



Being Cougar Smart

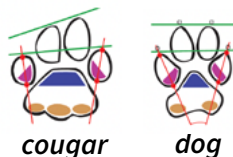
A guide to living safely in and around cougar country.



About cougars (*Puma concolor*), also called mountain lions or pumas.

Cougars are second to jaguars as the largest cat in the Americas. Adults' body lengths are 6 to 8 feet, from nose to tail, which can be 3 feet long. Males weigh 120 to 180 pounds and females weigh 80 to 110 pounds.

Cougars have a uniformly gray to reddish-tan body color. The muzzle and chest are white, and there are black markings on the face, ears, and tip of the tail. Cougar kittens are mottled with black spots and have ringed tails until they are about 6 months old.



Cougar paw prints are distinguishable from dogs' by their three-part pad, lack of visible claws, and wider, oval shape.

Cougar habitat and their role in a healthy ecosystem.

Cougars normally are reclusive animals that avoid humans. They make their dens in rocky outcroppings, dense thickets, and under uprooted trees. They are highly territorial—a male cougar may dominate a range of up to 100 square miles.

Large carnivores, like cougars, contribute to the richness and complexity of animal and plant life in ecosystems. Having cougars on the landscape helps to regulate all of these populations. In the absence of cougars and other predators, deer, rodents, and other prey populations' numbers greatly increase, causing problems for humans and the environment.

Cougar Smart in the Wild

Attacks on humans are very rare, but cougars can be dangerous. Being smart, cautious, and aware helps prevent incidents or attacks.

Be alert

- Do not approach dead animals—cougars defend their prey.
- Hike in groups and make noise to prevent surprising a cougar.
- Carry a walking stick and bear spray (and know how to use it).
- Keep your animals leashed.
- Keep children close: don't let them run ahead or fall behind.

Don't run

- If you see a cougar, face the cougar and slowly back away.
- DO NOT run or play dead.
- Pick up small children immediately and calm them.
- Leave room for the cougar to escape, do not approach.
- Make noise: shout loudly in an assertive voice, but avoid high-pitched screaming that could sound like an animal in distress.
- Make yourself look larger: lift your arms up, open your jacket or shirt, hold your backpack above your head.
- If the cougar is not deterred and continues to approach, deploy the bear spray and aim for the face and head at 30-40 feet away.
- If the cougar attacks, fight back hard with sticks, stones, backpack.

Cougar Smart Around Your Home

Here are more ways to protect yourself and your family (both human and non-human) from unwanted encounters with cougars and other large predators.

Closely supervise children	• Make sure they are home before dusk and not outside before dawn. • Make lots of noise if you come or go during times when mountain lions are most active—dusk to dawn. • Teach your children about cougars and what they should do if they encounter one.
Don't feed wildlife or attract deer or other prey species to your home	• Cougars follow their prey. To avoid attracting prey species into your yard, use native plants in landscaping, not nonnatives. • Deer-proof fences which are 6 to 8 feet high will deter deer and cougars.
Don't let your animals roam around outside	• Bring them in at night. If you keep your animals outside, provide a kennel with a secure top. • Don't feed your animals outside where the food can attract cougars or other smaller animals, which cougars prey upon. • Store and dispose of all garbage securely.
Eliminate hiding places and build barriers	• Landscape or remove vegetation to eliminate hiding cover for cougars, especially around areas where children play. • Fence children's play areas. • Make it difficult for a cougar to approach unseen. • Close off open spaces below porches or decks.
Install outdoor lighting	• Especially important in areas where you walk, so you can see a cougar if one is present.
Place all livestock in enclosed sheds or barns at night	• Close the doors to all outbuildings so that an inquisitive cougar is prevented from going inside to look around.



Simply sighting a cougar from a distance is not cause for alarm. They are likely just passing through. However, if the cougar displays predatory behavior (prolonged watching, following, or approaching humans) or agitation (hissing, growling, or tail swishing), this could indicate a real threat.



Anyone who sees a cougar that may be a threat to public safety is urged to call New Mexico State Police Dispatch at (505) 841-9256 to request assistance from a Department of Wildlife Conservation Officer. In case of emergency, call 911.

Animal Protection New Mexico is a statewide nonprofit that protects animals by creating systemic change resulting in the humane treatment of all animals.

In 2010, we developed Cougar Smart New Mexico to promote safe coexistence with cougars. In 2015, we launched our Stop Cougar Trapping campaign, culminating in the New Mexico Wildlife Commission banning recreational cougar trapping and lowering the annual kill limit for cougars overall in 2019.

Visit us online at apnm.org/cougarsmart to learn more about cougars in New Mexico and how we work to promote their protection and sound coexistence approaches.



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