

## COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA BRIEFING

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**Meeting Date:** April 28, 2023

**Agenda Number:** 16

**Presenter:** Stewart Liley

**Corroborator:** N/A

**Agenda Title:** Initial Discussion of the Bear and Cougar Rule 19.31.11 NMAC

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### 1. Summary of Agenda Item

The Department will present initial perspectives on changes to the Bear and Cougar rule (19.31.11 NMAC) based on public comment, harvest data, and biological data collected from research in New Mexico and recent literature. Proposed changes will include aligning harvest limits with recent biological data.

### 2. Background Information

The Department is initiating the rule development process for the Bear and Cougar rule because the current 4-year Rule expires on April 1, 2024. Proposed changes to the Bear and Cougar Rule are made based on current scientific findings using the results of Department and collaborator research efforts in New Mexico, recent findings in the literature, and Department staff and public observations and recommendations. Harvest limits are set at a percentage of the zone-specific population estimate, which maintains sustainable population sizes while allowing hunting opportunity.

Bear population estimates are derived using population density estimates from studies conducted in various locations in New Mexico. Bear population density estimates were updated in April 2023 for two bear management zones based on Department efforts using advanced genetic and statistical modeling techniques.

Cougar population estimates are derived using density estimates from studies conducted in New Mexico, and estimates in the literature for nearby arid areas. In most zones, cougar habitat is ranked according to quality, and an appropriate density estimate is applied to each of the habitat types to derive a zone-specific population estimate. In some zones, cougar population density estimates are currently being updated using data collected from ongoing intensive capture and camera trapping efforts, and advanced statistical modeling that determines a density estimate across all habitat types in a zone. Monitoring of age and sex structure through data collected from harvested animals, as well as data on harvest effort provided by hunters, boosts understanding of population trends, especially in the years and areas for which there aren't recent population density estimates.

### 3. Strategic Plan References and Possible Impacts of Agenda Item

The process as presented to the Commission meets the Conservation Services Program Objectives 1, 2 and 5 of the Department's Strategic Plan: FY 2019 – FY 2023

### 4. Considerations Regarding Duplications and/or Conflicts with Existing Rules or Statutes

None

**5. Description and Summary of Public Involvement Process and Results**

The Department will post via its website the proposed changes as they are developed. The Department is planning public meetings in Raton, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and Roswell during August. Meetings with stakeholder groups will also be held to gather input, which will be summarized for the Commission.

**6. Suggested Motion**

This is a discussion item and no motion is necessary, unless Commission discretion dictates otherwise.