



by email to
Game Commission Chair Paul Kienzle,
Commission Vice-chair Bill Montoya
Commissioner Elizabeth Ryan
Commissioner Robert Espinoza
Commissioner Ralph Ramos
Commissioner Bob Ricklefs
Commissioner Dick Salopek
cc: Darrel Weybright, NM G&F

Re: Proposal to allow traps and snares for cougars

May 1, 2015

Dear Chairman Kienzle and Commissioners,

On behalf of the thousands of New Mexico members and supporters of the groups represented by the TrapFree New Mexico coalition, we are urging that you and the New Mexico Game Commission not move to allow a cougar trapping season. As part of the upcoming cougar rule review, the NM Department of Game and Fish is proposing to allow cougars to be killed by recreational and commercial trappers. Texas is currently the only state to allow this method of cougar "take", making it an anomaly as a wildlife management practice that is not right for New Mexico.

We are certain that you are aware of the unpopularity of trapping among the majority of New Mexicans. In 2011, when the most recent and allegedly final furbearer rule review was completed, over 12,000 petition signatures and comments were sent to Game Commissioners and the agency urging that traps be prohibited from NM public land. Additionally, in 2005, a Research and Polling, Inc. survey found that New Mexico voters supported abolishing trapping on our public lands by a 3:1 margin (see below).

Under the current trapping rules, hikers, campers, hunters and even search and rescue volunteers have had their dogs caught in traps, have incurred veterinary expenses and have even been hurt themselves trying to rescue their animals. Other public land users are forced to pay for what can amount to hundreds of dollars in veterinary and medical bills; certainly there is no compensation for the emotional turmoil such incidents cause. Although NM Game and Fish does not require reporting of these incidents, you can read those reported to us here: <http://trapfreenm.org/learn-more-stories-comments.php>. Every year stories of dogs being trapped or an animal being witnessed with horrible injuries in a trap makes the news in New Mexico. We invite you to scroll through these published stories on our home page: <http://trapfreenm.org/>. These documented cases are by no means a complete list.

A document received from NM Game and Fish in response to a public records request revealed incidents of a Barbary sheep and deer accidentally caught in traps. Both died needlessly. Animals from bears to javelinas to endangered Mexican wolves have all been mistakenly trapped. Because wolves are more

closely monitored, it has been documented that in about half of the trapping incidents involving wolves, the trap has injured—even to the point of requiring amputation—or outright killed the animal. Again, no one knows the toll for non-target species. In documentation from 2013, USDA Wildlife Services- the federal program with the most trapping expertise- reported accidentally killing hundreds of animals in traps from dozens of wildlife species including birds, reptiles, ungulates and other mammals.¹ And even this list may not be complete.

Although the bill that seeks to end trapping on public lands has not progressed in the legislature, the measure clearly has substantial public support. The trapping of cougars would lead to even more incidents and injury to companion dogs and other wildlife which will spark even more intolerance of trapping. Given that the best available science states that cougar populations are largely self-regulating and that indiscriminate killing disrupts their social order which results in *increased* conflict with humans, the need to kill ever more is subject to question.² We urge you to not let any proposals to allow cougar trapping move forward. Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

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¹ http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/prog_data/2013/G/Tables/Table_G-2_Euth-Killed.pdf

² <http://conservationmagazine.org/2009/11/troubled-teens/>

New Mexico Trapping Survey 2005

Poll conducted by Research and Polling, Inc.

Respondents were informed that trapping is legal on public lands in New Mexico and given a brief description of the different types of traps that are commonly used, as well as the rules trappers are supposed to follow. Voters were also read some of the arguments that supporters have given to ban leg-hold, snare and lethal traps on public lands in New Mexico and arguments opponents to such a ban have given. Voters were then asked if they would support or oppose banning these types of traps on public lands in New Mexico. Overall, 63% of voters statewide say they either *strongly support* (41%) or *somewhat support* (22%) placing a ban on leg-hold, snare and lethal traps on public lands, while 22% are opposed to such a ban. Support for banning trapping is strongest among female and Anglo voters as well as those who participate in outdoor activities such as backpacking, bird/animal watching, and hiking. When considering age, gender, ethnicity, income, education level or political affiliation, there is NO demographic for which the support for a trap ban is outpolled by the opposition- not one.

The poll also asked if the respondent or anyone in their household had ever encountered a trap on public land. Statewide, 7% responded in the affirmative. This suggests that approximately 50,000 New Mexicans have had this experience; a surprisingly large number. According to the poll, New Mexico residents have found a variety of non-target animals in traps including dogs, javelina, deer, bear, rabbits, quail, and coatis— none of which can be legally trapped in the state.

A random sample of registered voters statewide was interviewed by telephone. Telephone numbers were generated from the Research & Polling, Inc. database. All interviews were conducted between August 16th and August 24th, 2005. A total of 398 registered voters statewide completed interviews.

Poll Results Support Banning Leg-hold, snare, and lethal traps on Public Lands

Respondents were read two statements:

(A) Opponents of trapping argue that it is a cruel way to kill animals who can suffer for long periods of time, especially since some trappers do not always check their traps every 24 hours. Critics believe that public lands belong to everyone and that the traps pose a danger to everyone who uses trails and roads on public lands as well as their pets and horses since there is no way to identify where traps are being laid. Pets, other domestic animals and unintended wildlife are injured or even killed by traps every year. Opponents also believe unlimited trapping could be hurting certain populations of animals like bobcats and foxes since trappers are not required to report their kills and there is no limit as to how many animals are killed.

(B.) Supporters argue that trapping is an important source of revenue for trappers and the state of New Mexico, as well as being a tradition often passed down through family generations. Supporters also argue that trappers are required to check their traps every 24 hours and free any animals that are trapped by accident. Supporters also argue that trapping helps to control predators such as coyotes and skunks and helps to control wildlife disease. Some supporters are concerned that a ban on trapping using leg-hold and lethal traps is the first step to placing greater restrictions on hunting.

After hearing these arguments do you support or oppose banning leg hold, snare and lethal traps on public lands in New Mexico? Is that strongly or somewhat?

	Statewide	Hikers	Campers	Bird/Wildlife Watchers	Back- packers	Horseback riders	Hunters	Anglers
Strongly support	41%	47%	42%	51%	46%	43%	27%	36%
Somewhat support	22%	21%	24%	17%	28%	19%	25%	23%
Mixed feelings	9%	8%	10%	10%	3%	6%	11%	11%
Somewhat oppose	9%	9%	8%	9%	8%	9%	12%	11%
Strongly oppose	13%	13%	13%	13%	13%	18%	21%	16%