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Monday, September 4th, 2023

Game, Fish and Parks Commission
Joe Foss Building
523 East Capitol
Pierre, SD 57501
C/o Jon Kotilnek - Jon.Kotilnek@state.sd.us

Dear Commissioners,

PETITION FOR RULEMAKING Submitted pursuant to SDCL 1-26-13.

Nancy Hilding and Prairie Hills Audubon Society of Western SD submit this petition. Nancy Hilding is a resident of Meade County, SD. Prairie Hills Audubon Society is a non-profit corporation registered in SD and as such is a person by SD law and Supreme Court decisions.

EXISTING RULE TO BE AMENDED –

Mountain lion Hunting Fees [41:06:02:03](#). **Hunting license fees.** Hunting license fees are as follows:

(62) Mountain lion license, \$22;

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Change Requested - Add text and reformat shape of section on mountain lion license fees. The additional text to be added is underlined below:

41:06:02:03 **Hunting license fees.** Hunting license fees are as follows:

(62) Mountain lion license,

a) hunting without the use of hounds, \$34. If a male mountain lion is killed, or a female mountain lion is killed, a \$10 fee for male and \$20 fee for female will be accessed as an extra fee, when the animals are turned in for inspection;

b) hunting with the use of hounds outside Custer State Park, \$80. If a female mountain lion is killed, an extra \$20 will be accessed as an extra fee, when the animal is turned in for inspection;

c) hunting with the use of hounds within Custer State Park; \$100. If a female mountain lion is killed, an extra \$20 will be accessed as an extra fee, when the animal is turned in for inspection;

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STATEMENT OF REASONS

COUGAR LICENSE COST IS TOO LOW:

New concept of license fees

We have created a new concept of license fees, where there is a basic rate for a license, but add-on fees exist if you are successful at the hunt. This is because many boot hunters don't catch lions. As cougars must be submitted for inspection, so SDGFP has a contact opportunity to collect a post-hunt fee, that it may not have with other species.

Value of Cougars is more than \$22:

Twenty-two dollars is too small an amount of money to pay for opportunity to hunt a mountain lion. We have had inflation since the cougar hunting license fee was first accessed in 2005. A resident deer or antelope - one animal tag - is \$34. Cougars in SD have a small population, so each animal is worth more than a deer. Cougars are an iconic species.

Many people value cougars and want to know that cougars are on the land or to see them and/or their tracks around their houses or when they are out in the woods. Killing of the mountain lions deprives the outdoor recreators and homeowners, who enjoy mountain lions of their recreational enjoyment. The state sells the opportunity to hunt, in exchange for dollars that support SDGFP efforts and programs. A larger cougar-based revenue for SDGFP is needed to compensate those who want and respect them for the loss of mountain lions.

To protect population viability SDGFP sets a smaller harvest limit for females. Each female killed reduces the odds of the hunt continuing for more days. The females are more valuable.

Mountain lions have babies year-round and cubs stay with mom until 18 months old. Killing a female, often results in orphaned cubs. Orphaned cubs that survive can become “conflict” mountain lions as they were not properly trained by mom. You can’t design a mountain lion hunting season to escape creation of orphaned kittens. Killing of females has ethical issues that bother many people, and hunters should pay more for the privilege of killing them.

Hound hunters much more successful than boot hunters

Hunting with hounds gives the hunters a much higher probability of killing a mountain lion than the “boot” hunters. As the hound hunters are more likely to kill a mountain lion, they should therefore pay more for the license. They may also act as guides and earn money with their hounds.

SDGFP staff’s July 2023 Powerpoint on mountain lions (“Mountain Lion Management and Research Updates - July 2023”) identified 3,374 cougar license holders and 37 mountain lions killed in the Black Hills Fire Protection District (except CSP) last year. Hunter success in Black Hills, where no hound hunting was allowed, would be 1.1% if all 3,374 actually hunted in Black Hills. The GFP powerpoint indicates 3.8% “active hunter” success.

37 hunters would be 3.8% of 973 hunters. So we assume staff believe 973 folks are active hunters. 973 folk are 28 % of folks who buy licenses. It seems lots of people who buy mountain lion licenses don’t actually go mountain lion hunting. This indicates the fee is so low that 72% of the people are willing to buy and not use license, at least in the Black Hills Fire Protection District (outside CSP).

Many of the Custer State Park (CSP) licenses for other species (not cougars) cost more within the CSP, than the species’ licenses outside CSP. As Custer State Park’s mountain lion access permits are limited in number, the hunters have a higher chance of killing a mountain lion there than elsewhere. There are alternating time periods of hound hunting vs boot hunting. Almost all mountain lions are killed by the hound hunters, while the “boot hunters’ get none or very few mountain lions – in 11 years, 96% of the CSP killing was from hound hunters. 15 hound hunters get licenses in Custer State Park/year and last year 7 mountain lions were killed in CSP, so the hound hunters had 46% success at killing a mountain lion in CSP last year.

The prairie harvest for the last 5 years averaged 11.6 mountain lions. For the past 8 years, 72% of the killed prairie mountain lions were taken by hound hunters

– so prairie’s mountain lion hound hunters are getting about 8.6 mountain lions/year. Last year the prairie kill number was 14.

Last year we had 44 mountain lions killed in Black Hills & 14 on the prairie for 58 mountain lions killed. The hound hunters got about 27% of the mountain lions killed last year.

Fewer hound hunters than boot hunters

There are a lot less hound hunters than boot hunters – at the July 2023 Commission meeting, a proponent of increased hound hunting said there are 100 members of hound hunting club and all would take advantage of increased hound hunting. If we subtract 100 hound hunters from 3,374 licensed mountain lion hunters and get 3,274 licensed boot hunters. The hound hunters, are .03 of the hunters (three hundredth – $100/3,274$). That three hundredth are killing 27% of the mountain lions ($15.6/58$ mountain lions). If you allow them to take 12 more from the Black Hills Fire Protection District (except CSP), .03 of the hunters will likely kill an even greater percent of the mountain lions (perhaps $27.6/58$ or 46% of the mountain lions). This may reduce the desire of “boot hunters” to buy licenses.

For the boot hunters we suspect that SDGFP allows a low price to encourage hunting by many. We did not raise the price for “boot hunters” as much as hound hunters. We have raised the lowest price for a cougar license to the same as a deer license. By assigning an extra fee for a successful hunt, we are raising the price for only those who are successful, so as to keep that low price incentive.

The hound hunters, especially those in CSP should pay more for their licenses.

Sincerely,



Nancy Hilding

President Prairie Hills Audubon Society

For the Society and myself as an individual