

# POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFLUENCES ON COUGAR MANAGEMENT LEGISLATION IN WASHINGTON STATE: POST INITIATIVE 655

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**Abstract:** In November of 1996, Washington State voters approved Initiative 655 (I-655) prohibiting the use of dogs to hunt or pursue cougars (*Puma concolor*). I-655 has initiated increased awareness, public safety concerns, and legislative activity surrounding cougars in Washington State and has highlighted differing opinions of cougar management in eastern and western regions of the state. I compared population and economic data for western and eastern Washington counties with the highest reported cougar-human interaction in an attempt to describe and understand the social values and political context of cougar management legislation in Washington after I-655. I searched newspaper and television news archives to characterize how cougars and cougar management are presented to the public and to judge its potential role in the legislative process. Washington's northeastern counties (Chelan, Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille) have significantly lower human population levels, lower household and family incomes, higher unemployment, a greater percentage of families and individuals living in poverty, and a higher percentage of people working in forestry, fisheries, and farming than counties in western Washington (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Thurston, Skagit, and Whatcom). These results suggest Washington's five northeastern counties are rural, resource-based communities with political and social values that differ from those of the more populated, urban counties to the west. Search results of Washington newspaper and television news archives indicated greater coverage of cougar-human interaction (61.6% of media reports) and few reports of cougar science (12.3% of media reports). Since 1996, media coverage of human-cougar interactions and utilitarian views of northeastern county residents and politicians has contributed to eight legislative attempts to overturn all or part of I-655. The most recent attempt, Substitute Senate Bill 6118, has successfully authorized the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars in Washington's five northeastern counties. The passage of this bill in light of increasing cougar harvest rates, documented declines in northeastern cougar populations and a decline in cougar complaints relative to pre I-655 levels, suggests that cougar management legislation in Washington may be influenced by political and social factors and may not reflect a scientific understanding of cougar ecology and behavior.

**Key words:** Cougar, *Puma concolor*, Washington, State Initiative 655, Substitute Senate Bill 6118, hound-hunting, socio-economic descriptions, public safety, wildlife media coverage

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## INTRODUCTION

Washington State (172,348 km<sup>2</sup>) is an ecologically diverse area that is home to 6.1

million people (US Census Bureau 2004) who reside within 39 counties (Figure 1). Washington is also home to an estimated



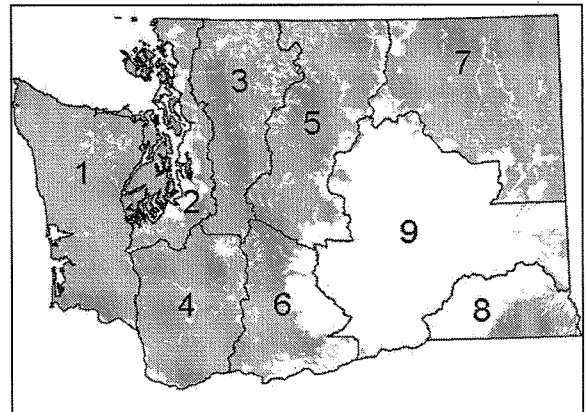
**Figure 1: Washington State and its 39 counties.**

population of 2,400 - 4,000 cougars (*Puma concolor*) ranging across 88,497 km<sup>2</sup> of forested habitat. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) manages cougars as a game species within nine Cougar Management Units (CMUs, Figure 2) to provide recreational hunting opportunities, ensure public safety, and maintain stable, viable cougar populations (WDFW 2002). However, ensuring public safety and maintaining viable cougar populations within some of Washington's ecological and political boundaries is a source of significant controversy.

