

**Web comment (not moderated) to Seattle Times regarding article  
“Cougar-hunting bill still faces House opposition”  
3/24/11**

Thankfully, Rep. Dunshee wants to look at the facts and the science surrounding cougars (*Puma concolor*) before overturning the people’s mandate regarding sports hunting of cougars with dogs.

Rep Kretz is disingenuous in touting the killing of problem cats, because the hunting season Mr. Kretz is supporting is sports hunting for trophies, not a depredation permit for a cat that killed livestock or pets. (Where I live in Sammamish, we take our pets in at night to avoid problems.) The law allows hounds for a depredation permit, and as a cougar will stay by a kill for several days, hound hunters often kill the offending cat.

The bill’s sponsors were earlier touting proactive safety measures. Hmm. One person recorded killed in Washington by a cougar in 1924. About nine human deaths in the past decade were from hunters. Last year a bow hunter died from an arrow still on his companion’s bow. Family dogs kill 30 per year in the US. Deer sacrifice themselves to kill more than 100 people per year. Vending machines supposedly average two kills per year. I won’t mention the more obvious dangers to human life. Cougars have killed 14 people in the US in the last 120 years.

Mr. Kretz seems to be biting the hand that feeds him when he objects to “urban people.” Okanogan County receives \$1.53 for each tax dollar it pays. The six hounding counties listed in the article receive about \$12.22 tax benefit for each \$6 tax paid at the state level according to WA Office of Fiscal Management statistics. Farmers and ranchers do not pay B&O taxes, which helps to cover the risk of agricultural activities. Farmers and ranchers are eligible for reduced property taxes to maintain their lands to “assure the use and enjoyment of natural resources and scenic beauty for the economic and social well-being of the state and its citizens.”(RCW 84.34.010) In these tight fiscal times, Mr. Kretz might better serve his constituents by raising their taxes since urban people match each of their tax dollars with a dollar of their own.

You and I can buy a bear and cougar-hunting license for \$24, or about \$10 if we also buy another license. That seems like an insignificant amount to pay to kill a keystone species animal. I see that hunters will pay thousands of dollars to go on a cougar hunt; Mr. Kretz should sponsor a bill to charge a reasonable amount for a cougar hunting tag—say \$3,000. Why are we giving away our natural resources to a very small group of enthusiasts?

One of the mandates of WDFW is to preserve wildlife, not to just please hunters and agricultural interests. Mr. Dunshee correctly wants to look at the science regarding cougars. WDFW estimates the population of cougars at about 2000 cats in Washington. WDFW says that only about 60-70% of hunters (of all species) return their mandatory reports on time. They have also said that they need 90% to make accurate assessments of game population. I believe that WSU is working on a

population census for cougars. So once again, Rep. Dunshee is correct: we should let the scientists weigh in.

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