

Pro-Wildlife Tips and Talking points for Taos June 13, 2015 Game Commission Meeting

What to expect: There will be two opportunities to address the Commissioners about wolves, cougars, and bears during the June 13th meeting. The first will be during agenda item 8, which is the *Bear and Cougar Rule Development* item. The second will be during agenda item 9, which is the *New Mexico's State and Wildlife Action Plan*. Mexican gray wolves are a "species of greatest conservation concern" in the state plan, so this is a perfect place to speak about wolves.

When you arrive at the meeting, you will be offered the opportunity to fill out a speaker card. Please fill one of these out whether you intend to speak or not and indicate on the card that you are there for items 8 and 9 and that you support wolf recovery and oppose trapping of cougars and expanding the bear hunt. If you think you might want to speak, keep that option open on the card-you can always change your mind if called. If you know you don't want to speak, you can indicate that on the card, and just having shown up and filled the card out will make a difference.

You can speak during either or both agenda items. You will likely be asked to keep your remarks to 2-3 minutes, depending on how many people are wanting to speak.

Talking Points: You'll likely do best if you keep your remarks simple and focus on a few key points rather than trying to incorporate everything below.

No matter which item you address, there are 3 key things we hope you will include. These are your support for Mexican wolf recovery, your opposition to cougar trapping and your opposition to expanded bear hunting.

FOR COUGARS AND BEARS: ([agenda item 8](#), please arrive by 9AM)

- While a new cougar population study is planned it hasn't even been started. The Department lacks adequate science to justify killing more cougars.
- In 2010 the quotas for cougars were raised by over 50%. They are not being met by hunters but cougars can self regulate. They defend territory, limiting their own density
- Killing too many cougars can disrupt their social structure, which can actually increase conflict with people
- New Mexico is allowing excessive numbers of female cougars to be killed
- Traps should not be allowed for any species on public land.
- To allow sport trapping for cougars on private land will still result in non-target captures, and more suffering for wildlife including cougars. Traps do not discriminate between the old and very young, including kittens, nor between genders.
- In 2010, the Bear quotas were raised by 69%. NM has killed a record number of bears since then, over 700 a year between 2011 and 2013. As with cougars, too many female bears are being killed.
- Despite no change in the number bear licenses sold, the kill in 2014 dropped precipitously by 28%, which could signal that bears are getting harder to find.
- Bears reproduce very slowly. On average, a female doesn't have her first cub until she is 4 years old. The average age of hunter killed bears is only 6 years old, which means females can be killed after having only one offspring. Bears can live 30 years.
- NM Game and Fish has embarked on a study of bear populations which has not been published as of this writing. It will not reflect bear population trends or how well bears can compensate for hunter caused mortality. More work must be done and it should include study of un-hunted populations.

- The Dept. needs to monitor bear populations continually, to determine trends in bear numbers, using methods similar to the NMSU study. If another full blown study is cost prohibitive, the dept. should focus on smaller areas, or alter the study design. The important thing is to continue monitoring so we know how bears are doing and if too many are being killed.
- New Mexicans deserve to have wildlife decisions based on completed peer-reviewed and published studies.

FOR WOLVES ([agenda item 9](#), please arrive by 10AM):

Related to the "State Wildlife Action Plan":

- The Mexican gray wolf was selected by the Dept. as a species of greatest conservation need based on the fact that it is declining, it is vulnerable, it is a keystone species, it is wide ranging, and it has high recreational, economic or charismatic value to the public. In fact, the lobo ranked higher than any other mammalian species in terms of meeting the criteria for determining a species of greatest conservation need. (Appendix C, Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, 2006). The commissioners should reverse their misguided denial of the Ladder Ranch wolf holding permit.
- The wolf is a state endangered species as well as a federal one. The Commission's decision to deny the Ladder Ranch permit is not based on science and most likely violates the NM State Wildlife Conservation Act, which lists Mexican wolves as an endangered species in NM and requires the New Mexico Game and Fish Department to take necessary actions to protect and recover them.
- The decision may also violate the federal Endangered Species Act and calls into question the NMGFD's eligibility for federal funding to support endangered species programs carried out by the Department. In addition to granting the Ladder Ranch permit, the NM Game and Fish Department should also grant the US Fish and Wildlife Service permits to release Mexican wolves into New Mexico.
- An informed Commission acting on sound science would recognize the critical role played by large carnivores in maintaining the health of game herds and ecosystems. The denial of the Ladder Ranch demonstrates a bias against carnivores by the Commission, and the decision should be reversed.

In general:

- There are still only around 110 endangered Mexican gray wolves in all of New Mexico and Arizona. This is not the time to play politics and make their recovery more difficult.
- [Polling in 2008](#) showed that 69% of New Mexico voters support the Mexican wolf reintroduction. [Polling in 2013](#) showed that 74% of NM voters agree that "Wolves play an important role in maintaining healthy deer and elk populations" and that "Restoring wolves to forests and wilderness in New Mexico will bring a healthier balance to our ecosystem." The NM Game Commission has a responsibility to do what's best for all of NM's wildlife, and for NM's citizens, who want wolves.
- There are close to 4 million reported cattle deaths each year and only about 8,000 are attributed to wolves – that's a fifth of 1% (Cattle Death Loss: USDA National Ag. Statistics Service). Financial and logistical assistance is available to help livestock owners responsibly avoid depredations and coexist with wolves and other carnivores.
- Wyoming and Montana both have wolves, and elk harvest numbers in both Wyoming and Montana in 2013 were significantly higher after 18 years with wolves than they were in 1995, when the wolves were reintroduced.

- Wolves and other top carnivores are vital to good herd health. They kill the very young and old elk, leaving the healthiest part of the herd and preventing overpopulation, which is currently a problem in parts of Wyoming, with elk numbers increasing.
- There has never been a documented case of a Mexican gray wolf attacking a human being and there have only been a few documented wolf attacks on humans anywhere in North America.

Additional Tips for Testifying:

- Print out your main points ahead of time and print them large so they can be read easily.
- Introduce yourself and where you are from or where you work.
- Speak from the heart- why do you personally care about healthy populations and sound policies for wolves and other carnivores?
- Be respectful and polite when testifying and be sure to thank the commissioners for considering your comments.