

Sept. 15, 2023

New Mexico Department of Game & Fish
1 Wildlife Way
Santa Fe, NM 87507
DGF-Bear-Cougar-Rules@state.nm.us

Re: Bear & Cougar Rule Proposed Changes

Dear Staff:

We are writing you on behalf of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Aldo's Silver City Broadband, a non-profit, all-volunteer organization focusing on education about, and advocacy for, public lands, especially wilderness. We are based in the heart of the Gila/Aldo Wilderness regions, and are an affiliated chapter of a national organization headquartered in Durango, CO, with over forty chapters nationwide. Our grassroots organization, led by women, works to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands.

We are writing to express our concerns about your new quotas and schedules for bear and cougar hunting in New Mexico. While your proposed changes to the quotas are mixed, the overall numbers to be killed are higher.

Bears and cougars are now known to be extremely important to the integrity of our ecosystems. Both species are known to self-regulate their own numbers, so erring on the side of killing fewer of these animals is better. Killing too many can lead to more conflict over territory.

Killing bears and cougars at random for recreation and trophies does not help address conflict with humans. In fact, it may exacerbate conflict. Trophy hunters typically target larger, established individuals for their kills, disrupting their social structures. Bears and cougars are territorial animals, and if an individual who is not involved in conflict is killed, a younger and less experienced individual who is more prone to conflicts may move into the vacant territory.

Both bears and cougars are frequently hunted using dogs that chase them until the exhausted animal seeks refuge and rest by climbing a tree. The hunter will then find the dogs by using their electronic collar signals as they keep the animal treed. When these hunters arrive at the scene, they will shoot the animal at point blank range. Even segments of the hunting community find this practice contrary to Fair Chase hunting principles.

We have looked into your reports about bear and cougar numbers (such as your “2023-24 Cougar Harvest Update”), and it is unclear where these populations stand in 2023 as it appears that you estimate their population by extrapolating from limited study areas to broader regions. Although sustainable harvest limits and harvests are clearly shown in these charts, there are no actual population totals (or quota percentages) shown for either mammal.

Considering these issues and facts, we ask that you implement the following rules:

* The hunting quotas for bears and cougars are reduced or kept as now, in recognition of the ecological benefits of these large animals.
* The lengths of bear and cougar hunting seasons remain as now, which will protect the animals and their genetic diversity, and will additionally protect other public uses of public lands.
* Non-resident hunting of bear and cougar is forbidden.
* The use of hounds in bear and cougar hunting is forbidden.
* Hunters of elk, deer and other game are prohibited from opportunistically shooting bears and cougars.

We understand that you have a traditional alliance with hunters so that they have a great deal of influence with your work, but we would like to see bird watchers, campers, backpackers, and hikers be included in your concerns. In addition, Southwest New Mexico has numerous businesses which depend on tourists who come here for the wilderness experience. We believe these groups make up a larger percentage of New Mexicans who are concerned with wildlife numbers in the forests of New Mexico than hunters.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Denise Smith and Marcia Stout
Aldo's Silver City Broadband Leaders
aldosgob@gmail.com

Cc: Rick Winslow, Bear and Cougar Biologist, New Mexico Department of Game & Fish
Frederic.winslow@dgf.nm.gov