



New Mexico's bears and cougars need YOU now!

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) published their proposal for a new rule that will govern the trophy hunting of bears and cougars for the next four years. The Game Commission will vote on this proposal at their public meeting on October 27th, deciding the fate of hundreds of bears and cougars.

The [proposed rule](#) recommends *raising the kill limits for bears, extending the bear hunting season, and continues indefensibly high kill limits for cougars. But NMDGF has not provided sufficient or coherent information about bear or cougar populations that allows the public or even wildlife biologists to judge whether their recommendations are sound.*

Here's what you can do:

1. **Submit a letter to the editor** calling on the Game Commission to **reduce the proposed kill limits for both cougars and bears by at least 50%**, and to include *all* human-caused sources of mortality in the kill limits. New Mexico's newspapers, their guidelines for submission (word counts) and email links appear below.
2. **Submit a public comment to NM Game and Fish by Oct. 25** to DGF-Bear-Cougar-Rules@state.nm.us. You can use [this public comment template](#) and please feel free to personalize it to make your comment unique. See the talking points below.
3. **Attend the October 27th Game Commission meeting in person in Farmington starting at 9:00am or attend via ZOOM.** You must pre-register for the Zoom meeting. Instructions will be posted on this page under "How To Participate" a few days before Oct. 27 at: <https://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/commission/meeting-agendas/>

We have also included all of this information as a PDF attachment for your convenience.

Talking points:

- **NMDGF's proposed trophy hunting kill limits for bears and cougars should be reduced by at least 50%.** The kill limits are not demonstrably sustainable and have little basis in sound science.
- **What is trophy hunting?** A trophy hunt is where a hunters' primary motivation is to kill black bears and cougars *not for food*, but for photo opportunities to post on social media, to display body parts and for bragging rights.
- **Biologists have conducted few scientifically rigorous studies of New Mexico's bears and cougars. Limited empirical (rigorous scientific) data exists.**
 - In the case of black bears, NMDGF uses mostly outdated studies conducted in the best bear habitats and then generalizes the results statewide.
 - And in the case of cougars, NMDGF relies on an old, flawed habitat model to set kill limits for the majority of cougar management zones, despite more recent and reliable studies demonstrating that this model produces inaccurately high population estimates.
 - NMDGF's kill limits are largely not grounded in sound science and should be reduced by at least 50%.

- **NMDGF proposes to only count legal kills by hunters towards their kill limits, instead of all sources of bear and cougar mortality.** Total mortality includes disease, predator-control kills, human conflict kills, road-killed wildlife and the significant amount of annual poaching. Failing to include total mortality in the kill limits means that an *unlimited* number of bears and cougars may be killed *on top* of the hunting kill limits.
- **The Southwest has been experiencing a “megadrought” from 2000 to 2023, the driest period since 800 A.D.** As result, New Mexico also experienced the most severe wildfires in recent history, destroying habitats, food and wildlife themselves. The NM Game and Fish has failed to account for these factors in their habitat or population estimates. Climate trends weigh in favor of lowering kill limits, not raising them.
- **Trophy hunters use radio-collared hounds to chase bears and cougars in New Mexico—a method that is both cruel and unfair.**
 - The hounds follow their quarries’ scent until the exhausted animal seeks refuge in a tree. When the trophy hunter arrives at the scene, they will shoot the animal at point blank range. Even many hunters find this practice contrary to “fair chase” hunting principles and oppose hound hunting. Hounds can legally run cougars all year long and bears in the Fall when they are trying to put on fat for winter and must eat constantly.
 - Hounding harms non-target species, including deer and domestic livestock and results in deaths and injuries to *federally protected Mexican wolves*, bear cubs, mountain lion kittens, and results in deadly fights between bears or cougars and hounds.
 - Hounding can cause both wildlife and hounds to die from heat exhaustion.
- **Archery equipment is cruel and results in uncounted wounding losses.** Because of their heavy musculature, allowing archery equipment to hunt bears results in prolonged deaths of bears and wounding losses that are never counted in bear kill limits.
- **Bears and cougars make New Mexico’s ecosystems healthy and diverse.** Bears spread more seed than even birds, and cougars leave carrion for multiple species, contributing to biological diversity.
- **Researchers have found that black bear hunting does not resolve human-bear conflicts, and, may in fact, worsen them.** Trophy hunters target larger, established individuals for their kills, disrupting important bear and cougar 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. Also, killing these large carnivores does not reduce attacks on humans—but keeping dogs on leashes and carrying bear pepper spray in in wild places does.
- **Hunting cougars and bears will neither bolster ungulate herds (like mule deer or bighorn sheep) nor make people safer.**
 - Killing cougars, however, creates social chaos in their families resulting in even greater mortalities from intraspecific aggression. Randomly killing cougars or bears exacerbates conflicts between these animals and people, pets and livestock. It can even intensify losses of rare prey animals such as bighorn sheep.
 - Bears’ diet is comprised of more than 90% plant materials.
- **Living black bears and cougars hold intrinsic, social, and economic values, and provide incalculable benefits to their ecosystems.**
- **The American public opposes trophy hunting by 2/3rds majorities.** Ask NMDGF to consider broad public opinion, adopt hunting rules that ban the use of dogs in cougar and bear hunting, reduce the proposed hunting kill limits by at least 50%, and include *all* human-caused sources of mortality in the kill limits.

Where to submit a Letter to the Editor (LTE):

Albuquerque Journal

LTE word limit: 300 words

[Letter to the Editor Form](#)

New Mexico Political Report

LTE word limit: 400-1000 words

[How to Submit](#)

Santa Fe New Mexican

LTE word limit: 600 words

[Letter to the Editor Form](#)

Santa Fe Reporter

LTE word limit: 200 words

Send letters to editor@sfreporter.com

Taos News

LTE word limit: 250 words

[Letter to the Editor Form](#)

Las Cruces Sun News

LTE word limit: 300 words

[Letter to the Editor Form](#)

The Independent (Gallup)

LTE word limit: 800 words

[How to Submit](#)