

Dogfight over proposed ban on treeing prey

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicle

A proposed ban on using hounds to tree bears and bobcats has provoked yet another tussle between hunters and conservationists, who have already squared off this year over wolves and mountain lions.

The proposed law, which passed the state Senate last week, would prohibit using dog packs to chase bears and bobcats into trees, where hunters then stroll up and shoot the exhausted and helpless predators to death.

"It is an inhumane practice," said Ted Lieu, D-Torrance (Los Angeles County), who introduced SB1221. "It's been likened to shooting animals at the zoo. I think that's a good analogy."

Lieu, the chairman of the Senate Labor Committee, said he learned that hounding bears and bobcats was still legal after Daniel Richards, the president of the California Fish and Game Commission, created a furor by killing a mountain lion that had been chased down by dogs in Idaho. The commission voted Wednesday to change its process for selecting presidents and could decide in August whether to remove Richards from his post.

The legislation on dog packs, which passed 22 to 15 in the Senate, is expected to be taken up by the state Assembly's Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee within the next few weeks.

The proposed ban has raised the hackles of hunters, who say the booming bear and bobcat populations in the state must be controlled. There are about 70,000 bobcats and an estimated 30,000 black bears in California, at least five times the number of bears that existed in 1980, according to the

California Department of Fish and Game.

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