

**Possible Rule Changes for Bear and Cougar for consideration by the Fish & Wildlife Commission's Wildlife Committee
1.19.24 - Draft**

Change #	WAC	Possible Rule Change	Justifications Based on WDFW Publications(See highlights below)	New Language
1	220-415-100 Cougar Hunting Season	Insert sunset date so that rule is reviewed every three years: reverts to pre-2020	The 2020 change to remove the dates from these rules in 2020 and 2021 was contrary to the GMP that was controlling then. SEE: GMP, p. 111: "Evaluate the cougar harvest structure and harvest guidelines every three-years, corresponding to the three-year hunting season package." We may look at these rules more often, but it is important to put them back on the schedule to be considered every three years.	Insert "into the title 2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27"
2		Include subadults in harvest limits, reverts to pre-2020 system	SEE: DFW published research "Long-Term Evaluation of Cougar Density and Application of Risk Analysis for Harvest Management," uses standard densities that include sub-adults.	Keep language same as pre-2020 rule and revert back to the pre-2020 harvest limits that were based on density estimates that included subadults.

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3		Restore standards based on science- based densities and growth rates, and include the population estimates on which they are based. Eliminate the spread and cap at 16% limit, or maximum allowable harvest	To increase transparency to the public regarding how we calculate densities and growth rate limits and establish harvest limits per PMU. include the population estimates for each of the 50 PMUs, SEE: GMP pp. 111-12, table of PMUs with population estimates	Restore WAC 220-415-100 as it was before the 2020 changes, but delete the 14% threshold numbers, since they are not being used, to keep just the number indicating the 16% limit or maximum allowable harvest, that when reached will close that PMU

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4		Count all human- caused cougar mortality toward mortality limits	<p>DFW published science has emphasized the need to count all sources of mortality when determining hunting rates that will maintain stable local populations.SEE: Beausoleil 2013, p. 682 "Failing to account for and include all mortality sources may obscure estimates of population trajectory and underestimate the impact of harvest on demographics and cougar social structure." SEE GMP page 112 "Account for all human related cougar mortalities every year". "its imperative to know how many animals are lethally removed each year.</p> <p>"WDFW and other reported management removals have risen significantly in recent years.</p>	<p>Include language in WAC 220-415-110(2)(b)(3)(a) to count all mortality: "All known human-caused mortality of cougars since the end of the last hunting season shall be counted toward the maximum allowable harvest, including but not limited to legal harvest, known poaching and vehicle strikes, and killing of individual problem cougars by the private citizens or local, state or federal officials or their agents.</p>
5		Combine split season into one season	<p>WDFW hunter reports indicate that about half of the current overages occur before January 1. when the season cannot be closed because of the split-season structure. SEE: Status and Trend, 2021, p. 275 and SEE: . Status and Trend 2022, pg. 294 consider creating single-season hunt structure with harvest guidelines being applicable throughout.</p>	<p>Amend WAC 220-415-100 to eliminate spit season and include dates for a single season. Make consistent changes to subsections (a) and (b)</p>

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6		End cougar season on March 31 each year	<p>SEE: multiple DFW Cougar Status and Trends Reports: Recommend "removing April from the hunting season, which crosses license years requiring an additional license purchase and creating confusion."</p> <p>(This change was also recommended by staff in a proposed rule amendment in 2018, which indicated the change was necessary to "assist in minimizing disturbance to ungulates that are already stressed from winter and birthing; minimize confusion and burden on hunters to buy two licenses." That amendment was later withdrawn but staff said it would revisit those issues.)</p>	Change WAC 220-415-100(2) to end the single season at the end of our hunting year, on March 31
7		Provide for immediate closure	<p>SEE: Cougar Status and Trend 2021. Recommends establishment of "24-hour closure rule when harvest guidelines are met."</p>	Closure will be with a 24-hour notice
8	220-415-090 Bear Hunting Season	Require review of bear rule every 3 years at a minimum	<p>SEE: GMP: "To maintain stable bear populations, modifications to harvest levels are made on a three-year rotation" No science to support a season in perpetuity, need to be responsive to new science</p>	Insert "2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27" into the title.

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9		Revert to seasons and bag limits prior to 2019 (sept 1-November 15), revert to state-wide bag limit of one bear	The change in 2019 was to “standardize seasons” for clarity. There has since been a spike in harvest, especially in some BMUs, to avoid harm to populations whether BMU or state-wide, return to pre 2019 seasons while we wait for results of recent research.	Amend WAC 220-415-090 to indicate that bear season will be from September 1 to November 15 and that the bag limit will be one bear statewide.

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