

**Senate Bill 5613**  
**Concerning the use of dogs to hunt black bear, cougar, or bobcat.**

**Sponsors: Van De Wege, Rolfes**

Follow the bill:

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5613&Initiative=false&Year=2021>

**What to do:**

1. **Email:** Have a short comment prepared that can be copied and pasted to each member on the online contact portal. (see examples below)
2. **Phone:** Contact each of the Senators numbers listed below.
3. **Prepare for public hearing/commentary** about the bill January 18. (Have your thoughts condensed to 3 minutes or less with the strongest points presented first - in case your time is cut off. This can be a short & concise version of the comment you sent to the Senators)

**Timeline:**

This is a very quick legislative session! Time is of the essence! Get your comments in ASAP and definitely **before January 18!**

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**Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (7)**      Van De Wege, Chair (D); Salomon, Vice Chair (D); Warnick; Honeyford; Rolfes; Short; Stanford

**Contact each member of the Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources and Parks Committee:**

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/Rosters/CommitteeMembersByCommittee/Senate>

1. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/24/0>

 <b>Senator Kevin Van De Wege (D)</b> 24th Legislative District Home Page Email Details	<b>Olympia Office</b> 212 John A. Cherberg Building PO Box 40424 Olympia, WA 98504 (360) 786-7646	<b>District Office</b> 504 East 8th Street Suite C Port Angeles, WA 98362	<b>Committees</b> Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (Chair) Health & Long Term Care Ways & Means
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2. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/32/0>

 <b>Senator Jesse Salomon (D)</b> 32nd Legislative District Home Page Email Details	<b>Olympia Office</b> 404 Legislative Building PO Box 40432 Olympia, WA 98504 (360) 786-7662	<b>Committees</b> Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (Vice Chair) Housing & Local Government Law & Justice
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3. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/13/0>

	<b>Senator Judy Warnick (R)</b> Republican Caucus Chair 13th Legislative District	<b>Olympia Office</b> 316 Legislative Building PO Box 40413 Olympia, WA 98504 (360) 786-7624	<b>Committees</b> Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (Ranking Member) Behavioral Health Subcommittee to Health & Long Term Care Housing & Local Government Ways & Means
Home Page	Email Details		

4. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/15/0>

	<b>Senator Jim Honeyford (R)</b> 15th Legislative District	<b>Olympia Office</b> 112 Irv Newhouse Building PO Box 40415 Olympia, WA 98504 (360) 786-7684	<b>Committees</b> Ways & Means (Assistant Ranking Member, Capital) Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks Labor, Commerce & Tribal Affairs
Home Page	Email Details		

5. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/23/0>

	<b>Senator Christine Rolfes (D)</b> 23rd Legislative District	<b>Olympia Office</b> 303 John A. Cherberg Building PO Box 40423 Olympia, WA 98504 (360) 786-7644	<b>Committees</b> Ways & Means (Chair) Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks
Home Page	Email Details		

6. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/7/0>

	<b>Senator Shelly Short (R)</b> Republican Floor Leader 7th Legislative District	<b>Olympia Office</b> 409 Legislative Building PO Box 40407 Olympia, WA 98504 (360) 786-7612	<b>Committees</b> Housing & Local Government (Assistant Ranking Member) Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks Environment, Energy & Technology Rules
Home Page	Email Details		

7. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/1/0>

	<b>Senator Derek Stanford (D)</b> 1st Legislative District	<b>Olympia Office</b> 402 Legislative Building PO Box 40401 Olympia, WA 98504 (360) 786-7600	<b>Committees</b> Labor, Commerce & Tribal Affairs (Vice Chair, Commerce & Tribal Affairs) Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks Environment, Energy & Technology
Home Page	Email Details		

**#1. EMAIL:** Talking Points to copy and paste portions into a message on the Senator's contact portal (and/or use these sentences as a template to create your own message.)

Example:

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my comment. I fully support the passage of Senate Bill 5613. While I understand that public safety is an important aspect of law enforcement, I feel it is important that emergency calls concerning wildlife be addressed by the agencies best suited and trained to respond. The use of dogs to track wildlife is best left in the hands of WDFW. I fully support the passage of SB 5613. Thank you for taking the time to read my commentary. I thank you for your service to the State of Washington and making it better.

