

Dear BearWatch Member

The reason you've not received your January 2009 BearWatch newsletter is because we have been involved in extended discussions with the New Mexico Game and Fish about their 2009-2010 bear hunt.

After five years of reasonable management practices we're on the edge of a slippery slope that could lead to future difficulties in maintaining a stable bear population in New Mexico.

Last summer I had a long discussion with Rick Winslow, NMG&F's Bear Biologist. We went over each zone's hunt stats, etc. Winslow wanted to raise the hunt from 336 to 350 and lower the sow limit to 40%. On behalf of BearWatch, I went along with the 350 hunt but asked that he and his supervisors reconsider the sow limit and lower it to 30%. Winslow said he would try to get it down to 36%. I said ok and thought that would be the end of it. Little did I know . . .

Unknown to me, at the Oct. NMG&F Commission 'Big Game' meeting where the 2009-2010 hunts were to be decided, then Big Game Manager RJ Kirkpatrick asked the Commissioners to increase the bear hunt 21% or from 336 bears to 406 bears and keep the sow limit at 40%. I was not made aware of this proposal and had assumed my prior agreement with Winslow would be the proposal. I checked and did not see this new proposal on the web a few days before the meeting.

The NMG&F did not contact me/BearWatch about this increase until one month after the vote. NMG&F management have also given themselves the power to increase the bear hunt by as much as 10% if there are several good forage years. I was not given the opportunity to address this large 21% hunt increase or 10% forage-driven increase with the Commissioners before they voted on it.

I've spent the last three months contacting our bear biologist Al LeCount, talking to and emailing information to Gov. Richardson's people and most of the Commissioners and talking to and meetings with Dir. Stevenson, Asst. Director Jenks, RJ Kirkpatrick and Winslow. In a two hour phone conversation, Dir. Stevenson suggested to me that some kind of compromise was possible and suggested a face-to-face meeting might resolve the issue.

My husband Dennis has a background in modeling has collaborated with our bear biologist, Al LeCount in trying to understand NMG&F's reasoning for increasing the bear hunt 21%. NMG&F's population model results have several large inconsistencies.

Dennis produced two variations of a population forecast model based on the established Bunnell & Tait approach and concluded first, that NMG&F had overestimated the population and second, that all model approaches had very large uncertainties because of a paucity of field data used to calibrate these models.

We met with Dir. Stevenson and staff on January 13, 2009. Dennis gave a two-hour presentation to go over their model and compare it to BW's models that he and LeCount had formulated. BW's conclusion was that NMG&F was managing on the high end and could, in future years, damage New Mexico's bear population. One week later I sent a follow-up letter to Dir. Stevenson and heard back by email several weeks later that a reply to our questions and concerns is on his list of things to do.

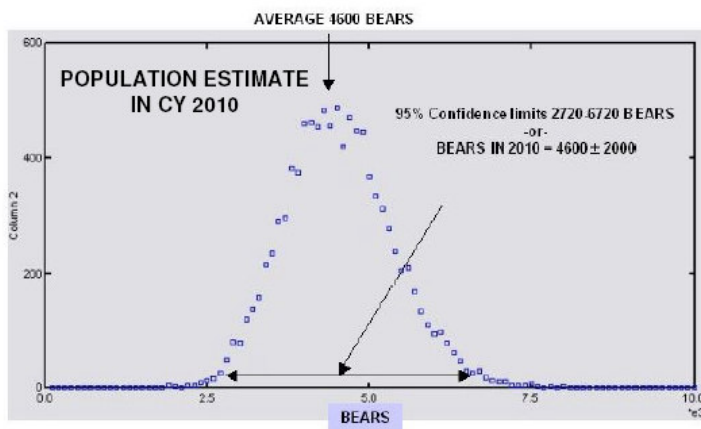
Winslow is now ignoring those model inconsistencies and is using his Harvest Management Matrix to justify this increase. We find the Matrix to be less than satisfactory in justification since the population numbers and mast index are nothing but guesses.

I'll let you know when I hear anything further. However, I will not wait indefinitely nor let this issue drop unresolved. I will keep you informed where we go from here.

Please see the attached BW presentation we made to the NMG&F's Director and staff.

Please feel free to contact me with questions.

Jan Hayes



Uncertainty Analysis
LeCount-Simple



Simple Model. At the 95% confidence level:

ASSUMPTIONS

- Annual surviving cubs fraction = $0.17 \pm 10\%$
- Annual loss fraction = $0.10 \pm 10\%$
- Population in 2000 = $5286 \pm 10\%$

RESULTS

- Population in 2010 = 4600 ± 2000

