

2020 Cougar Public Safety and Depredation Response
Final Regional After-Action Review Summary (AAR)
and Emphasis Areas (Yellow Highlights) Used to Create DRAFT Recommendations

05/21/2021

Background

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has assembled an internal and Cross-Program Cougar Safety Team (CST) to address increasing concerns associated with cougar human safety situations and cougar depredations on pets and livestock. The CST has four main areas of focus which are *Outreach, Responsiveness to the Public, Using Science to Inform Decisions* and *Partnerships*. Using the *Responsiveness to the Public* focus area as the foundation for their request, the CST asked the Regional Directors to conduct an after-action review (AAR) of the 2020 Regional responses to cougar depredations and public safety situations.

The objective of these AAR's was to; 1) Acknowledge the good work of Regional staff and to provide an understanding of why Regional responses can vary, 2) Identify areas where consistency can help us improve on our response and 3) Identify areas where change or additional actions may be needed.

Process

In order to facilitate the completion of the AAR's the Regional Directors (RDs) were provided a set of questions from the CST. These questions were provided in advance to the Regional Enforcement Captains and to the Regional Wildlife Program Managers. The RDs met with them to discuss the questions and provide some greater context for the AAR. The Captains and the Regional Wildlife Program Managers were then asked to discuss the AAR's with their respective Regional staffs, share the questions and request their participation. AAR's were completed in all Regions and participation from both Wildlife staff (i.e., the Regional Wildlife Program Manager, the District Biologists and the Conflict Specialists) and from Enforcement staff (i.e., the Captain, the Sergeants and some Fish and Wildlife Officers) was excellent. Most AAR's were a minimum of 2 hours long and the conversations were rich. Each of the Regional Director's has retained the individual Regional responses to the six questions and those are available to supplement this summary.

Lastly, the Regional Directors all agreed that this AAR was a very valuable exercise, that should be repeated on an annual or alternating year basis. As Executive Management Team members it provided great insight into the staff coordination and logistics planning that supports our Regional responses to a cougar depredation or a cougar public safety situation. We are so appreciative of the work of all the Program staff that are asked to make difficult decisions in challenging circumstances. Thank You!

Questions and Summaries of Regional Responses

1. **Considering the majority of requests for service; when responding to a cougar depredation or cougar public safety concern were you able to take the most appropriate action? If not, why not?**

Summarized Positive Responses

All Regions responded positively to their ability to address cougar depredation or public safety situations, with a sampling of the responses which included the following:

Yes, an appropriate response is provided.

Yes, our response is appropriate, and we are able to respond effectively and efficiently and to provide education when needed.

Yes, the Regional response is appropriate. We respond, educate and use best professional judgement in taking an action.

Yes, we have the tools needed (i.e., the relationships, the staffing, the hounds/handlers) to respond appropriately.

Yes, we are all on the same page responding to depredations or public safety issues. It's important that we give the public a clear expectation on cougar removals (up front communication is important). It is also important for the public to know that we don't automatically remove cougars when contacted.

Summarized Responses Indicating Appropriate Action was Impacted

As noted above, while all Regions responded positively to their ability to address cougar depredation or public safety situations, every Region also generated a list of things that impacted their ability to take the most appropriate action. The following is a summarized and categorized list (the categories have been created by the Regional Directors) of the most common things that were identified by the Regions as impacting the ability to take the most appropriate action:

- ✓ **Internal Direction and Guidance (e.g., Rule, Policy, Directive, SOP, etc.)**
 - WDFW guidance on what constitutes an appropriate action should be provided. In one Region it was suggested that the guidance be provided around an animal's behavior, not based on what species it is.
 - The appropriate action/response for a cougar situation is not always clear and circumstances for each situation can be different; what the public perceives as dangerous or as a public safety situation may not be consistent with staff perspective (e.g., all depredations do not equal a public safety situation). It was mentioned that the Agency utilizes a significant number of non-lethal tools on other species (e.g., black bear, moose, deer and elk) and that cougar should be similar (see staff comments below in Outreach and Public Messaging about desire for Agency provided tools to help landowners help themselves).