The size and central location of the Cascade Mountains in Washington provides a natural divide that separates western and eastern into ecological and socio-economic regions. Differences in the social values, economics, and ecology of these two regions may translate into differences of opinion over the status, management, and ecological significance of cougars; as well as other wildlife species. These differences were demonstrated in November of 1996 when 63% of Washington voters and 31 of 39 counties approved Initiative 655 (I-655) outlawing the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars. The Humane Society of the United States and affiliated animal rights organizations backed I-655 with the purpose of eliminating recreational hound hunting of cougars, a practice they viewed as cruel and

inhumane (Stiffler 1999, Pacelle 2002). Proponents of I-655 garnered support for the ban primarily from environment groups and suburban/urban voters living in more populated counties of western Washington. Opposition to I-655 stemmed largely from rural communities throughout the state, but opposition to the initiative was greatest from voters east of the Cascade crest (WA Secretary of State, personal communication 2004). Opponents argued that cougar populations would grow unabated and public safety would be threatened as cougars "lost their fear of people" (Stiffler 1999). Many of these individuals viewed hound hunting of cougars as a way of life and strongly opposed what they perceived was increased intervention by government agencies and urbanites into their communities. Specifically, opposition to I-655 existed in four of the five northeastern counties: Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille, (WA Secretary of State, personal communication 2004).

Economics and social values have always played a significant role in the management of North American carnivores (Clark et al. 1996, Kellert et al. 1996, Rasker and Hackman 1996) and cougar management in Washington appears to be no



**Figure 2: Map of Washington State with Cougar Management Units and distribution of suitable cougar habitat (in gray). Figure courtesy of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2004.**

exception. In the years following passage of I-655, several unsuccessful attempts were made to overturn all or portions of I-655. Policy and management of wildlife should be based in science (Anderson et al. 2003), but in Washington, non-scientific factors may have influenced cougar management legislation following the passage of I-655. Fueled by concerns over public safety and media reports of cougar-human interactions, a complex network of social values and politics at the state and county level have acted as important factors directing cougar management legislation in Washington.

### **Objectives**

I present and compare information on statewide media coverage of cougars and differences in population levels, economies, and social values for western and eastern Washington counties where the highest levels of cougar-human interaction are reported. This information helps to relate the context of cougar management legislation in Washington State immediately preceding and following the passage of I-655. Particular emphasis is placed on Substitute Senate Bill 6118 (SSB 6118), legislation that authorizes the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars as part of a pilot study in Washington's five northeastern counties; Chelan, Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille. Additional information on cougar harvest rates, population estimates, and complaint statistics is presented to demonstrate that cougar management legislation may not be based in scientific understanding of cougar ecology, behavior and demographics. The recent legislative history of Washington State highlights the need for managers to understand and communicate with the social and political network in which they operate to ensure effective management conservation of cougar populations within their state or province.

## **METHODS**

### **Legislative History**

The history of cougar management legislation was obtained from a search of Washington State Legislative archives housed in the University of Washington's Suzzalo Library. The search was conducted under the topic of "cougar" and "mountain lion" and limited to Washington State Senate and House of Representative bills from the 1994-1995 legislative session (pre I-655) through the 2003-2004 legislative session. I recorded the number, title, subject, and subsequent fate of each bill. I interpreted bills lacking specific information on House of Representative or Senate floor votes as dying in committee or subcommittee. Election results pertaining to I-655 were obtained from Washington State voting records and personal communication with the office of the Secretary of State.

### **Washington State Socio-Economic Description**

To characterize and compare social values and political context of western and eastern Washington counties where the highest levels of cougar-human interaction were reported, I obtained economic and population data through an online search of the most recent United States Census Bureau databases (2000 for social and economic data and 2003 for population data). I collected information on median annual household and family income, unemployment rates for individuals over 16 years of age, percentage of families and individuals living in poverty, and percentage of workers over 16 years of that work in forestry, fishing, and farming professions (US Census Bureau 2000) for Washington counties within CMU 2, Puget Sound; CMU 5, North Cascades East; and CMU 7, Northeastern. Cougar Management Units 2, 5, and 7 have the highest levels of reported cougar-human interaction and WDFW game

