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# FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR	Cook	ORIGINAL DATE LAST UPDATED		НВ	586
SHORT TITL	E Cougar Hunting &	Trapping		SB	
			ANAI	LYST	Sanogo

## **REVENUE** (dollars in thousands)

	Recurring	Fund		
FY15	FY16	FY17	or Nonrecurring	Affected
	(\$200.0)	(\$200.0)	Recurring	Game Protection Fund

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Department of Game and Fish (DGF)

#### **SUMMARY**

HB 586 would remove all species of *Felis concolor* (cougar) from the list of protected wildlife species and game mammals (amending Sections 17-2-3 and 17-3-13 NMSA 1978). Nonresidents must obtain a trapper's license to to capture, trap or possess a cougar.

## FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Cougar hunting license fees would no longer be collected by the Department of Game and Fish (DGF). This loss of revenue is estimated to be a recurring cost of \$198.7 thousand per license year (based on revenues collected in 2014). The amounts in the table above reflect the apportionment of the license year costs to the fiscal year.

### SIGNIFCANT ISSUES

Cougars became a protected species in New Mexico in 1971 and no harvest limits were established by the Commission until 1999. DGF regularly estimates cougar populations in various zones across the state and makes harvest recommendations to the state game commission, depending on the zone and management objectives for each zone. The commission, via rule, designates the total harvest limit and female sub-limit for each zone. The female sub-limit is designed to ensure a sustainable reproductive component (ie. females) remains in each zone.

Pursuant to current commission rule, cougar season is yearlong and each licensed hunter may take up to two cougars per license year. The total statewide sport harvest limit is 749 and the

## **House Bill 586– Page 2**

female harvest sub-limit is 303.

Despite fairly liberal bag limits, season dates, and methods, cougar harvest limits have not been reached in most zones in recent years. The average annual harvest from 2002 through the 2014 licenses years has been 220 cougars per year.

Current data and trends in harvest indicate that to successfully harvest a cougar requires specialized hunting skills and is only routinely accomplished with the assistance by trained dogs or experienced trappers. Because of this, it is uncertain whether removing cougars from a protected status will result in significantly higher harvest levels or jeopardize sustainable population levels statewide. It will however, eliminate DGF's ability to monitor total harvest and female harvest which would make it difficult to evaluate population sustainability over time.

# **TECHNICAL ISSUES**

The Department of Game and Fish provides the following suggestions:

On page 15, line 24, the word "or" is replaced with "including cougar". This language seems to place cougars, coyotes, and skunks into the category of "furbearing animal" as defined in Section 17-5-2 NMSA 1978. However, the definition of "fur-bearing animal" has not been changed, which creates a potential conflict in the statute. This may need to be reworded to correctly define cougars, skunks, or coyotes as "non-game" species, or include them in the "fur-bearing animal" definition.

AIS/bb