Other points that could be included:

- I feel it is important to have reliable, trained agencies in wildlife assist in the public safety calls that come in concerning human/animal conflicts.
- The use of dogs by counties is unnecessary, sometimes dangerous, violates the spirit of the state ban and is detrimental for wildlife and ecosystems.
- Wildlife management by county agencies distracts counties from their own duties, wastes county tax money, takes valuable time away from other emergency calls and spreads the department thin.
- Manpower and resources are limited in a county so it's better to send wildlife management issues to WDFW who knows how to address these situations.
- County services and budgets are better utilized when they allow wildlife calls to go to state wildlife agencies who are trained in assessing these types of calls.
- Hunting activity with dogs that is not supervised by WDFW or wildlife professionals is not safe and makes people and animals less safe.
- We are in full support that the state agency is best suited for wildlife management and are the professionals trained to use dogs for hunting purposes.

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**#2. PHONE: Sample script for calls to the Senator's office:**

- Relax!
- Most of the time when you call you will speak to the the Senator's assistants, not the actual Senator
- Insert YOUR personal story - each story is unique and they want to hear your story
- Be polite, courteous and get your point across!

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_ I live in \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I look to you to support Senate Bill 5613 so that we can protect wildlife and leave wildlife management in the hands of WDFW.*

*As a resident of Klickitat County, I have seen first hand the negative impact the use of dogs by a Sheriff's office has had on wildlife and that is why I am in support of SB 5613.*

*Thank you for your time.*

## **Informational background:**

The italicized/underlined quotes below include talking points that Sheriff Songer uses to defend his use of posse hound hunters to find and kill cougars. The facts provided in response are the truth that we need to speak. Remember that Senate Bill 5613 only addresses a county's authority to hunt cougars with hounds— so this is what we are trying to get legislators to support. The statistics provided here come primarily from 154 sheriff reports obtained through public records requests.

*"Cougars are a public safety issue."*

### **FACT:**

There have only been 2 fatalities in 100 years in Washington state (none in Klickitat County). Cougars are elusive, sightings are quite rare, encounters are even more so. Cougars prey on deer and other wildlife, not humans. You are far more likely to be attacked by dogs, struck by lightning, or become President of the United States, than to be attacked by a cougar. Statistically it is a non-issue.

More concerning to public safety are the hound hunts that are being used by the Klickitat County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) to search for cougars that have not attacked any persons or domestic animals. KCSO has used posse hound hunters 86 times, usually looking for cougars that have done nothing of concern according to more than two-thirds of the reports. The hounds, on the other hand, chased cougars into residential neighborhoods, where officers fired shots at them; attacked and killed caged rabbits; and provoked cougars to attack them (the hounds). People and animals are at risk from these hound hunts, and for no good reason. Posse hound hunts are a greater public safety issue than cougars themselves.

*"We don't want kids killed by cougars."*

### **FACT:**

More kids have died from abuse, neglect and suicide in Klickitat County than the 0 kids that have died from cougars. Packs of overexcited dogs on the hunt, roaming off-leash across our landscapes, and hound handlers and deputies shooting at wildlife in areas where kids live, pose a greater threat to kids than cougars do.

*"All kills of cougars in Klickitat County by the Sheriff's office are reported to WDFW."*

### **FACT:**

Less than 25% of the kills by the Sheriff's office were reported to WDFW. WDFW has confirmed that only 5 of the 28 kills were reported through their mandatory online reporting system. WAC 220-400-050(3) requires the reporting of wildlife kills, as follows:

*"Any person who takes a cougar with the use of dogs must notify the department within 24 hours of kill (excluding legal state holidays) and provide the hunter's name, date and location of kill, and sex of animal. The raw pelt of a cougar must be presented to an authorized department employee for sealing within five days of the notification of kill."*

If WDFW handled calls from concerned residents instead of KCSO, they would use their knowledge and tools to determine when to hunt down cougars, and would use WDFW's group of well-vetted and well-trained hound hunters to do it, thereby reducing risks of hound hunts to people and non-target animals. WDFW would also be able to decide whether to relocate or put down the animal and would record vital data that their cougar biologists use for research and wildlife management purposes.