management objectives call for reducing cougar populations within these units to ensure public safety and minimize damage to private property (WDFW 2002). Specifically, data was collected for King, Pierce, Snohomish, Thurston, Skagit, and Whatcom counties of western Washington and Chelan, Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, and Spokane counties for eastern Washington. Additional emphasis was placed on the five northeastern counties: Chelan, Okanogan, Stevens, Ferry, and Pend Oreille because of their forthcoming participation in cougar hunts authorized by SSB 6118. Spokane County was included in the socio-economic analysis because of the county's location in CMU 7. Spokane County is eastern Washington's most populated and urban county with the subsequent effect of making eastern Washington counties appear more similar to western counties in the regional comparison.

### **Cougar Media Context**

To quantify and characterize media coverage and publicity surrounding cougars and cougar management in Washington, I queried the internet archives of western and eastern Washington NBC, ABC, CBS, and Fox news affiliates and the state's largest westside and eastside newspapers, The Seattle Times (western Washington) and The Spokesman Review (eastern Washington). Archive searches were performed using the keywords "cougar", "mountain lion", "Initiative 655", and "Senate Bill 6118" while being constrained to the dates: January 1994-September 2004. I classified media reports as scientific (relaying specific information on cougar ecology and/or behavior from cougar research and/or management activities inside or outside of Washington), political/legislative (conveying information pertaining to cougar management legislation, legal status or hunting

regulations), human-cougar interactions (accounts of sightings, encounters, or attacks on livestock, pets or people) or as an editorial (authored by a group or individual conveying their personal view of cougars or cougar management inside or outside of Washington).

## **RESULTS**

### **Legislative History**

From the analysis of Washington State Legislative archives I identified 12 bills directly pertaining to the management and legal status of cougars in Washington in the year leading up to, and the eight years following the passage of I-655 (Table 1). The 1995-1996 legislative session had three bills addressing cougar management. Senate Bill 5153 authorized the killing of a cougar reasonably perceived to be an immediate threat to public safety, SB 5492 made it unlawful to hunt cougars, black bears (*Ursus americanus*), bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) and lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) with dogs, and SB 6262 required the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission to review cougar management on a regular basis and allowed for a cougar tag to be purchased after the cat was killed. Senate Bill 5153 and SB 5492 each died in subcommittee/committee failing to reach the floor of the Senate. Senate Bill 6262 was passed by both the Senate and House but was vetoed by Governor Mike Lowry. Senate Bill 5492 was the final attempt of The Humane Society of the United States and partnering animal rights advocates to ban the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars through traditional lobbying and legislative avenues. In November 1996, Washington State voters approved Initiative 655 by a vote of 1,387,577 (63%) in favor and 815,385 (37%) opposed.

The 1997-1998 legislative session saw the first legislative attempt to override I-655. Senate Bill 5594 authorized the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars to protect private

**Table 1. Summary of the history of cougar management legislation in Washington State preceding the passage of State Initiative 655 in the 1996 General Election to present. The legislative number, legislative session, subject description, and outcome of each bill is provided.**

