



# LIVING WITH LARGE PREDATORS IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY

Large predators in Los Alamos County today are mountain lions, black bears, bobcats and coyotes. These large, powerful predators have lived here for eons, feeding on the plentiful prey and playing an important role in the ecosystem. You may live or play in habitats used by these predators. They can at times be dangerous. However, with a better understanding of these magnificent and important animals, we can learn to coexist.

## When People Encounter Large Predators

Generally, large predators are elusive. They tend to live in remote, rural country like Los Alamos County. Consequently, the number of predator human interactions is increasing. This increase is due to a variety of reasons: more people moving into their habitat, an increase in prey species, drought conditions requiring them to expand their home range, more people using hiking and biking trails in their habitat and a greater awareness of the presence of large predators.

## What to Do if You Live in Large Predator Country

If you choose to live in large predator country, make sure that you do not contribute to their becoming a problem. To reduce the risk we urge you to follow these simple precautions.

-  Closely supervise children whenever they play outdoors. Make sure children are home before dusk and are not outside before dawn. These are the times that large predators are most active.
-  Structure landscapes so that it eliminates hiding cover for predators. You do not have to remove all vegetation but enough so you can detect a predator if it comes into your yard. Make it difficult for them to approach unseen.
-  Install outside lighting, preferably with motion sensors. Light areas where you walk so you can see a large predator.
-  Close off open spaces below porches and decks.
-  Planting non-native shrubs and plants often will encourage prey species to come onto your property. Predators follow prey.
-  Roaming pets are easy prey. Bring them in at night. If they must stay out, confine them to a kennel with a secure roof. Do not feed pets outside where they or their food can attract predators or other small mammals like raccoons which predators prey upon.
-  Store all garbage securely.

Most predators with residential areas within their habitat do not cause any damage. If a predator doesn't find abundant food, it will move on.

## What to Do if You Meet a Large Predator

There are no definite rules about what to do if you meet a large predator. In most cases, the animal will detect you first and will leave the area. Attacks are rare compared to the number of encounters. However, if you do encounter one, here are some suggestions. Remember: Every situation is different with respect to the animal, the terrain, and the person.

### **1 Stay Calm**

If you see a predator that hasn't seen you, calmly leave the area. As you move away, talk out loud to let the animal know of your presence.

### **2 Stop**

Back away slowly while facing the predator if you can do so safely. Avoid direct eye contact. Don't run as this might stimulate its instinct to chase and attack. Give it plenty of room to escape.

### **3 Do all you can to appear larger**

Raise your arms and open your jacket if you are wearing one. If you have small children with you, protect them by picking them up so they don't panic and run.

### **4 Never Approach**

Wild animals are unpredictable, however, they will usually avoid a confrontation unless pushed into one.

### **5 Watch for young**

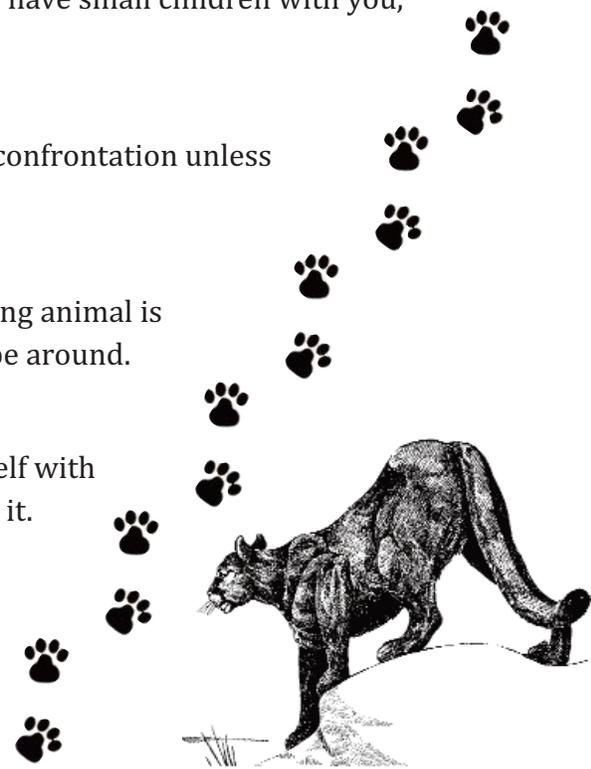
Coming between a female and her young can be dangerous. If a young animal is nearby, try to move away from it, being alert for others that might be around.

