

*This op-ed is from the June 3 Silver City Daily Press about the NM Game and Fish presentation in Silver City.*

GUEST COLUMN (Contact Carol Morrison, 575 654-3348, or Stephanie Smith, 703 608-0505; co-leaders, Aldo's Silver City Broad Band, Great Old Broads for Wilderness.)

### **Don't ask for public involvement, if you don't want public involvement!**

On the evening of May 28th, NM Department of Game and Fish (NMG&F) scheduled a "public involvement" meeting in Silver City for input on the proposed rule changes for bear and cougar "management" across the state. These are serious changes that include increasing kill numbers for bears and cougars; an option to extend bear hunting seasons without specifically excluding Spring hunts; and allowing for the snaring and trapping of cougars on private lands. The hearing opened to a full house. From there it was all down hill...

To begin with, there was no sign-in sheet for public comment, no P.A. system and no recording device to capture what people actually said. Instead, the facilitator, a NMG&F staff biologist, said that she would be taking the notes as people spoke.

Early in the question and discussion period, the facilitator stated she would only write down the first comment given for or against a proposed change, and refused to count hands or make note of additional comments that supported the first. When asked why she would not allow a show of hands for and against a proposed change, she smiled sweetly and said, "Because that's not what we're doing at this meeting."

The facilitator also stated that cougar kill numbers would be increased—including the use of traps and snares—because they eat deer and elk, whose population numbers are currently lower than they would like. When asked why NMG&F could not limit hunting seasons and/or reduce licenses on deer and elk to boost populations instead of killing more cougars, she said that, "Deer and elk are not my department." Oddly, she then stated that the question did not apply to the proposed rules. Meeting attendees

argued in vain to have their comments included, and it took their insistence to have the word “indiscriminate” added, as it applies to killing by traps and snares.

These proposed rule changes are symptomatic of a broken system that appeases a small minority and ignores the vast majority of New Mexicans who, by a 3/1 ratio, oppose the use of traps and snares to indiscriminately torture and mutilate our wildlife. A copy of the proposed rule changes are available at <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/.../Bear-and-Cougar-Rule-Chan...> and deserve and deserve a read.

Many people who did their homework and showed up to express concern about several of the proposed changes felt disrespected. Whether it was incompetence or planned manipulation, NM Fish and Game did not look good last Thursday evening. Hopefully, it won't be our cougar and bear populations that have to pay the price.