Legislative Session	Bill Number	Bill Subject Description	Bill Outcome
1995-1996	SB 5153	Authorized killing a cougar or bear reasonably perceived to be an immediate threat to public safety.	Died in committee / subcommittee
1995-1996	SB 5492	Unlawful to hunt cougars, bears, bobcats and lynx with dogs (final legislative attempt to ban hound hunting )	Died in committee / subcommittee
1995-1996	SB 6262	Fish and Wildlife Commission shall review cougar management on a regular basis, allows the purchase of a cougar tag after the animal has been killed	Passage by House and Senate, vetoed by Gov. Mike Lowry
November 1996	I-655	Bans use of dogs to hunt or pursue cougars	Approved by Washington State voters (63% yes votes)
1997-1998	SB 5594	Authorize use of dogs to protect private property and public safety	Died in committee / subcommittee
1999-2000	HB 1012	Authorizes use of dogs to hunt cougars-override I-655	Died in committee / subcommittee
1999-2000	HB 1959	Hunting cougar with dogs authorized-override I-655	Died in committee / subcommittee
1999-2000	SB 5001/ CH 248	Hunting cougar with dogs authorized in specific areas to address public safety concerns-creation of the Public Safety Cougar Removal Hunts	Passage by House and Senate, signed into law by Gov. Gary Locke
1999-2000	SB 5068	Hunting cougar with dogs authorized-override I-655	Died in committee / subcommittee
1999-2000	SB 5120	Hunting cougar with dogs authorized-override I-655	Died in committee / subcommittee
1999-2000	SB 5133	Washington counties may authorize hunting cougar with dogs- override I-655	Died in committee / subcommittee
2001-2002	SSB 6712	Wildlife damage to livestock, permission to trap or kill-cougar included	Died in committee/subcommittee
2003-2004	SSB 6118	Create a 3-year pilot cougar control program through the use of hound hunting in five northeastern counties	Passage by House and Senate, Section 1 and 3 signed into law by Gov. Gary Locke, Section 2 vetoed

property and public safety. Senate Bill 5594 died in committee without a floor vote.

The 1999-2000 legislative session contained six proposed bills authorizing the use of dogs to pursue and hunt cougars in Washington. The proposed bills varied from conditional, cause specific authorization of the use of dogs, to a complete override of I-655. House Bill (HB) 1012, HB 1059, SB 5068, SB 5120, and SB 5133 each unconditionally authorized the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars. Each bill failed to make it out of committee/subcommittee. Senate Bill 5133 is of special note because it specified the right of individual counties, not WDFW or the Fish and Wildlife Commission, to authorize the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars (similar to initial drafts of 2004's SSB 6118). Senate Bill 5001/CH 248 authorized the hunting of cougars using dogs in specific areas to address public safety concerns. Senate Bill 5001/CH 248 passed through both the Senate and House and was signed into law by Governor Gary Locke in March of 2000. Senate Bill 5001/CH 248 legislated the creation of Public Safety Cougar Removal Hunts (PSCR hunts) with the aid of dogs. WDFW is authorized to issue PSCR hunt permits for any of the 137 Game Management Units (GMUs) based on the number of cougar complaints recorded within a particular GMU the previous year. Substitute Senate Bill 6712 was drafted in the 2001-2002 legislative session and would have granted permission to trap and kill wildlife responsible for killing livestock, including cougars. Substitute Senate Bill 6712 did not specifically address the use of dogs and did not pass out of committee/subcommittee in 2002.

The 2003-2004 legislative session saw the most recent bill to legislate cougar management post I-655. Substitute Senate Bill 6118 creates a three-year pilot program to control cougar populations in

Washington's five northeastern counties (Chelan, Okanogan, Stevens, Ferry, and Pend Oreille) with the aid of dogs. Substitute Senate Bill 6118 consisted of three sections. Section 1 created the three-year pilot program authorizing the use of dogs to hunt and pursue cougars to control populations. Section 2 allowed for additional Washington State counties to join the pilot program if they could demonstrate an urgent need to deal with cougar public safety issues. Section 3 of the bill required WDFW to report the findings of the pilot program to the Fish and Wildlife Commission and proper legislative committees and to make recommendations on science-based measures to manage cougar behavior and populations in the future. The bill passed quickly through the Senate and House, garnering little media attention during the legislative session. Prompted by WDFW, Governor Gary Locke vetoed Section 2 of the bill but signed Sections 1 and 3 into law in March of 2004. Substitute Senate Bill 6118 effectively overturned cougar hunting restrictions set forth by I-655 for the five northeastern counties and replaced them with hunting regulations approved by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