- The direction provided by the Director’s Memo and by the Regional Enforcement Supervisors is too restrictive and results in cougar being removed that are not a public safety threat.
- The Director’s Memo needs to be clarified or to provide more specificity for staff, it is not being interpreted the same across all Regions.
- The Dangerous Wildlife Policy demands a timely in-person response for an incident deemed to be a public safety situation; this is not always possible (see staffing below) and the Policy should allow greater flexibility.
- The recently revised wildlife response matrix still needs clarification for Wildlife and Enforcement staff response.

✓ **Equipment, Resources and Staff**

- The appropriate action can be impacted by the timely availability of equipment (live traps, immobilization gear and drugs) and staff (generally, when the Regions discussed concerns for staff availability it was focused on Conflict Staff, but there were also instances of vacant Enforcement positions).
- Hound availability/hound quality was identified as something that impacted our ability to respond; however, this was identified predominately as an Eastern Washington issue.
- In a number of Westside locations, with higher human populations and where we are responding in urbanized areas, it was identified that hounds were generally not available as a response tool.

✓ **Outreach and External Messaging**

- Staff indicated a desire for the Agency to have a more prescriptive approach around the expectations for animal husbandry and have this relate directly to the action taken by WDFW in a cougar conflict situation. Staff also acknowledged that sometimes landowners don’t have the knowledge or resources to avoid livestock depredation and would like to help landowners help themselves in order to better address the sources of the problems.

✓ **Coordination and Work with Local Law Enforcement/Local Messaging**

- In one District in Region 1 and one in Region 5, some staff were concerned that the Agency’s ability to take the appropriate action regarding a cougar situation was sometimes impacted by Community sentiment. In these same areas, local law enforcement was taking an active role in communicating with the public and/or in responding to cougar incidents. Staff were concerned that there could be ramifications for Enforcement/WDFW if the Community did not feel the WDFW response was

appropriate and/or that the WDFW response was being driven by the local politics and not by the Department.

2. What was the most important positive outcome of the way that your Detachment/District responded to cougar depredation/public safety issues in 2020 (and why)?

All Regions generated lists of positive outcomes from the way in which their Detachment/District responded to cougar depredation or public safety issues. The following is a summarized and categorized list (the categories have been created by the Regional Directors) of the most important positive outcomes:

✓ **Public Trust and Relationships**

- All Regions acknowledged an appreciation by the public for WDFW's response to cougar depredation and public safety situations. Several Regions spoke to a trust in WDFW and in our ability to respond and provide education. A common sentiment was that Community trust was built by officers and staff that invested in developing relationships (including with local law enforcement). Relationships with other state agencies was also identified as a positive.
- The Regions identified that the public was thankful in situations where a cougar was removed as well as in situations where a cougar was not removed (location and situation specific).
- Several Regions spoke to the positive relationships that WDFW has with the local hound handlers that assist the Department.

✓ **Teamwork and Internal Communication**

- All Regions identified strong working relationships and trust between Wildlife and Enforcement staff involved in cougar depredation and public safety responses (one District did not identify this as a positive outcome but rather as a significant challenge, fueled by both internal and external issues).
- The majority of respondents talked about the cross-Program teamwork, coordination and collaboration that existed and how that translated to open lines of communication and consistent messaging (i.e., everyone on the same page).

✓ **Outreach and External Messaging**

- The majority of Regions identified or felt that they were doing a good job of providing a consistent message to the public (including across Programs); including messages that may be unpopular in some Communities.
- All Regions talked about the value of providing technical assistance or providing education around cougar behavior and animal husbandry and the Department's

response in different situations. Education was often the focus of the Department's contact as well as working on after-action plans with the public to minimize recurrence of problems.

- The Regions identified that cougar were not removed in the vast majority of calls that WDFW responded to and they pointed to education as a reason for that (Note for 2019 and 2020 WDFW responded statewide to 680 and 533 cougar calls respectively and cougar were removed in 20% and 19% of those cases).

