

## Talking Points: 2023 Petition to Amend Bear and Cougar Rules

### *Summary*

- Please approve the petition as a first step in undoing the damage that overhunting and other killing have likely already inflicted on our bear and cougar populations. The petition would restore the pre-2020 hunting guidelines for cougars, which imposed limits on the number of cougars that could be killed based on science, not political considerations. The petition would also roll back the bear hunting extensions and “bag limit” increases passed in 2019. It further asks the Commission to encourage better compliance in bear “harvest” reporting by imposing a reasonable penalty for failure to report. Finally, the petition would restore sunset dates to bear and cougar rules, so that these rules are examined on the same schedule as other hunted species.
- The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission enacted arbitrary and capricious rules in 2019-2021 to expand bear and cougar hunting seasons. WDFW based its recommendations on social pressure from a small number of residents. WDFW owes it to the public and its own hardworking scientific staff to ground its governance in sound science, not politics. The petition would restore cougar and bear hunt rules to previous levels and incorporate WDFW scientists’ own suggestions for monitoring and managing hunting mortality of these species.
- Increased killing of cougars does not boost deer and elk populations, protect livestock, or reduce human-cougar conflict. In fact, there is strong evidence that heavy hunting of cougars actually *increases* public safety concerns and cougar conflict with livestock. Instead of focusing on actions that would decrease conflict with cougars, WDFW has opted for the appearance of dealing with the problem – while actually worsening it.
- WDFW managers pushed an expansion of bear hunting in response to political pressure and not science – as they themselves admitted. As a result, bear mortality statewide has increased drastically; it may have reached 17% during the 2022-2023 season. Bear biologists have found that mortality above 4-10% is likely to damage the population. Most bears die because of humans, with hunting accounting for the vast majority of all human-caused deaths.
- Cougars are keystone species that benefit the environment and other species. Damage to the cougar population is damage to the environment. We should also be treating bears like the ecologically important animals they are, not as a nuisance or a mere “resource.” Bears, like cougars, are “ecosystem engineers” that improve habitat for other species.