#### **Washington State Socio-Economic Description**

U.S. Census Bureau databases for Washington indicate large contrasts for all socio-economic categories between western and eastern counties with the highest levels of reported cougar-human interaction. Western Washington counties averaged higher populations (western: 608,255/county to eastern: 99,764/county) and higher annual median household and family incomes (\$46,797 and \$55,260) than eastern Washington counties (\$33,515 and \$40,114; Table 2). Eastern Washington counties averaged higher unemployment rates

(eastern: 7.0% to western: 4.0%), a higher percentage of families and individuals living in poverty (eastern: 12.0% and 17% to western: 7.0% and 10%) and a higher percentage of individuals working in forestry, fishing, and agricultural industries (4.0%) than western Washington counties (1%, Table 2).

### **Cougar Media Context**

Searches of western and eastern Washington television news and newspaper archives yielded 138 stories pertaining to cougars. Seventeen reports (12.3%) were classified as science, 85 (61.6%) as cougar-human interaction, 30 (21.8%) as political/legislative, and 6 (4.3%) were classified as editorials (Table 3). Internet-based archives for newspapers contained more stories (82) than the internet-based archives of local television news affiliates (56). The Seattle Times archive generated 37 articles: 4 science, 20 cougar-human interaction, 8 political/legislative, and 5 editorials. Search of The Spokesman Review archive produced 45 articles: 4 science, 20 cougar-human interaction, 20 political/legislative, and 1 editorial.

Searches of western Washington television news archives produced 52 cougar stories: 8 science, 42 cougar-human interaction, 2 political/legislative, and 0 editorials. Eastern Washington television news archives produced 4 stories: 1 science and 3 addressing cougar-human interaction (Table 3). I obtained no reports from three television news websites (KCPQ-13 Fox Seattle, KHQ-6 NBC Spokane, and KAYU-28 Fox Spokane) because they did not provide access to their archives via their Internet homepages. Searches of all television news archives were limited further by an inability to access stories prior to 2000.

### **COUGAR MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS: 1996-2004**

People's attitudes toward wildlife and predators are influenced by their place of residence (urban vs. rural), socio-economic status, and the physical and behavioral characteristics of a species (Kellert et al. 1996, Mankin et al. 1999, Reiter et al. 1999, Deruiter and Donnelly 2002). The socio-economic data for Washington's five northeastern counties indicate they are sparsely populated rural areas with depressed economies based in natural resource and agriculture industries. Political and social views of citizens and politicians towards wildlife and cougars within this cultural setting may be characterized as utilitarian and dominionistic (Kellert et al. 1996). Residents of rural settings often possess strong beliefs of private property rights and may feel marginalized by government agencies and environmental regulations. Land use restrictions may be perceived as a violation of personal rights and residents may express their displeasure with antagonism towards predators (Kellert et al. 1996). The socio-economic description and subsequent attitudes of the northeastern counties towards cougars contrasts the preservationist or ecocentric views of residents and politicians of the more populated, urban counties of western Washington (Kellert et al. 1996, Mankin et al. 1999). Opinions of northeastern Washington residents of cougars may be further influenced by the high percentage of individuals employed in natural resource and agriculture based industries. In surveys of public attitudes of wildlife, farmers and ranchers have expressed the most antagonistic views of cougars and predators (Brown 1986, Kellert et al. 1996). This perspective is contrasted by positive views and values of cougars and predators

**Table 2: Population size, annual median household income, annual median family income, unemployment rate, percentage of families and individuals living in poverty, and percentage of individuals working in forestry, fisheries, and farming for eastern and western Washington State counties with the highest levels of reported cougar-human interaction.**

