## Fact Sheet for New Mexico's Current "Furbearer" Regulations

"Furbearer" is a name given by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to refer to a group of animals comprised of coyotes, skunks, bobcats, foxes, ringtails, badgers, weasels, raccoons, beavers, weasels, muskrats and nutrias that are trapped seasonally for their fur. Some members of this animal group, including pine martens, river otters, black-footed ferrets, and coatimundis have no hunting or trapping seasons.

### *No Opportunity for Public Participation*

New Mexico is behind other western states in their care and management of this wildlife group. The Game Commission has yet to conduct a full review of the "furbearer" management process and is currently not using science-based management plans.

The Game Commission reviews management plans for animals such as cougars, bears and deer every two years. Disturbingly, the agency has not conducted a full review of "furbearer" regulations since 2006. If the Game Commission waits until 2010 to review its "furbearer" regulations, it will be five years before any changes can be implemented. This puts into question the status of "furbearer" populations.

The Game Commission's review of all wildlife regulations, including this wildlife group, should involve the public's input and be held in a consistent, timely manner. Additionally, "furbearer" regulations should be reviewed this year and at least every two years to be consistent with the management of other wildlife groups in New Mexico. Failure to conduct this full review precludes the public's participation and appears arbitrary, capricious, and undemocratic.

### *New Mexican Wildlife Should Enjoy Adequate State Protections; Wildlife Management Must Be Based on Science, Not Market Prices for Pelts*

Unlike any other state, New Mexico depends on a "sustainable kill limit" system, ostensibly to prevent over-hunting and over-trapping of wildlife. But the system isn't "sustainable" at all. Using this flawed approach, the Game Commission estimates the number of "furbearers" that can be killed, and then creates a numerical range for hunting each animal. For instance, the "sustainable kill limit" for bobcats is between 3,627 and 5,440 individuals each year; for gray foxes: 5,587-16,761; for swift foxes: 2,221- 3,702; and for kit foxes: 2,450- 4,143. These ranges are not based on any empirical data or field studies. The lower number is generally ignored and there is no plan to modify "furbearer" hunting or trapping when the higher number is exceeded. Additionally, there are no regulations in place when trappers concentrate in one geographic area. As a result, localized populations can be wiped out completely.

It's clear that wildlife management should be based on science and field data, and not through the current system. The interests of wildlife and their advocates should be considered against the interests of trappers, who are currently allowed to kill without limit. Kill quotas based on the precautionary principle, bag limits and season reductions should be part of new management plans for these species.

Some of the species of most concern are bobcats and foxes. With no bag limits on these animals, population sustainability is unknown.

## *Bobcats*

- New Mexico's bobcat season is 135 days – the longest in the West. New Mexico's bobcat season should be shorter to better protect both bobcats and non-targeted animals. This will at least ensure these animals are only killed when their fur is most valuable, so as not to be wasted. (See Table 1 for comparisons with other western states.)

| Table 1. Bobcat Kills & Seasons Comparison for 11 Western States (2007-2008 Season) | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **NM** | **CO** | **AZ** | **WY** | **MT** | **ID** | **UT** | **CA** | **OR** | **WA** | **NV** |
| **Bobcats killed** | 4,240 | 1,847 | 1,000 | 3,066 | 2,480 | 1,450 | 2,926 | 125 | 3,144 | 836 | 2,811 |
| **Season** | Nov 1 -Mar 15 | Dec 1- Feb 28 | Nov 1 - Feb 28 | Nov 15 - Mar 1 | Dec.1- Feb 15 | Dec 14- Feb 16 | Nov 12- Feb 8 | Nov-24 Jan 31 | Dec1- Feb 28 | Nov15- Feb 28 | Nov1- Feb 29 |

- Bobcat kill pelts must be tagged by the New Mexico Game & Fish Department, pursuant to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). During the 2007-2008 season, 4,240 bobcats were killed in NM – more than in any other western state. Over the last three seasons, 10,608 bobcats have been killed. While license sales have remained constant, bobcat kill numbers were down by nearly a third last year to 2,958. It is unknown whether this decrease was due to lower pelt prices, lower trapper effort or if it is a reflection of a trapper-induced population decline.

## *Foxes*

- New Mexico's gray fox season is among the longest in the West at 4.5 months. This season should be shorter and at least reflect when fox pelts are prime.
- Thousands of gray foxes are killed each year in New Mexico, but the exact number is unknown due to trapper noncompliance with reporting. Most fox trapping is concentrated in southwestern New Mexico. While reported statewide fox kills declined by a third in the 2008-2009 season over the 2007-2008 season, it is down by half in southern New Mexico, which could suggest a population decline from over-trapping.
- New Mexico's kit and swift fox populations are in dramatic decline because of predator and rodent control as well as a variety of human-caused threats. Because these species are likely imperiled in New Mexico, the seasons for these foxes should be closed entirely.

## *Trapper Reporting and Endangered Species*

Mandatory trapper reporting was implemented in New Mexico in 2006. Unfortunately, despite this, trapper compliance has dropped from 75% to 58%, likely due to the absence of meaningful penalties. Absent other data, regular reporting of trap kills provides some management information, so it is important that trapping privileges be denied to those who fail to report.

Additionally, non-target species - especially endangered ones - should be better protected. For example, there are only 52 Mexican wolves in the wild, but two have lost a foot from fur traps. Two others have suffered the same fate, but have since died. Reducing allowable traps size and requiring padded traps would mitigate this danger. Snares, which are lethal and highly injurious, should be prohibited in areas that harbor wolves.