

A CAT RACE TAIL...OF HOUNDSMEN, BIOLOGISTS, ADMINISTRATORS, COMMITTEES AND LAWMAKERS IN NORTHEAST MONTANA— A HISTORY OF MONTANA HB 142^{TWS}

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Cougar hunting has been part of the fabric of northwest Montana's hunting heritage for over 100 years. From the late 1970s to the mid -1990s cougar populations increased dramatically throughout western Montana. Along with cougar population increases, the number of houndsmen and cougar hunters coming to northwest Montana from out of state increased as well. Popular press magazines were advertising northwest Montana as a destination cougar hunt for non-resident hunters. The high number of non-resident hunters that subsequently came to northwest Montana, in part, created challenges for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' (FWP) existing cougar management. Harvest quota management, allocation of the recreational opportunity, and quality of the hunting experience were issue

that both houndsmen and FWP staff raised. A potential solution presented itself in the form of a new Montana statute that became known as House Bill 142. The trials and tribulations of implementing a new law and subsequent hunting season regulations were explored in detail for this presentation. Following the implementation of Montana HB 142, hunting season quota over-runs decreased, percent nonresident harvest decreased, and opportunity for resident cougar hunting increased. This was accomplished over a two-year period by people dedicating countless hours at regional and statewide houndsmen, advisory, legislative, FWP Commission, and public meetings.