County	Population	Median Household Income	Median Family Income	% Unemployed	% Of Families Living In Poverty	% Of Individuals Living In Poverty	% Of Individuals Employed in Forestry, Fisheries, and Farming
<b>Eastern Washington</b>							
Chelan	67,973	\$37,316	\$46,293	6.6	8.8	12.4	7.4
Okanogan	39,134	\$29,726	\$35,012	7.0	16.0	21.3	9.5
Ferry	7,417	\$30,388	\$35,691	10.9	13.3	19.0	3.5
Stevens	40,776	\$34,673	\$40,250	5.7	11.5	15.9	3.0
Pend Oreille	12,254	\$31,677	\$36,977	5.1	13.6	18.1	2.5
Spokane	431,027	\$37,308	\$46,463	5.1	8.3	12.3	0.4
Average	99,764	\$33,515	\$40,114	7.0	12.0	17.0	4.0
<b>Western Washington</b>							
King	1,761,411	\$53,157	\$66,035	3.1	5.3	8.4	0.3
Pierce	740,957	\$45,204	\$52,098	4.1	7.5	10.5	0.5
Snohomish	639,409	\$53,060	\$60,726	3.5	4.9	6.9	0.5
Thurston	221,950	\$46,975	\$55,027	3.9	5.8	8.8	1.1
Skagit	109,234	\$42,381	\$48,347	4.3	7.9	11.1	4.0
Whatcom	176,571	\$40,005	\$49,325	7.4	7.8	14.2	2.0
Average	608,255	\$46,797	\$55,260	4.0	7.0	10.0	1.0

expressed by residents working and living in, or near, the diversified economies of urban settings similar to those that exist in western Washington counties (Kellert et al. 1996, Reiter et al. 1999).

As statewide reports of cougar encounters rose from a pre-initiative 255 in 1995, to 495 in 1996, to a peak of 955 in 2000 (Beausoleil et al 2003), the reactions of politicians and residents of western and northeastern counties reflected the two regions' differing social values. Northeastern Washington legislators and county commissioners representing the utilitarian and dominionistic perspectives of ranching, agricultural, and hunting interests worked for legislation aimed at restoring hound hunting to reduce cougar populations and as they believed, "restore fear of people

in cougars" (Andrist 2003, Mottrom 2003). Following a 1998 cougar attack that left a 4-year-old Kettle Falls boy severely injured, the position of the area's politicians and residents was bolstered by WDFW proclamations that public safety was its cougar management priority (Koenings 2000, WDFW 2004). Conversely, western Washington residents and politicians did not advocate hound hunting as a solution to increasing cougar-human interaction, deferring instead to WDFW to develop management solutions that were not based in hunting or pursuing. Deferral of predator management by western county residents to the state wildlife management agency is consistent with similar demographics described by Reiter et al. (1999).

**Table 3: Summary of cougar media reports obtained from searches of Internet archives for local western and eastern Washington NBC, ABC, CBS, and Fox news affiliates and Washington's largest westside and eastside newspapers, The Seattle Times and The Spokesman Review.**

Media News	Source	Science <sup>a</sup>	Political/ Legislative <sup>b</sup>	Cougar / Human Interaction <sup>c</sup>	Editorial <sup>d</sup>
Newspaper	The Seattle Times	4	8	20	5
	The Spokesman Review	4	20	20	1
	<i>Total</i>	8	28	40	6
Television	NBC-Seattle	6	0	6	0
	ABC-Seattle	2	2	26	0
	CBS-Seattle	0	0	10	0
	Fox-Seattle	e	e	e	e
	NBC-Spokane	e	e	e	e
	ABC-Spokane	0	0	1	0
	CBS-Spokane	1	0	2	0
	Fox-Spokane	e	e	e	e
<i>Total</i>	9	2	45	0	

<sup>a</sup> Science: relaying specific information on cougar ecology and/or behavior from cougar research and/or management activities inside or outside of Washington State

<sup>b</sup> Political/legislative: conveying information pertaining to cougar management legislation, legal status or hunting regulations

<sup>c</sup> Cougar-human interaction: accounts of sightings, encounters, or attacks on livestock, pets or people

<sup>d</sup> Editorial: authored by a group or individual conveying their personal view of cougars or cougar management inside or outside of Washington.

