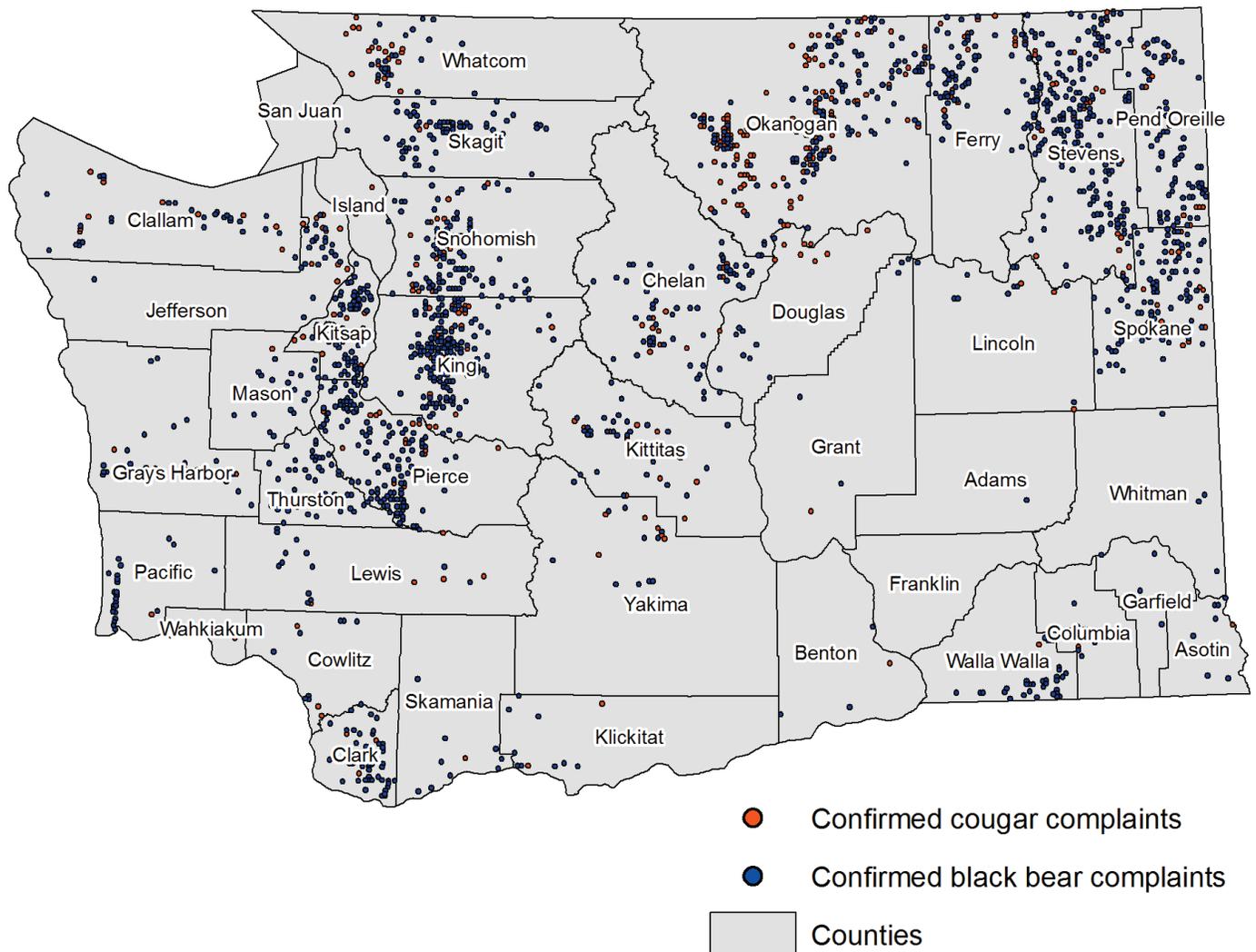


Figure 1. Spatial distribution of confirmed black bear and cougar complaints in Washington.