### **6 Convince it you're not prey**

If the animal approaches closer or behaves aggressively, arm yourself with a large stick, throw rocks at it, and speak louder and more firmly to it. Convince the predator that you are dominant and a danger to it.

### **7 Fight back**

If a predator does attack, fight back aggressively. Use any possible objects such as rocks, sticks, backpacks, caps, jackets or even your bare hands.



## Who Can You Call?

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish is responsible for managing, conserving and protecting wildlife within the state. Your concerns about wildlife are our concerns as well. If you have a potentially life-threatening situation with a large predator, or if an injury occurs, please contact the Department of Game and Fish, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the phone number listed below. After hours, contact the Los Alamos Police Department or the New Mexico State Police. Sightings or encounters with large predators are not that uncommon and you are not required to report them.

**New Mexico Game and Fish Department Main Office**  
**1 Wildlife Way, Santa Fe, NM 87507**  
**(505) 476-8000**      [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us)

# What are the Common Large Predators in Los Alamos County?



## COYOTE

The coyote's howl is a familiar sound in Los Alamos County. The coyote is a wiry, nimble wild dog, built and colored for escaping large enemies as well as stalking nervous prey. A coyote normally weighs between 25-30 pounds. A mature animal is just two feet high at the shoulder and three feet long, with its bushy tail floating out behind while running. Coyotes are monogamous and a pairing may last for several years, though not necessarily for the life of the coyote. Female coyotes come into heat once a year, usually in the late winter or early spring. An average of six pups are born. The young begin to emerge from the den at about two weeks of age, and disperse after six to nine months. Occasionally, some young may remain with the parents, and for a time a small group is formed.



### Hunting and Feeding Habits

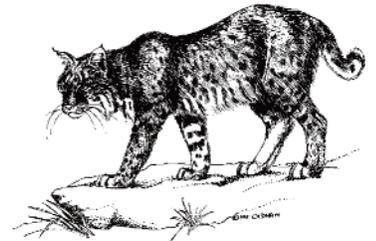
Although about 90% of the coyote's diet is other mammals, they are opportunistic and depending upon season and availability, consume a wide variety of plant and animal material. When rabbits are in good supply, they are the dietary mainstay. Carrion (dead animals), mice, rats, ground squirrels, marmots, prairie dogs, and other rodents, together with a few birds, make up the remainder of the basic diet. Coyotes often hunt alone, or a mated pair may cooperate in foraging. Coyotes will often pair to kill difficult prey. They run in relays to tire an animal, or one of them waits in ambush while the other drives the victim toward the other.

### Habitat

The coyote is widely distributed in Los Alamos, and despite control programs aimed at reducing their numbers, they are relatively common, due in part to their ability to adapt to changing environments.

## BOBCAT

Bobcats are cat-like in appearance, with a short tail and sharp, erect ears. Their stubby tails and bobbing motion identify them in the wild, as do their grey and yellow markings. The coat tends to be spotted on the flanks and striped on the face and legs. A bobcat, even when fully grown, may weigh only 15 to 30 pounds. The bobcat is shy and seldom seen, however, it is a savage fighter when cornered or taking prey. Bobcats can mate at any time of the year, normally from February to May, and give birth to a litter of one to seven kittens. Kittens may remain with the female until the fall of the next year.