During this period of heightened public safety concerns, media coverage of cougars was intensifying and focused on cougar-human interactions. Media has the ability to influence people's value orientations of wildlife (Champ 2002) and people's attitudes towards cougars can be negatively influenced by media coverage of cougar-human interaction (Wolch et al. 1997). Searches of western and eastern Washington newspaper and television news archives show over 60% of stories pertaining to cougars covered human-cougar interaction but only 12.3% of stories dealt with cougar science. These results suggest that Washington residents on both sides of the Cascade Mountains were unlikely to receive information on cougar ecology and behavior in a neutral context of cougar research and management activities. Instead, Washington State residents were more likely to see cougar ecology and behavior framed in an adversarial context of fear stemming from cougar confrontations with, or attacks on, livestock, pets and people. Problems with media coverage of cougars in Washington may be increased further by the tendency of news media to focus on conflict and controversy in their coverage of wildlife issues (Corbett 1992).

Unfortunately, absent from much of the public debate and media coverage of increased cougar-human interaction is informed discussion of the complexity of cougar ecology and behavior, the impacts of human population growth with subsequent expansion of urban sprawl and recreation into historic cougar habitat, and an overall increase in public awareness of cougars over the past decade. Following the passage of I-655, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission prompted by WDFW biologists and managers made changes to cougar hunting laws to offset anticipated declines in cougar harvest. These efforts have resulted

in steady increases in cougar harvest levels and recent insights gained from harvest statistics and field research suggest cougar populations in areas of high cougar-human conflict are in decline (WDFW 2002, Beausoleil et al. 2003, Lambert et al. 2003, Martorello and Beausoleil 2003). Following a peak of 955 cougar reports in 2000, reports have steadily declined to pre-initiative levels with 255 cougar reports registered in 2003 (R. Beausoleil, personal communication 2004).

With the exception of SB 5001/CH 248, the bill that created the Public Safety Cougar Removal Hunts in 2000, attempts to overturn I-655 in the Washington State Legislature have largely been unsuccessful. These failures may be rooted in continued support of cougars from Washington residents living in or near urban settings and the influence they yield as a result of their large populations, higher income levels and greater political representation.

In early 2003 however, the northeastern county commissioners declared a state of emergency to force the cougar public safety issue with WDFW (Hanron 2003). This move may have offset the political power of western Washington residents and provided the political traction necessary for approval of SSB 6118 in the face of documented increases in cougar harvest levels, declines in cougar complaints, and decreasing northeastern cougar populations. In addition to efforts of northeastern politicians, additional factors may have been operating within political networks to garner support for SSB 6118. These factors may include WDFW lobbying the State Legislature and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission on behalf of SSB 6118 in an attempt to change cougar hunting laws to gain greater control over cougar harvest characteristics in northeastern Washington. The extent of these efforts remains unclear.

## CONCLUSIONS

Social, political, and economic influences on cougar management legislation are not unique to Washington. Across the western United States and Canada, wildlife biologists and managers operate within issue networks that apply various levels of political and social pressure. To a greater extent, cougar management in Washington and throughout much of the West is simply a microcosm of larger social issues surrounding conflicting ideologies over the management of natural resources, private property rights, and the role of government agencies. It is worth noting that more than one proposed hound-hunting bill, SB 5133 and the initial draft of SSB 6118, placed cougar management authority in the hands of county commissioners, not state wildlife biologists and managers. One need look no further than current debates over timber extraction on public land, allocation of water rights, grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) reintroduction efforts, federal designation of wilderness areas, or gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) management to witness the extent of this issue.

There are no quick solutions for addressing the role of politics, social values, and economics in cougar management. Currently, researchers and biologists are engaged in a variety of research and management activities in Washington that utilize a combination of rigorous scientific inquiry and creative education programs. These efforts offer a starting point for the encouragement of future legislative efforts based in knowledge of cougar ecology and behavior to ensure long-term viability of cougar populations inside and outside of Washington.

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