3. **What was the most important challenge or biggest concern for your Detachment/District's response to cougar depredation/public safety issues in 2020 (and why)?**

All Regions generated lists of the most important challenges or biggest concerns for their Detachment or District when responding to cougar depredation or public safety issues. The following is a summarized and categorized list (the categories have been created by the Regional Directors) of the most common challenges or concerns identified by the Regions:

✓ **Equipment, Resources and Staff**

- Similar to responses given in Question 1 regarding what impacted WDFW's ability to take the appropriate action during a cougar call; staffing was again identified as one of the most important challenges that the Regions faced. Generally, when the Regions discussed concerns for staff availability it was focused on Conflict Staff, but there were also instances of vacant Enforcement positions that created challenges for the Regions and led to reduced response times to the public.
- Similar to responses given in Question 1 regarding what impacted WDFW's ability to take the appropriate action during a cougar call; live traps, capture kits, immobilization drugs, drug certifications and training and drug availability were again identified as one of the most important challenges that the Regions faced.
- Similar to responses given in Question 1 regarding what impacted WDFW's ability to take the appropriate action during a cougar call; the availability of hounds or the availability of quality hounds was identified as one of the most important challenges that the Regions faced.
- Several Regions indicated that the lack of a funded cougar compensation program for species other than commercially produced cattle, horses or sheep is a significant challenge. They also identified the lack of a funding source to provide non-lethal deterrents/animal husbandry assistance as a concern.

✓ **Public Perception and Social Media**

- Staff identified significantly different public perceptions and public attitudes around cougar as significant challenges in trying to provide a consistent Agency/Regional response. In some Regions or local areas, the public have emotional or personal

attachment to cougar, and they do not want cougar killed. In other Regions or local areas there is not the same feeling and cougar are more likely to be seen as threats to property and safety. In these areas the public is often more supportive of lethal removal.

- Staff also recognized that people that are impacted by a depredation or a public safety situation are often not receptive to information about cougar behavior or animal husbandry practices. This necessitates follow-up after some time has lapsed and that can present new challenges.
- Social media stories and inaccurate information about cougar incidents can create hysteria. Often times these social media reports get out ahead of WDFW and we have a hard time correcting or telling our story. The Regions identified this as a challenge and talked about social media hysteria as also influencing or making it difficult for us to provide any educational information.

✓ **Teamwork and Internal Communication**

- In one District in one Region the challenges associated with teamwork and communication are creating significant internal conflict both within and across the Wildlife and Enforcement Programs. There is a lack of agreement on what constitutes an appropriate action for a cougar response and on what constitutes a public safety situation (e.g., livestock depredation events). Another challenge identified specifically to that District is the internal conflict created by a local Tribal cougar project. All of these issues were identified as the most important challenges to that District, but as identified by other Regions this is having an impact outside of the District.
- Several Regions identified that internal conflict and disagreements on cougar response in some parts of the state were impacting other Regions and hurting WDFW/local credibility. It was also mentioned that how one Region responds can concern the others and that it may not be appropriate to lump the Regions together in any kind of a review.
- In some Regions it was mentioned that there was “second-guessing” or “armchair quarterbacks” around some Regional responses to cougar depredation or public safety situations. This was identified as making it difficult to implement the Agency policy.

✓ **Internal Direction and Guidance**

- Implementing the conflict response matrix and understanding the roles and responsibilities for staff and where the authority for decisions lies was identified as a challenge for a few Regions.
- Identifying consistent opportunities to utilize cougar relocation or cougar translocation (and understanding the difference between the two) was identified as Regional challenge.

- The Director’s memo and interpretation of the memo and/or direction provided from a supervisor to remove a cougar that may not have been a public safety threat were both identified as Regional challenges. One Region specifically asked for clarification of the word “removal” in the Director’s memo.

