

# Washington bans anyone under 21 from buying assault rifles

By MARTHA BELLISLE  
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Washington on Tuesday joined a handful of other states that ban anyone under 21 from buying a semi-automatic assault rifle after voters passed a sweeping firearms measure in November that has drawn a court challenge from gun-rights advocates.

The ballot initiative seeks to curb gun violence by toughening background checks for people buying assault rifles, increasing the age limit to buy those firearms and requiring the safe storage of all guns. Only the age-limit portion of the measure went into effect Tuesday; the rest becomes law on July 1.

Kristen Ellingboe, a spokeswoman for the Washington Alliance for Gun Responsibility, said the initiative was one of the most comprehensive gun-violence prevention measures to pass in the United States. It specifically targeted semi-automatic assault rifles in response to mass shootings across the country, she said.

“We’ve seen that assault rifles are the weapon of choice for mass shootings, and when they’re used, more people are killed and injured,” Ellingboe said.

Fifty-nine percent of Washington voters approved Initiative 1639 in November.

“We’ve seen time and again that Washington voters want action to prevent gun violence in our state,” Ellingboe said. “They showed that again by supporting 1639 by a wide margin.”

Opponents have sued to block it.

“Starting today, young adults between the ages of 18 to 20 will have their rights to purchase semi-automatic rifles stripped away,” said Dave Workman, a spokesman for the Bellevue, Washington-based Second



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson

Semi-automatic rifles at a gun shop in Lynnwood, Wash.

Amendment Foundation.

The federal lawsuit says the measure violates the Second and 14th amendments of the Constitution as well as gun sellers’ rights under the Commerce Clause. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit are firearms dealers in Spokane and Vancouver, a 19-year-old competitive shooter, a 19-year-old in the Army Reserves, a 20-year-old recreational shooter, the Second Amendment Foundation and the National Rifle Association.

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson said he “looks forward to representing the people of the state of Washington in court against the NRA.”

“The gun lobby is trying to thwart the will of nearly 60 percent of Washingtonian voters who supported common sense gun reform in our state,” he said in an email.

The full measure, when it goes into effect later this year, will expand the background check process to ensure that vetting for rifle purchases is the same as for buying pistols.

Now, people in Washington who buy long guns are run through the FBI’s National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS. Background checks for handgun sales are done by local law enforcement agencies that can

access NICS as well as more detailed records that might expose mental health issues or harder-to-find criminal records. And you must be 21 to purchase a pistol.

“This will update Washington state law so the requirements to purchase semi-automatic assault rifles will match handguns,” Ellingboe said.

In most states, including over the border in Idaho and Oregon, you must be 18 to buy an assault rifle. But Republican-dominant Florida passed a law after a school shooting to increase the age limit to 21.

Nikolas Cruz was 18 when he legally bought the assault rifle he used to kill 17 people at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, last February.

Four other states — Hawaii, Illinois, Vermont and New York — also prohibit anyone under 21 from buying all firearms.

Workman, of the Second Amendment Foundation, says Washington’s measure will take away firearms from law-abiding residents who can easily pass multiple background checks. It will impair public safety and embolden criminals while placing restrictions on people who already legally own semi-automatic rifles, he said.

## ‘Leopard of the Kootenai’ makes rebound

Burbot are finally back on the menu

By NATHANAEL MASSEY

The Spokesman-Review

SPOKANE, Wash. — In the early 2000s, the world’s only freshwater cod was all but gone from the waters of the Kootenai River in north Idaho and British Columbia. Once counted in the thousands, regional populations of burbot — sometimes known as ling cod — had dropped to a mere 50.

Today, that number is closer to 50,000.

The fish’s spectacular rebound stems from a collaborative restoration effort by fisheries, communities, academics and state officials, along with the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and the Bonneville Power Administration. As a result, a decade and a half after facing extinction, “The Leopards of the Kootenai” are back on the menu.

With regional populations hovering between 40,000 and 50,000 in the Kootenai, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission announced in December that a burbot fishing season had been approved as part of its fishing rules for 2019-2021. It’s the first time since 1992 that fishing for burbot has been greenlighted by state officials.

In appearance, burbot look a bit like a catfish, a bit like an eel, with a wide mouth and speckled hide — the last accounting for their “Leopard” nickname. They’re predatory, swallowing fish nearly half their size and, when food is scarce, each other. “They’re a pit bull of a fish,” a former hatchery technician told a Spokesman-Review reporter in 2014. Adults typically reach lengths of 16 to 20 inches.

The fishing ban was put in place in the early 1990s to protect declining popu-



Idaho Fish and Game

Burbot have made a remarkable recovery.

lations, but it was environmental factors — many of them resulting from the construction of the Libby Dam in the 1970s — that put the burbot’s long-term success in jeopardy, according to an Idaho Fish and Game news release from 2004.

The dam trapped nutrients and drastically increased river flow, and warmer waters hindered the species’ spawning, which takes place in freezing winter waters.

Other iconic Kootenai River species, including white sturgeon, saw their populations drop during the same period as cascade effects from the dam spread throughout the river’s ecosystem.

The effect of the dam was shattering.

Previously, the burbot fishery at the junction of the Kootenai River and the west arm of Kootenay Lake, British Columbia, had been one of the most robust in the world, rivaling even that of the famed Moosehead Lake of Maine. A decade in, and populations were declining precipitously; 30 years on, the Kootenai burbot was all but gone.

In 2014, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho dedicated a new, \$15 million hatchery devoted to the restoration of both burbot and white sturgeon.

Drawing from genetically-related burbot stock

from Moyie Lake in British Columbia and employing hatchery practices developed with the aid of University of Idaho researchers, the 35,000-square-foot hatchery aimed to introduce 125,000 burbot into the Kootenai each year.

Annual population monitoring was conducted by Idaho Fish and Game biologists, along with British Columbia and Montana.

Funding for the hatchery was provided in large part by the Bonneville Power Administration — which manages Libby Dam along with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — as part of its effort to mitigate the dams impacts.

Sometimes derided as “poor man’s lobster,” burbot meat — light, white and somewhat sweet — is nevertheless appreciated by many anglers and historically has been an important food source for tribes that fished the Kootenai River.

Speaking to The Spokesman-Review in 2014, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho Fish and Wildlife Director Sue Ireland pointed to its lasting significance.

“The sturgeon and the burbot both are so unique,” she said.

“They’re important culturally to the tribe. They’re important socially to the community. And they’re important to the river.”

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