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To : "'Barbara Baker'" bbakerwdfw@gmail.com

Subject : cougars

Lorna sent me a long note telling me people were "saddened and disappointed" about my cougar vote. Fine, can't please everyone. In case you were also puzzled (you said so), below is what I replied to her. Just FYI to you, no need to reply.

"Yes, I know you three would be disappointed in my vote. I could have very easily voted no like you all on the motion, but there were several considerations in my thinking as a Commissioner vs a scientist. Some I mentioned, some I did not. Science. I was pretty clear that I thought the chance this would work is small, as habitat is ultimately the determinant of population size. And I expected a real scientific assessment for any future actions. I would not support predator control as normal management, and I hope I did not give that impression. I was strongly influenced by the BM elk monograph by Johnson et al 2019. Read the management section at the end where they state that predator control for a few years might help to allow a population to get large enough to withstand cougar predation if the population has sunk to a very low level. I do believe the DFW science from the aerial surveys and the calf mortality study is pretty sound. They can do better, and that is why I keep mentioning science policy, which always seems to go over like a lead balloon when I bring it up at meetings. I did say I thought the chances of success were small. Part of me did not want to be that Commissioner who says no to every DFW hunting-related proposal.

That leads me to the other point. If we as Commissioners really want to work under a Big Tent, then we have to pick our battles and have some give and take with stakeholders. This was a small battle, in my estimation. The proposal likely has a small impact: a few extra cougars killed (not doubling the harvest) in one area of the state, no change in the allowable harvest (that is kind of a loose guideline, however, that deserves scrutiny at another time), no change in cougar hunting policy (compared to spring bear for example), consistent with GMP policy guidelines mostly, and there is a chance it might work (or at least seem to work if there are no confounding variables, which there are) based on available science. That is, little lost with my vote. What is gained by my vote is keeping some social currency with the hunting community, who thinks the Commission generally is against them, and with the eastern WA politicians. As the Game Management Plan says, policy is rooted in science, but social and economic considerations are important. Also, I did not support predator control as business as usual. If some people want to pursue that, then we can deal with that in the future. I won't support hound hunting or strong predator control. This was a unique situation, I felt. In other words, I gave away little for a lot of good will from some stakeholders who feel oppressed on an issue that I think has some scientific support.

Send this to Melanie and Tim, if you want. I'd be happy to discuss over Zoom – I'd thought to explain myself more anyway. As for DFW staff, I'd be happy to discuss with them too. They can call me anytime. Not sure who you talked with, but I have talked with others who think us new Commissioners are against the Department's mission and staff. One said arrogant and condescending. I'm trying to walk the middle ground, and I can tell you it did not feel good to alienate all sides of the DFW public in the contrasting cougar and bear votes. I don't vote on a whim. I'll talk with other public too. I've already talked with Sam Bruegger. I think they lost little compared to the big carnivore battles ahead.

Anyway, I appreciate your candor. Anytime, Lorna. Maybe I'll regret this vote, but not just now. Let's keep talking. I know there is more we agree on than we might disagree over. "

--- John