✓ **Coordination and Work with Local Law Enforcement/Local Messaging**

- As presented earlier in Question 1, one District in Region 1 and one in Region 5, were concerned that the Agency’s ability to take the appropriate action regarding a cougar situation was sometimes impacted by Community sentiment. This same issue was presented as providing those Districts with a significant challenge. In these areas, local law enforcement is taking an active role in communicating with the public and/or in responding to cougar incidents. Staff is concerned that there could be ramifications for Enforcement/WDFW if the Community does not feel that WDFW is taking the appropriate cougar response. There is also concern in the Region 1 District that the WDFW response is being driven by an anti-carnivore attitude and by messaging of local law enforcement. This challenge is seen as continuing to fuel the District’s internal conflict.

✓ **Other Challenges**

- A few Regions mentioned a challenge associated with the multiple ways in which WDFW documents cougar removals (IRF, Survey 123) and indicated that this leads to inconsistency and breakdowns in communication. Some staff were concerned that we need a better way to standardize cougar removal documentation.
- A few Regions expressed a challenge associated with the website database that reports on bear, cougar and wolf sightings; specifically, that the database does not identify what has been confirmed or unconfirmed.
- COVID-19 was mentioned by several Regions as presenting a challenge when responding to a cougar depredation or public safety situation.

4. What are the things that have the greatest influence on the way in which your Detachment/District responds to cougar depredation/public safety issues?

All Regions generated lists of the things that had the greatest influence on the way in which their Detachment/District responded to cougar depredation or public safety situations. The following is a summarized and categorized list (the categories have been created by the Regional Directors) of the things identified as having the greatest influence on a Regional response:

✓ **Internal Direction and Guidance**

- Several Regions identified that the Agency Policy and the Director’s memo had the greatest influence on a Regional response. The influence was characterized as both a positive as well as a negative, depending on the Region. One Region identified that they

wanted the Policy to provide “as bright a line as possible” for how they make decisions on the ground, so that they would know that their response would be supported.

- Supervisors, the RMT’s, the EMT and the Commission were all listed as influencing the Regional responses.
 - Several Regions identified that the biggest influence on how they responded to a cougar situation was whether or not it was a depredation or a public safety situation; stating that in those Regions they are not handled the same way.
 - One Region identified that while there were numerous rules (WAC) that influenced their response, what was needed was a clear response structure that had flexibility but specifically provided guidance around the use of non-lethal deterrents.
- ✓ **Equipment, Resources and Staff**
- Staffing/Maintaining field level staffing was identified by the majority of Regions as influencing the Regional response.
 - Equipment (specifically the number of “new design” live traps) and hound availability was listed as a significant influencer on the Regions ability to respond.
 - One Region identified that access to private property was an influence on their response because of the ability to use hounds if access was available.
- ✓ **Teamwork and Internal Communication**
- Consistent messaging and/or the lack of consistent messaging was identified as a significant influence on the Regional response. As was mixed messaging from staff that responded. These things were identified as leading to mistrust of the Department.
 - Individual staff relationships with the public and with the Community.
 - The Regions identified that education of the public before and after a response was an influence on what the response would look like. This included information on animal husbandry and the Department being able to be prescriptive about what good practices look like.
- ✓ **Coordination and Work with Local Law Enforcement/Local Messaging**
- As presented earlier in Question 1 and in Question 3, one District in Region 1 and one in Region 5, were concerned that the Agency’s ability to take the appropriate action regarding a cougar situation was sometimes impacted by Community sentiment. This same issue was presented as providing those Districts with a significant challenge. For this question those same Districts listed the local Community sentiment as having the greatest influence on their ability to respond. In these areas, local law enforcement is

taking an active role in communicating with the public and/or in responding to cougar incidents. Staff is concerned that there could be ramifications for Enforcement/WDFW if the Community does not feel that WDFW is taking the appropriate cougar response. There is also concern in the Region 1 District that the WDFW response is being influenced by an anti-carnivore attitude and by messaging of local law enforcement. This challenge is seen as continuing to fuel the District's internal conflict.

