

General cougar season starts Sept. 1 - Permit-only hunt applications are due Aug. 31

Local News

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OLYMPIA - Cougar hunters will begin the 2009 general season on Sept. 1 this year, while those interested in permit-only hunts held after the general season have until Aug. 31 to submit an application to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Under new rules adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, the general cougar season will begin with a statewide archery-only season Sept. 1-25, followed by a muzzleloader-only season Sept. 26-Oct. 16. Beginning Oct. 17, hunters may use any legal weapon to target cougars in most areas of the state. In the past, the general cougar hunting season began Aug. 1 and hunters were allowed to use any legal weapon. The changes were adopted to better match cougar hunting with the early elk and deer seasons, said Donny Martorello, carnivore specialist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

Exceptions include certain cougar management units in Chelan, Ferry, Klickitat, Okanogan, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties, which will be closed during modern firearm deer season. Cougar hunting will run Oct. 31 through Nov. 30 in those areas. Any legal weapon may be used and the use of hounds is permitted. Martorello said that the later start date in those areas, which occurs after the modern firearm deer season, is designed to better evaluate the pilot hound program in those counties. "We want to offer all hunters a fair opportunity to hunt cougar in the state and maintain harvestable levels," Martorello said. "Removing cougar hunting from a portion of the deer season will help us further test the management benefits of the pilot hound season." Details on the 2009 cougar season are available on page 50 of the WDFW's *Big Game Hunting* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/hunter/hunter.htm>. Meanwhile, hunters who wish to participate in a permit-only cougar hunt to be held this winter, have until Aug. 31 to purchase and submit their applications to WDFW. Cougar hunters participating in the general season may also apply for the special hunt drawing. Approximately 68 permits will be available for special cougar hunts in five areas where the use of dogs is allowed. Under new rules approved by the commission, dog ownership is no longer a requirement for those wishing to apply for a hound-assisted hunt. Also new this year is the addition of 290 permits allowing permit-only cougar hunts without the use of dogs in nine areas of the state. The drawing for permit-only hunts will be held in mid-September; winners will be notified in mid-October by email or U.S. mail. To apply for a permit, hunters must purchase a special permit application and a 2009 hunting license that includes cougar as a species option. Hunting licenses, cougar transport tags and cougar permit applications may be purchased online at <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/>, by calling (866) 246-9453, or at any license vendor in the state. Special permit applications, which require a correct hunt choice number specifying the area of choice, may be submitted online at <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/> or by calling (877) 945-3492. Hunt choices and season dates are located on page 51 of the 2009 *Big Game Hunting* pamphlet, available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/hunter/hunter.htm>.