

Senate set to debate bill to reinstate hounding of cougars

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. -- In testimony submitted to the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee today, Big Wildlife, an international wildlife protection organization headquartered in Williams, Oregon, urged lawmakers to oppose legislation that would reinstate the cruel practice of using hounds to pursue cougars.

The Senate committee is expected to consider a bill passed by the House that would overturn a 1994 voter-approved ban on hounding of the big cats. The proposal could move to the full Senate for a vote shortly thereafter. The legislation would permit the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to deputize trophy hunters as government agents and allow them to use hounds to chase cougars. Big Wildlife also called on Governor Kulongoski to reject the legislation should it reach his desk. "This legislation has nothing to do with protecting Grandma Myrtle, little children, poodles named Fluffy, or sheep from big, bad cougars. Trophy hunters are pushing this bill to make an end run around the hounding ban because they know Oregonians reject the cruel practice of using a pack of howling, radio collared dogs to chase cougars," said Brian Vincent, Communications Director for Big Wildlife. Big Wildlife noted that voters passed the hounding ban not only because they believe hounding is inhumane but because they support conserving a diversity of wildlife in Oregon. The group said the pro-hounding bill was yet another attempt by lawmakers and the ODFW to accommodate trophy hunters still disgruntled with the ban.

Since the ban was enacted, the Department has systematically eroded safeguards for cougars. For example, the agency has reduced cougar tag fees to a paltry \$11.50, extended the cougar hunting season to ten months and in some areas year-round, and allowed hunters to kill two cougars per year. Earlier this year, the ODFW launched its Cougar Management Plan that employs aggressive lethal controls of cougars throughout the state. As a result, more cougars are being killed in Oregon than ever before. "We hope the Senate Committee comes out swinging against this proposal that would overturn the will of the people and bring back a barbaric hunting practice," said Spencer Lennard, Big Wildlife's Executive Director.

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