✓ **Public Perception and Social Media**

- The Regions identified that in more urban areas public perception is the single greatest influence on the Regional response. Often times we are influenced to respond to demonstrate that we took an action (e.g., hounds on a leash). In these urban areas with limited options to use hounds, we also need to recognize that there are a lot of people watching our staff response.
- The Communities have differing perspectives (needs and concerns) on what action we should take, and they can greatly influence our response. Some Communities want cougar removed and others very clearly do not.
- Social media and podcasts can influence the Regional response.

✓ **Other Influences**

- A few Regions identified that the timeliness of when we receive a report has a great influence on our response.
- A few Regions identified that pressure from outside their Region was an influencer on the way in which their Region responded to a cougar depredation or public safety situation.

5. Are there data from cougar depredations and public safety situations that aren't being collected now that should be collected in the future?

All Regions generated lists of data needs from cougar depredations and public safety responses. The following is a summarized list (consolidation of all Regions, with redundancy and duplication removed) of the data needs identified through the Regional AAR's:

✓ **Summarized List of Data Needs Identified by the Regions**

- Data specific to whether or not a cougar call was a public safety situation or a depredation (i.e., not all depredations are public safety situations).
- One Region indicated a need for more "Kertson-type" cougar data and research.

- The data from the cougar reporting website needs to be made consistent with the conflict data.
- Data specific to the location of cougar incidents so that we can determine if we are responding to repeated depredations in the same location.
- Need better data on confirmed or unconfirmed cougar reports in CODY; this inflates our reports for cougar calls.
- We need WILDCOMM reported cougar calls and CODY cougar incidents to reference one another so that there is not double reporting of cougar complaints.
- We should use color coding for website cougar complaint reporting.
- We need to address a data concern where one cougar in an area may result in multiple complaints being reported.
- We need to collect data on the number of road-killed cougar.
- Our sighting database should clearly indicate if the “sighting” was actually a video or a trail cam picture.
- We need to be able to identify cougar that are reported as hunting harvest that are actually taken in populated areas (i.e., backyard harvest).
- Numerous Enforcement staff recommended changes to the Incident Response Form (IRF); including to Box 13, so that we could capture information on cougar relocations.
- We should collect data from a cougar conflict situation so that we know the number of previous incidents at that site and the proactive non-lethal steps taken, so that we can evaluate the effectiveness of our response.
- We need to collect/continue collecting biological data from cats that are euthanized.
- We need data on the animal husbandry practices in place at the time of a depredation (an extensive list was provided by District 1).
- We need data on the behavior of the cougar if it was reported as a public safety situation (an extensive list was provided by District 1).
- We need data on the local conditions surrounding a depredation (from District 1, e.g., distance to house, distance to other livestock, proximity to wild prey, etc.).

6. Considering the following things (A-E) that have direct/indirect influence on the way in which your Detachment/District responded to cougar depredations/public safety issues (Note the list is not exhaustive and can be added to); Please discuss each one and decide if change is needed; if Yes, describe the change that you would recommend:

A) Local Coordination/Communication

- Some staff in districts in Region 1 and in Region 5 identified that the local coordination and communication between WDFW and the local Sheriff's Office could be improved.

B) Teamwork

- In Region 5, the Enforcement and Wildlife Program staff agreed that scenario planning would be useful to plan for worst-case scenarios and figure out how they would have capacity for both programs to respond together (Note this also included a conversation about the availability of Wildlife Conflict Staff). Regarding both Programs responding together, in Region 1, District 1, the Wildlife Program staff recommended having a joint Enforcement/Wildlife Conflict response to livestock depredations.
- In a few Regions interest was expressed in a refresher course on identifying livestock depredations and carnivore signatures. It was mentioned that these could happen locally or statewide.

C) Local outreach/messaging

- Numerous Regions talked about the value of consistent and readily available outreach and messaging materials. Common items discussed included standardized sighting signs for cougar awareness, flyers, mailers and door hangers for cougar information, self-help measures (emphasized in Region 2) to avoid problems and livestock husbandry techniques to minimize chances of depredation. Dedicated Regional Communications staff were also discussed as providing our best opportunity to provide proactive messaging.
- Regional Customer Service staff take a lot of cougar calls from the public and they are often the ones that are making decisions on which staff to direct the caller to. However, they often find themselves in deep conversation with the caller and they would benefit from more formal training about the cougar message that WDFW wants to give the public across the entire Agency.

