

New Mexico Game Commission
New Mexico Department of Game & Fish
Wildlife Management Division
1 Wildlife Way, Santa Fe, NM 87504
Fax: 505-476-8127
Email: darrel.veybright@state.nm.us

Re: Cougar Management for 2009-2010

Dear New Mexico Game Commission:

The Cougar Fund, a national non-profit dedicated to sustaining healthy and viable cougar populations would like to take this opportunity to voice our support for the New Mexico state Game and Fish's proposed rule changes to the big game hunting rules for the 2009 and 2010 hunting rules. The agency's proposed changes are not only reflective of current science, but also ensure progressive and adaptive management policies will be practiced in New Mexico.

First, the Cougar Fund strongly recommends that hunters in the state be **required** to participate in an education program that will enable them to distinguish between male and female cougars. That such a program be mandatory is essential because for 73% of their lives, breeding age females (those about 2 years of age or older) are either pregnant or raising dependent young. Kittens stay with their mothers until they are between 14 and 18 months old. Their mothers teach them how to survive on their own in the wild. In addition to survival, female cougars teach their young proper socialization and prey identification techniques. Without this training, young cougars can be disproportionately involved in human and depredation conflicts.

Second, the Cougar Fund encourages the state Game Commission to end the cougar control program aimed at reducing depredation incidents. Current peer-reviewed science suggests that the expansive killing of cougars not only increases the proportion of transient males in the population – an age and gender that has been shown to be disproportionately involved in depredation and human conflict incidents – but may actually lead to increased litter sizes, since as population numbers decrease, reproductive rates are known to increase.

Additionally, rather than the state reacting and spending valuable resources to kill “too many” or “problem” cougars, techniques such as appropriate land-use planning, improved animal husbandry and public education about living in cougar country will have a far greater effect in the long term. Lawmakers could also provide tax incentives to pay for fences and frightening devices, such as motion detectors and sirens. Laws should also punish irresponsible landowners who attract cougar problems through actions such as leaving an animal carcass in a pasture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara L. Carlson'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.

Sara L. Carlson
Director of Programs & Operations