

Published Issaquah Press, Issaquah WA 3/2/11

Dear Editor:

Politicians say they “work on the People’s business.” The politicians in Olympia, led by Representative Blake of Aberdeen are busy undoing the People’s business. In 1996, Initiative 655 passed with 63% of the vote, outlawing bear baiting and hunting cougars with dogs. Since, the legislature has slyly run “temporary” pilot programs to allow cougar hunting with dogs. Now, Rep. Blake has submitted HB 1124 to establish cougar hunting seasons with dogs, in total repudiation of the I-655 mandate.

Amazingly, this legislator believes that when a hunter with dogs trees a cougar and kills the cougar, it is a lesson to all cougars to avoid people. In the US, domestic dogs kill about 30 people a year; deer kill more than 100 per year when hit by cars. In the past 100 years, cougars in the US have killed 14 people, three in the last ten years. While an attack by a cougar is horrific, Fido, Bambi, or lightning is more likely to kill you.

Cougars primarily feed on deer. In 2008, the total kill of deer and elk by Washington hunters was just over 42,000 animals. I assume many hunters were in cougar territory, hunting without the use of dogs, but I wonder why the cougars weren’t ambushing and killing hunters? A cougar that trees when chased by dogs is a cougar that avoids confrontation, yet it dies for ‘sport’.

HB 1124 feels like a sop to the hunting lobby, despite the noble words of “population management” and “safety concerns.” State agencies have no accurate cougar population count, and statistical studies show that sport hunting of cougars does not increase human safety. The current law allows for the use of dogs to track aggressive cats that have shown wrong attitudes toward humans, pets, and livestock, or have received an unverified complaint. Apparently this is not enough for the hunting lobby.

Our legislators quietly capitulate to a small lobby, once again proving that the dollar is mightier than the ballot.

Bob McCoy
Sammamish, WA