- Region 5 specifically brought up the difficulty that the public has in some areas for finding a local WDFW contact phone number and recommended that this be addressed at a statewide level.
- The Wildlife Program in District 1 brought forward a number of ideas for addressing the negative “carnivore culture” in District 1 including taking advantage of the KCVL “Question of the Week”, virtual presentations, library presentations, 4-H group presentations, presence at fairs, and other opportunities to provide a positive focused message on cougars.

D) Statewide outreach/messaging

- There were a variety of perspectives on Statewide outreach and messaging with some common energy around more self-help information about animal husbandry, the status of the cougar population as compared to historic, the negatives of feeding wildlife, and information for hunters around the cougar seasons, harvest guidelines and cougar impacts to ungulates.
- There was some discussion around the value of Statewide messaging but with the ability to tailor it to the local community. Some sentiment was expressed that WDFW messaging is dismissive and overstates the science associated with conflict. One Region expressed concern that WDFW is not sympathetic/empathetic to rural communities and the economics or the cultural component of how livestock are/can be maintained.
- One Region indicated that the cougar information on WDFW’s website needed to be revisited to reduce confusion with the public. The example that was given was the information pertaining to “day active” cougar.

E) Agency policy/direction

- While discussed by several Regions, there was a recognition that the current Dangerous Wildlife Policy is being revised and that any revisions may also have an impact on the Director’s memo. One Region indicated that the direction provided should be behavior based and not species based. There was not agreement on whether the Policy should be more or less prescriptive or leave more to discretion, with different Regions expressing different perspectives. There was also the desire for the Policy to incorporate a “strike” count to be used for cougar (like for black bear).
- One Region talked about the WDFW harvest guidelines not being “rolled out” well to the public in 2008 and that has led to lingering public distrust of the current system, especially when WDFW is lethally removing more cougars in a year than the guidelines allow for hunters.
- Outside of this Question, almost all Regions had previously identified the Agency need for more Wildlife Conflict Specialist Capacity; one Region include it here as part of the direction that the Agency should take.

2020 Cougar Depredation and Public Safety Regional Response

After-Action Review

FINAL Regional Recommendations

Topic: Dangerous Wildlife Response (Policy 5401 and the 2019 Director's Memo)

1) Recommendation: The Enforcement and Wildlife Program have been working on revisions to the Controlling Dangerous Wildlife Policy and Procedure (Policy 5401). This work needs to be completed through the existing Agency process. The revised Policy should address the issue of depredations that do/do not represent a public safety situation (e.g., imminent threat) as well as relocation/translocation. This same cross-Program group should update the wildlife response matrix.

2) Recommendation: Work on Policy 5401 is underway and will require time to complete. In the short term, the Enforcement Chief and the Wildlife Program Director should communicate with their respective staffs (with support of the Regional Directors) that not all cougar depredations should result in the lethal removal of a cougar. This is consistent with the 2019 Director's Memo but remains an area of confusion in many regions. When revisions to Policy 5401 are completed and the new policy is signed by the Director, the Director (or Program Directors) will provide an all-staff message indicating that the revised Policy and Procedure and Wildlife Response Matrix are ready for implementation. At this time any previous guidance would be rescinded.

3) Recommendation: The sub-committee working on Policy 5401 should consider including a "strike" approach to determine the actions taken by staff when responding to a dangerous wildlife incident. One approach would be for the sub-committee to consider a pilot area (outside of direction in the policy) where the "strikes" idea was used in coordination with increased husbandry education and assistance with implementing nonlethal deterrents.

Topic: Staffing and Equipment

4) Recommendation: The Wildlife and Enforcement Programs in coordination with the Director's office and a subset of the EMT should review the Agency resources and response to dangerous wildlife with a focus on the roles and responsibilities of Enforcement staff and Wildlife staff. This should include a thorough review of staffing, roles and responsibilities and workload/capacity for the Wildlife Conflict Specialists.

