

Agenda Item 9

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WAC 232-12-243 Cougar management removals.

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDED ADJUSTMENTS

The following adjustments are proposed since the Code Reviser (CR 102) filing and are *not included* in your notebook.

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- Change the definition of “sighting” from:

(g) "Sighting" means a direct observation of one or more cougar, in urban or rural settings, near individuals or residences; typically more than chance observations.

to:

(g) "Sighting" means a confirmed direct observation of one or more cougar, in urban or rural settings, near individuals or residences; typically more than chance observations.

The purpose of the change is to clarify that only confirmed sightings are used.

- Change the definition of “Human-cougar interaction” from:

(h) "Human-cougar interaction" means a human-cougar safety incident, livestock or pet depredation, cougar nuisance activity, or cougar sighting event.

to:

(h) "Human-cougar interaction" means a confirmed human-cougar safety incident, confirmed livestock or pet depredation, confirmed cougar nuisance activity, or confirmed cougar sighting event.

The purpose of the change is to clarify that only confirmed events are used to identify a human-cougar interaction.

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- Under section 5c, change the language from:

To verify if the cougar removal season is open or closed in each game management unit, the permit holders shall notify the department's enforcement program in Olympia within twenty-four hours prior to exercising a public safety cougar removal permit.

to:

To verify if the cougar removal season is open or closed in each game management unit, the permit holders shall notify the department's enforcement program in Olympia within twenty-four hours prior to exercising a cougar management removal permit.

The purpose of the change is to use consistent terms throughout the WAC and to avoid associating personal safety directly with cougar removals.

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SUMMARY OF WRITTEN PUBLIC INPUT

WAC 232-12-243 Cougar management removals.

COMMENTS	AGENCY RESPONSE
Changing the title of WAC is not consistent with statutory authority.	Thank you for your comment. The purpose of changing the title of the WAC was to avoid associating personal safety directly with cougar removals in a rule title. The title change does not have any impact on the management actions in the rule.
Removing the threshold of 11 confirmed complaints and replacing it with the 2008-2010 complaint trend violates the RCW 77.15.245.	When WAC 232-12-243 was established, confirmed cougar complaints were at record high levels. The thresholds were consistent with the complaint level in the Game Management Units with the most complaints at that time. Confirmed complaints have declined dramatically since then (about 73 percent decline) and are now at the lowest levels recorded. The purpose of the change in the threshold for implementing a removal is to recalibrate to recent complaint trends. If the threshold was felt as status quo, complaint levels would need to increase dramatically before the Department would take action. The Department wants to be more responsive than that. However, the Department's intent is not to lower the threshold just in order to implement more removals. The concept is if the Department detects an increase in confirmed complaint levels beyond levels in recent years, then we would take action in just those focused areas. Based on input similar to yours, we amended the threshold from the 2008-2010 complaint levels to the 2005-2010 complaint levels. We thought the 5-year trend would provide a better average for comparisons.

Sightings alone do not constitute a public safety threat.	We agree sightings alone to not constitute the need for a removal under this rule. We are modifying the language to clarify the intent that confirmed sightings under unusual conditions would raise concerns.
Integrate the published science on “sinks” into the draft WAC.	Thank you for your comment. We adjusted the harvest rate to not exceed 14 percent (1 cougar per 300 square kilometers of complaint areas) to avoid creating population sinks.
The harvest rate of 1 cougar per 130 square kilometers of habitat is too high of a removal rate.	Thank you for your comment. We adjusted the harvest rate to not exceed 14 percent (1 cougar per 300 square kilometers of complaint areas) to avoid creating population sinks.
What is the biological justification for the cap of 109 cougars?	The cap was inserted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission several years ago to put some limit on the potential harvest under this action. There is no biological rationale for the cap level of 109 cougars removed.
Why does the Department allow hound hunters who harvest a cougar before January 15th to continue hunting for a second cougar with dogs?	That language was carried over from when the WAC was originally established in 2001. The purpose at the time was to increase the likelihood that the target removal was achieved. The rationale was if hunter success was fairly low by mid-Jan, then the Department would re-authorize those hunters that had been successful. This has not been an issue with the program; as such, we amended the draft WAC to limit it to one cougar per permit hunter.
Who determines what constitutes a “chance observation” form of cougar sighting?	Department enforcement staff responding to the incident would make the determination.
Please make the necessary increases in cougar hunting seasons to reduce the growing cougar numbers in Washington and return a balance of the cougar population with the available habitat.	We are developing cougar harvest objectives (e.g. 14 percent of the population, which may include female and male and/or age objectives) that will maintain a stable cougar population in equilibrium with the environment. Hunting season recommendations will be consistent with those harvest objectives.

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SUMMARY OF WRITTEN PUBLIC INPUT

WAC 232-28-272 Black bear and cougar hunting seasons and regulations.

COMMENTS	AGENCY RESPONSE
Consider having a one tag season from Sept. 1 to Mar. 31 without any weapon restrictions.	This has not been considered for the 2011-2012 season, but might be an option that the Department would consider for the 2012-2014 three year season package.
Consider a year-round season.	This has not been considered for the 2011-2012 season, but might be an option that the Department would consider for the 2012-2014 three year season package.
Consider starting cougar season when bear season starts.	This has not been considered for the 2011-2012 season, but might be an option that the Department would consider for the 2012-2014 three year season package.