



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 “fur-bearing 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