5) Recommendation: The Enforcement Program has conducted a statewide assessment of their current inventory/condition/version of cougar and bear live traps. Based on this inventory, traps should be disposed of, repaired, purchased or redistributed as necessary to meet the needs of the Regions. The same assessment is needed for "capture kits" for cougar and bear (e.g., nets, climbing gear, restraints, immobilization equipment). The Wildlife Program should conduct a similar inventory and once complete, the programs should work together to replace, repair and acquire identified equipment.

Topic: Training Needs

6) Recommendation: The Wildlife Program (as lead) and Enforcement Program should evaluate the current condition and set the future expectation for staff that are to be trained and remain proficient in wildlife capture and immobilization (i.e., in the context of responding to a problem wildlife/dangerous wildlife situation).

7) Recommendation: Scenario-based planning should be included in the staff training curriculum for dangerous wildlife response. Participants should learn from reality-based scenarios as well as group tabletop exercises where both the Wildlife and Enforcement programs work to address potential “worst-case” dangerous wildlife scenarios requiring cross-program coordination and the combining of resources.

8) Recommendation: The Wildlife Program Conflict Section and Carnivore Section should consider coordinating and offering a new round of livestock depredation trainings in the Regions. These trainings could occur utilizing both internal and external experts. Also, there should be consideration of training around responding to problem/dangerous wildlife.

Topic: Outreach and Education

9) Recommendation: The Department should review the multiple sources of outreach and education materials (potentially including in-person meetings and events) that it has developed for cougar (and other species) and provide field staff and Regional Offices with “self-help kits” for the public. The information should focus on general cougar biology and behavior and then emphasize animal husbandry practices that can minimize interactions with large carnivores. Other items requested include a standardized WDFW cougar sighting sign, as well as flyers, mailers and door hangars with information on self-help measures for minimizing negative large carnivore incidents. Information about the negative impacts of feeding wildlife should also be included.

10) Recommendation: In addition to materials developed for the “self-help kits”, a brochure or messaging strategy is needed that is focused on providing management information for hunters. Items of interest include historic and current cougar population estimates, density information, hunting guidelines and their implementation and carnivore impacts on ungulates.

11) Recommendation: A script or talking points covering the diversity of perspectives around large carnivore management and public safety should be developed for use by Regional (and Headquarters) Customer Service Staff (CSS). This should be developed with the CSS so that it covers the things most commonly heard. Once completed a series of Headquarters and Regional Customer Service “Q and A” opportunities should be set up to have an interactive dialogue with CSS and Wildlife and Enforcement lead staff.

12) Recommendation: The department should address the difficulty the public has in some areas for finding a local WDFW contact phone number. This topic has statewide implications and needs further discussion to identify a consistent strategy for providing the public with the most efficient way of contacting the appropriate agency staff.

Topic: Reporting

13) Recommendation: Conflict Specialists have recently transitioned to using CODY to document sightings and dangerous wildlife incidents. While this has accomplished consistency for compliance with RCW 77.12.885, the Enforcement and Wildlife Programs should address a remaining inconsistency in the reporting of cougar harvest and depredation removal data (e.g., hunting license year versus calendar year). The CODY replacement should be reviewed to determine how it can best interact with Wildlife Program staff and Survey 1-2-3 to deliver consistent data.

Topic: Compensation Program

14) Recommendation: The Wildlife Program's Conflict Section should facilitate an internal working group to explore a potential compensation program for cougar (and bear) depredations on livestock other than commercially raised cattle, horses, and sheep. A program like this, if developed, would require significant funding, and a decision package for legislative session and/or potential partnerships with NGOs should be included in the group's evaluation.

Topic: Teamwork and Internal Communication

15) Recommendation: Program leaders and supervisors should discuss how to ensure staff are embracing the agency's ASPIRE values and set expectations to support other WDFW staff who respond to cougar incidents and make decisions to remove (or not remove) a cougar based on their best professional judgement.