



Director Delegated Petition Summary Sheet

Decision must be made on or before:

2/14/2025

Agenda item:

A petition that asks the commission to begin rule making for the Washington State Spring Bear Hunting Season and to provide justification for prior claims to previous petitions.

Presenter(s):

Stephanie Landry, Section Manager, Game Division, Wildlife Program

Background summary:

This petition requests that the Department begin rulemaking for a Washington spring bear hunting season and that the Department provide justification for prior claims to the petitioner's previous petitions. The petitioner states that he is requesting data from the Department through this petition and through the Public Records Request (PRR) process to substantiate WDFW staff's previous claims about why the Department does not recommend a spring bear season for conflict purposes. Department staff are responding to the PRR from this individual and will only address the remaining requests of this petition herein. This petition also requests that "the Department request the State Legislature to include Black Bear Conflict into the WDFW Predatory Wildlife Incidents reporting." This request will be shared with the WDFW Conflict Section for consideration.

This petition also requests Department staff "provide documentation to support their claim that hunting is not the most recommended tool for human-bear conflict situations" in the spring. WDFW recommends following the steps listed in this article to reduce and eliminate human-bear conflict: <https://wdfw.medium.com/news-the-time-for-spring-cleaning-as-black-bears-alarm-clocks-start-ringing-3064364b47ab>.

The petitioner also cited a news article that referenced a journal article from Garshelis et al. (2020) titled, "Population reduction by hunting helps control human-wildlife conflicts for a species that is a conservation success story." This journal article found that hunting is a useful tool for dealing with conflict, but not in an immediate sense with response to conflict calls. This research found that hunted populations that are managed to remain at a certain level can help to reduce conflicts. WDFW staff use the fall general bear hunting season to do just that. The Department manages for stable bear populations across the state, except in urban areas where the social carrying capacity for bears is lower. The Department is doing this using harvest during the fall general season. There is a lack of evidence to show that having a spring bear season is necessary for managing conflict. Current direction from the Fish and Wildlife Commission is to not have recreational spring black bear hunting without a proven management need. Because WDFW manages bear populations in the fall, there is no management need to harvest black bear in the spring as well at this time.

Finally, the petitioner notes that WDFW has the approved Master Hunter Shooting Proficiency Certification that allow Master Hunters to qualify as Master Archery Hunters. The petitioner requests that these hunters be used to target conflict bears in no shooting zones, stating that hunters are more appropriate for responding to conflict than enforcement officers or conflict specialists. As noted in our Policy for responding to dangerous wildlife, enforcement and/or conflict specialists are our first responders to conflict calls. Response must be timely, and we cannot rely on hunters to respond in time. Additionally, general hunting seasons are not intended to be used for solving immediate conflict situations, especially with dangerous wildlife.

Staff recommendation:

Department staff recommend denying this petition in its entirety based on Commission policy direction, internal policy direction, and previous decisions by the Director and Commission for initiating a spring bear hunt.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

If the Director denies the petition, no rule making will take place to contemplate a spring black bear recreational hunting season.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

If the Director denies the petition and no rulemaking occurs, the fiscal impact of this decision is expected to be minimal.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

The Wildlife Program recommends the petition be denied.

Post decision communications plan:

WDFW will communicate the outcome of the Director's decision to the petitioner.
