

# **One Hundred Fourth Legislature - Second Session - 2016**

## **Introducer's Statement of Intent**

### **LB961**

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**Chairperson: Senator Ken Schilz**

**Committee: Natural Resources**

**Date of Hearing: February 25, 2016**

The following constitutes the reasons for this bill and the purposes which are sought to be accomplished thereby:

The goal of this bill is to terminate the authority granted to the Game and Parks Commission to establish a hunting season for mountain lions. In addition to the amending of section 37-452, an additional amendment is being proposed to repeal outright section 37-473. The text is provided below to show what is being eliminated:

37-473. Permit for hunting mountain lions; application fee; auction; use of proceeds.

(1) The commission may issue permits for hunting mountain lions and may adopt and promulgate rules and regulations therefor within the limitations prescribed in subsection (1) of section 37-447 and section 37-452 for hunting deer. Any authorized permits shall be issued to residents of Nebraska, except that permits issued by auction may be issued to nonresidents.

(2) The commission shall, pursuant to section 37-327, establish and charge a nonrefundable application fee of not more than twenty-five dollars for permits issued only to residents. Any number of resident-only permits, as authorized by the commission, shall be awarded by random drawing to eligible applicants. No permit fee shall be charged in addition to the nonrefundable application fee.

(3) No more than one additional permit may be authorized and issued pursuant to an auction open to residents and nonresidents. The auction shall be conducted according to rules and regulations prescribed by the commission. Any money derived from the sale of permits by auction shall be used only for perpetuation and management of mountain lions.

Source: Laws 2012, LB928, § 2.

(Legislative Bill 928 was introduced by former Senator Loudon.)

The first and only hunting season was in 2014 when hunters killed five mountain lions.

In addition, 11 more were killed, for a total of 16 in 2014:

Legal hunting took 5; 11 fell prey to illegal hunting, traps, and vehicles. Ten of the 16 were females. Due to the large number of females killed, no season was set for 2015, nor for 2016.

A four-year scientific research project is under way to determine population movement, etc., of the mountain lions. To date, seven have been fitted with GPS collars. The goal is to collar 15 in three areas: Pine Ridge, Wildcat Hills, Niobrara River Valley.

Animals are captured in cages baited with road kill and sedated. Hair samples are taken and DNA-tested to determine gender and estimate age and health condition. Captured kittens are ear-tagged. (This proves that Game and Parks is capable of capturing and relocating any “problem” animal.)

The last scientific estimate of the Pine Ridge population was between 15 and 22 animals.

In addition to the heavy toll taken by various means previously mentioned, section 37-472 authorizes issuance of permits for killing one or more mountain lions that are preying on livestock or poultry. The Commission is empowered to promulgate rules and regulations governing the process.

Such safeguards (considering the small mountain lion population) nullify any justification for “sport” and “trophy” killing, designed to be revenue raisers and provide the thrill of killing.

In The Omaha World-Herald (1-19-14), Commission Deputy Director Tim McCoy noted, that “there have been no confirmed reports of mountain lions preying on livestock or pets in Nebraska” and “no one has been attacked.”

With such a small population (by whatever means determined), the high mortality rate from all causes cannot be sustained without exterminating the Big Cats – a native species until eliminated in 1890. The first sighting since then was 1991.

To repeat: NO CONFIRMED ATTACKS ON HUMANS HAVE OCCURRED.

The population of mountain lions is so small (by any reckoning) that any “managing” that may be necessary, can easily be done by Game and Parks, in conformance with scientific principles to conserve the species in Nebraska and provide for public safety.

Incidentally, when the bill was first introduced in 2014 (LB672), it came within two votes of overriding the Governor’s veto.

**Principal Introducer:** \_\_\_\_\_

Senator Ernie Chambers