*"The Sheriff only kills 'problem' cougars."*

### **FACT:**

Reports filed by the Klickitat County Sheriff Office (KCSO) show that most of the cougars were killed just for existing. The mere presence of a cougar, or cougar predation on deer and other wild animals, is not inherently a threat, or a reason to kill it. In Klickitat County, cougars are never far away from where deer are found, but there are no known records of people having ever been attacked. None of the cougars killed by KCSO were aggressive toward a human, and only 7 of 28 cougars killed (25%) had attacked or killed domestic animals. Yet 100% of cougars found by KCSO, whether actually "problem" cougars or not, are killed! In 26 of 28 cases, the killed cougars were found using hounds; KCSO used hounds to seek them 86 times in 24 months! Many of the cougars were simply there in their natural habitat, and were shot because the hounds found them. Klickitat County Sheriff's Office (KCSO)'s hound hunts are an abuse of legal authority, and defy the statewide ban on hound hunting overwhelmingly approved by WA voters and in effect since 1996.

*"There is a cougar overpopulation problem."*

### **FACT:**

Klickitat County habitat and prey abundance support a stable adult cougar population of no more than 50 cougars at any given time. Cougars self-manage their populations and territories, in concert with the prey populations within their habitat. Unsustainable killing from KCSO has put the cougar population in peril by indiscriminately killing cougars of all ages. WDFW biologists calculated a 12-16% annual "harvest" rate as sustainable - that's 6-8 cougars/year. Yet, KCSO reports and WDFW hunting data show that in 2 years time:

24 cougars were killed by KCSO

4 cougars were killed by property owners encouraged by KCSO

12 cougars were killed by cougar hunters with hunting licenses

Total=40 cougars killed in 2 years, or 20 per year

This is 2-3x more than the recommended 6-8 kills per year. Unsustainable!

Using hounds to track down cougars has helped KCSO to find and kill so many adult cougars that KC may now have increased numbers of very young cougars that have been drawn in from surrounding areas to compete for unclaimed territories in KC. These inexperienced young animals have more likelihood of making mistakes and being seen by humans. KCSO's hound hunts are thus causing problems, attracting young cougars, and making animals and people less safe, not more safe.

*"There are more calls coming into KCSO about cougars proving further the cougar overpopulation problem."*

**FACT:**

Sheriff Songer and KCSO have whipped up a frenzy of fear and urged people to call 911 ASAP when they detect the presence of a cougar, so that hounds have more likelihood to pick up a scent trail. Data shows that the more the Sheriff broadcasts his message, the more calls come into the KCSO office. There is a direct correlation, and it is the Sheriff, not the cougars, that is causing an increase in calls! Furthermore, it is all being driven by KCSO's desire to conduct successful hound hunts. If the bill passes and the KCSO hound hunts are stopped, the number of calls will decrease dramatically. The cougar population will then stabilize at less than 50 cougars, since this is what the habitat and population dynamics of cougars supports in the absence of KCSO's interference.

*"WDFW is under-staffed and underfunded and cannot respond to wildlife conflict issues in a timely manner."*

**FACT:**

A local watchdog citizen group obtained all KCSO cougar reports through public records requests. Data from the reports shows that KCSO seldom contacts WDFW for wildlife calls. Even when they do, their communication usually does not reach the appropriate WDFW responders in a timely manner. The reports say that KCSO attempted to contact WDFW on only 17 out of 154 calls, and 15 of these contacts were initiated after KCSO had already made the decision to hunt down and kill any cougar they could find. This meant there was no attempt to use WDFW's knowledge and expertise to assess whether a cougar actually was involved, and whether the cougar should be tracked, relocated, or killed. KCSO lacks wildlife expertise, but they do have posse hound hunters eager to pursue cougars, and a false narrative to justify killing cougars that are not a true threat. Passing this bill will mean that WDFW will be able to use their expertise and their own well-trained hound hunters to appropriately address wildlife conflict with cougars, bears, and bobcats.

*"Hound hunting was banned in 1996. Why is the Sheriff allowed to hunt with dogs?"*

**FACT:**

The Klickitat County Sheriff has exploited a loophole in the law RCW 77.15.245 to enable KCSO and its hound-hunter posse to hunt and shoot cougars. The loophole exists because this law was written with other purposes in mind, and legislators who wrote the law did not expect county law enforcement to displace WDFW as the agency managing conflicts with wildlife. KCSO's only tool for managing conflict is lethal removal of cougars, whereas WDFW has many tools to address human/wildlife conflict that do not involve killing. It is a misuse of funds for the Sheriff's office to pursue cougars when they should be focusing on their job: crime prevention & law enforcement. Senate Bill 5613 will end this abuse of WA law and allow WDFW to carry out its primary mandate to protect, preserve, and perpetuate WA wildlife.