

REC'D AFTER DEADLINE

Columbia County Board of Commissioners

Item # 13

cc: wild life



District 1
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District 3
Charles G. Reeves

341 E Main Street
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The Honorable Mike Hewitt
Washington State Senate
314 Legislative Building
PO Box 40416
Olympia, Washington 98504-04169

RECEIVED
JUN 05 2009

FISH AND
WILDLIFE COMMISSION
amy

Re: Cougar Hunting Restrictions

Dear Senator Hewitt:

I have been in contact with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Mr. Martorello) concerning the dramatic reduction in the cougar hunting season in southeast Washington. To date, the information I have received is not adequate to convince me that reducing the cougar hunting season is prudent in light of recent cougar problems in southeast Washington. The cougar population has increased dramatically over the last 15 years, and complaints from citizens in Columbia County have increased right along with the cougar population. The department has curtailed the cougar hunting season while they study the population, which seems to be contrary to common sense when you consider the situation with cougar sightings and problems in cities and local areas.

Local wildlife officials met with the county commissioners and citizens to discuss cougar issues in 2008 and the department representatives appeared to understand the concern expressed by our citizens during that meeting. Mr. Martorello, indicated the departments goal is to maintain the cougar population at the current level by greatly reducing the cougar season. It is apparent the department really doesn't know what the cougar population is, because they have implemented a study to determine the status of the cougar population in the Blue Mountains. However, they went ahead and reduced the cougar hunting season before having any data on the local cougar population. The logic behind the departments reasoning appears to be weak at best, and possibly somewhat anti-hunting at worst. Why would the department want to maintain the cougar population at a level that concerns local communities without discussing the issue before curtailing the hunting season? Several years ago the department met with county commissioners in northeast Washington before making major changes to the cougar hunting season. I would expect that counties in southeast Washington would receive the same consideration, but it is obvious we did not, because the department made the changes without discussing those changes with the counties. It seems the department would want to determine the status of the cougar

population before implementing any changes to the hunting season, especially when considering the concerns expressed by cities, counties, and local citizens.

There appears to be an attitude that local communities should have no say in how wildlife populations are managed in the local area. First, I was told by Mr. Martorello there would be no significant restrictions in the cougar hunting season, then the Wildlife Commission passed the recommendation to drastically shorten the cougar season and place weapons restrictions on portions of the season. I am sure you can understand our dissatisfaction with the department's apparent lack of response to concerns expressed by county commissioners and citizens.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has been doing research on cougar for several years, and are actually controlling cougar populations in some areas to improve elk populations. An article in the Tri-Cities Herald earlier this spring indicated the cougar population in the Blue Mountains of Oregon was stable, even though 170 cougar were harvested each of the last two years. Oregon has not curtailed their cougar season, even though they harvest approximately 10 times more cougar than are harvested in Washington's Blue Mountains. I do not believe a drastic reduction of the cougar season is justified in southeast Washington, when you consider the number of cougar sightings in rural areas and complaints expressed by local citizens.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in reviewing the problem we are having with the department's lack of communication and resistance to local concerns when dealing with the increased cougar population.

Thank you,



Richard W. Jones
Chairman

Cc: Washington State Representative Laura Grant-Herriot
Washington State Representative Maureen Walsh
Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission Chairman Miranda Wecker
Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission Vice Chairman Gary Douvia
Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission Member Dr. Kenneth Chew
Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission Member Conrad Mahnken, Ph.D.
Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission Member George Orr
Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission Member Chuck Perry
Washington State Fish and Wildlife, Special Species Section Manager Donny Martorello

REC'D AFTER DEADLINE

CC: COMMISSION 6-6-09
cc: Wildlife Program

Yeager, Susan D (DFW)

From: Mary Lou Peterson [m|peterson@co.okanogan.wa.us]
Sent: Thursday, June 04, 2009 4:44 PM
To: Commission (DFW)
Cc: Morton, Sen. Bob; Kretz, Rep. Joel; Short, Shelly
Subject: Five Counties testimony on the June 6th Cougar program changes

ITEM #13

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FISH AND
WILDLIFE COMMISSION

Please pass this email on to the Commission Members as our public testimony for June 6th at 9:00 am, the Cougar pilot program changes.
Thank You.

Dear Commissioners,

This Cougar pilot program has been an extremely important and effective pilot project for the past four years. We have had some amazing results in the safety of our citizens, our livestock and other wildlife. We have work for the past four years cooperatively with the Department and many hours of long discussions have taken place in order to have the best program possible. It has been a successful program and we want to have it become a permanent law.

The proposed changes for the 2009 season came as a surprise to the five Counties due to no communication or discussions were held for our impute or agreement on these changes. Many citizens within our five Counties on Wildlife Task Forces usually have the opportunity to analyze any rule changes to see if they are feasible for the program. This year we were not contacted ahead of time for this collaborative process to take place with all five Counties at the table. I did meet with Donny Martorello on June 15th and I discussed our comment to the Commission with the five County Commissioners.

The number one main objection that the Counties have is: Reducing the hunt and pursuit season by one month. Instead of starting the season on December 1st it will begin on January 5th of 2010 and ends on the regular day of March 31st. To shorten the season by one month, will also shorten the pursuit season which has been a key factor in the behavior changes of the cats as it states in the law. Also, by shortening the season, it applies more pressure on the hunters to kill earlier in the season which could affect the female quotas being filled earlier than usual, rather than waiting a male cat.

So again, we do not object to the other changes, but do not shorten our hunting season. We have all fought long and hard to create a program that works, keep it the same. I respectfully ask each of you to read and understand the law that is in place, we are to collaborate together to make these decisions.

Thank you for your time
Respectfully,

Mary Lou Peterson, Okanogan County
Ferry County
Pend Oreille County
Stevens County
Chelan County



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