

Raszka Shelley

From: Gallagher Chuck
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2015 1:49 PM
To: Raszka Shelley
Subject: FW: HB-2050 and HB-2181 Public Hearing Comments

Testimony on cougars,

From: Craig [<mailto:craig1945@centurylink.net>]
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2015 1:36 PM
To: Gallagher Chuck
Subject: HB-2050 and HB-2181 Public Hearing Comments

Chair Witt and Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Craig Starr and I am an officer representing the position of Oregon Bow Hunters (OBH) on House Bill (HB) 2050 and HB-2181. I attended the Public Hearing on the bills this morning, but did not get an opportunity to offer comments. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend the continuation of the Hearing this evening. In lieu of that, I offer my comments on behalf of OBH by way of this message.

Prior to 1967, Cougars were unprotected in Oregon. Cougars were hunted year-round and any Cougar could be legally killed. The Cougar population in Oregon in the 1960's was estimated to be about 200 animals. In 1967, the Oregon Legislature designated Cougars as a game mammal to be managed by ODFW. ODFW established hunting seasons and Cougar tags, set conservative tag numbers and carefully managed the Cougar harvest. By 1994, when BM-18 was enacted by voters, the Cougar population in Oregon was estimated to be about 3,000 animals – a 1,500% increase from the population only about 30 years earlier even though hunting Cougars with dogs remained in effect during those intervening years. Unfortunately, rather than recognizing the remarkable recovery of the Cougar population under ODFW management, many Oregon voters were misled into thinking that Cougars were threatened with extermination as a result of hunting with dogs.

As a result of BM-18, ODFW lost its one (1) effective tool – hunting with dogs – for management of Cougars (and bears) on an effective state-wide management level. There is lots of talk by opponents of bills like HB-2050 and HB-2181 about ODFW still being able to use dogs as needed to address instances where Cougars are problematic for one reason or another, but the restrictions on ODFW's management capability cause a response to problems that is slow, costly and essentially ineffective except on a very short-term and geographically limited basis.

OBH has grave concerns for Oregon's deer and elk populations for many reasons, not least of which is heavy predation by an essentially unmanaged and excessive Cougar population since BM-18 was approved. One can suggest, as the representative from the Sierra Club did this morning, that he or she hasn't seen any evidence that Cougars have had any adverse impact on deer and elk populations. However, what can't be questioned is that the added 2,000 or so adult Cougars in Oregon in 2015 (compared to 1994 when BM-18 was approved) kill some 100,000 prey animals each year – mostly deer and elk, but also domestic livestock (goats, sheep, llamas, cattle and horses) and family pets. It should be noted that the additional taking of deer and elk by Cougars in 2015 (compared to 1994 when BM-18 was approved) is nearly double the annual harvest of deer and elk by legal hunting.

Each deer and elk available for hunting by sportsmen and sportswomen is worth hundreds of dollars to Oregon's economy. And, the adverse economic impact of hunting reductions due to diminished deer and elk populations is most severely felt in Oregon's rural communities where economic opportunities are otherwise somewhat limited as well. Unfortunately, it is the residents of rural Oregon who are paying the economic price for urban voters' approval of BM-18

I don't know a single hunter who wants to return to the bad old days of the 1960's and earlier when Cougars were vermin to be exterminated. However, we want a managed balance to be possible between Cougar populations and the populations of deer and elk, and that's not happening now due to the political experiment that is the result of BM-18!

OBH urges you to report out a bill with a "do pass" recommendation allowing the voters in Oregon's individual counties the opportunity to decide whether dogs should be allowed for hunting Cougars under management by ODFW.

Sincerely,

Craig Starr
2nd VP Bowhunting and Legislation
Oregon Bow Hunters