### Hunting and Feeding Habits

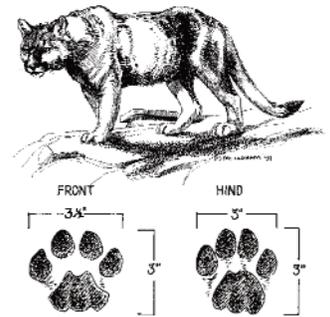
Like other cats, bobcats hunt primarily at night, but may also hunt during the day. The bobcat's eyes are admirably adapted to night-hunting. Bobcats are considered to be sight hunters using their eyes to full advantage. Bobcats hunt by stealth rather than pursuit. The cat may sit by a game trail or other strategic site until a rabbit passes nearby, and then capture the animal with a pounce or a quick rush. Their diet consists of mostly rabbits, but rodents, birds, and sometimes reptiles or even insects are taken. Small pets, such as house-cats and small dogs, have fallen prey to these aggressive predators.

### Habitat

The bobcat is found throughout Los Alamos County regardless of terrain. It even survives in heavily populated areas. A bobcat seldom travel more than two miles from its home.

## MOUNTAIN LION

The lion's scientific name, (*Puma concolor*) means "cat of one color". Mountain lions in Los Alamos County are usually tawny to light-cinnamon in color with black-tipped ears and tail. Adult cats can weigh from 80 to 150 pounds and measure eight feet long, with the tail included. The fur is short and kept clean by grooming. Female lions generally give birth to an average of two to three kittens. They normally live on the mother's milk for a month, after which they start eating meat she brings to them. The spotted kittens are cute when young, but quickly develop sharp claws and teeth that will serve them well when they grow up.



### Hunting and Feeding Habits

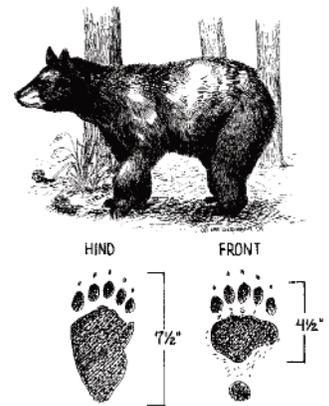
Powerful muscles, sharp teeth, and keen eyesight and hearing make the mountain lion a strong hunter. Most active from dusk to dawn, lions will also travel and hunt in daylight. Lions prefer to eat deer; however, they also kill elk, porcupines, small mammals, livestock and other domestic animals. It has been estimated that an adult lion can survive well on one deer per week. Lions take their prey by ambush rather than by a long pursuit, and usually kill with a powerful bite below the base of the skull, breaking the neck. The unconsumed portions are covered with dirt, leaves or snow and the lion may return to feed on it over the course of a few days. Lions feeding on a kill can be extremely dangerous to people.

### Habitat

Historically the mountain lion has occupied all parts of Los Alamos County. Individual lions range in areas varying in size from 10 to over 300 square miles. Females with young kittens use the smallest areas, adult males occupy the largest areas. Size of the home range depends on the terrain and how much food is available.

## BLACK BEAR

Large, powerful animals, black bears weigh over 200 pounds. The largest recorded in New Mexico was 495 pounds. A "black" bear can be colored jet black to cinnamon to blonde. They have pointed noses and high-set ears. Claws are long, sharp and curved, allowing them to climb trees. Their lifespan in the wild can be long. Adult female black bears normally give birth every other year to one to three cubs. The cubs are born while the mother is in hibernation. The cubs remain with their mother during their first full winter, and disperse the following spring.



### Hunting and Feeding Habits

Feeding on both plants and animals and being opportunistic, the black bear has a diet which varies according to seasonal availability of foods. They eat spring grass, berries, acorns, pinon nuts, and dead animals. Occasionally bears will kill livestock or break into commercial beehives and remove the honey and the bees. Rocks and stumps may be overturned in search of grubs, insects or small rodents as well. Recent research indicates they may also be an efficient predator of large game.

### Habitat

Forested areas of Los Alamos County are populated by black bears, and it is not uncommon to find them around the mountain campgrounds, and even near town. They need woodland cover, as they are shy animals, so mixed forest with food-producing trees such as oak or pinon, are good areas in which to find bears. Bears like water to play in and to drink, and frequently are found in springs and creeks.