

Transferable bighorn licenses, habitat stamp on Game Commission agenda

The Department of Game and Fish will ask for State Game Commission direction on creating a **new transferable authorization program for bighorn sheep hunting on private land**. The plan calls for giving three of New Mexico's largest ranches resalable, publicly owned bighorn tags in exchange for the ranches allowing public draw hunters onto their land. The department plans to present draft agreements with the Armendaris and Vermejo Park ranches – both owned by Ted Turner – as well as the Rio Costilla Cooperative Livestock Association at the Game Commission meeting this month in Albuquerque. (Right, photo copyright 2000-2011 NM Department of Game and Fish)



Although there has been no public discussion of the new transferable authorization program, a department official outlined the plan to NMWF. The draft agreement calls for providing 50 percent of bighorn hunting opportunities as transferable, resalable licenses to private landowners in exchange for permitting an equal number of public draw hunters onto their land for hunts. Initially there would be six desert bighorn tags for the Fra Cristobal range. Three would be provided to the Armendaris Ranch and three would be provided through the public draw. One ram tag would initially be provided for the Culebras Mountains, which run north from the Valle Vidal to the Colorado border. One year the license would be provided through the public drawing and the next year it would be provided as a transferable authorization either to the Rio Costilla association or to Vermejo Park Ranch, the two private landowners where the Culebras herd resides in New Mexico.

Most states that offer bighorn sheep hunts (including New Mexico currently) put all licenses into the public draw, and if the hunter wants to hunt on private land, he or she can work out an arrangement with the landowner. But New Mexico is one of few states where big ranches encompass entire mountain ranges and their sheep herds. The proposal under discussion in New Mexico exchanges public hunting licenses for access to private land – which is essentially how the current program for antelope started out. After a law governing the antelope program was repealed in 1973, lifting an overall limit on the percentage of pronghorn licenses that could be given out as private land authorizations, previous Game Commissions, department officials and sportsman organizations allowed the antelope program to get out of hand through a virtually unmanaged, ranch-by-ranch agreement process. Now some 66 percent of licenses are awarded as resalable licenses to a small number of landowners, which severely limits hunting opportunity for public draw hunters and for many landowners themselves.

The transferable bighorn license plan is **scheduled for "discussion only,"** although the Game Commission can take action on any item on the agenda.

Also on the Commission agenda is discussion of the Habitat Stamp Program. For a year or more the department and its program partners, the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, have been talking about potential changes in the way some \$800,000 a year in wildlife habitat improvement funds are spent. Once again, the department is seeking sportsmen's comments on how best to structure the Habitat Stamp Program. Five options are now under consideration. Southern New Mexico sportsmen support changes that bring more funding to their region. Hunters and anglers elsewhere in the state are encouraged to read the proposals and weigh in. [Click here](#) to read the Habitat Stamp options and submit your own comments on the future of this important program.

In other business, the Commission is expected to approve minor changes in the Upland Game Rule, including eliminating the requirement that grouse hunters obtain a free blue grouse permit. Also up for approval are changes in northern pike regulations for Eagle Nest Lake and changes in the elk youth encouragement hunt program. The meeting runs 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the UNM Continuing Education Conference Center, 1634 University Blvd. NE (just north of Indian School Road) on Thursday, Dec. 15. [Click here](#) to read the full agenda. [Click here](#) for a map of the meeting location.



Salazar named to Valles Caldera board

President Obama has appointed former New Mexico Wildlife Federation President Kent Salazar (left) to the Valles Caldera Trust. A lifelong New Mexico hunter and angler, Salazar will hold the seat designated for an expert in wildlife management. Salazar is also a former member of the State Game Commission and is currently an elected board member of NMWF and a regional representative to the National Wildlife Federation. "I'm honored to be appointed to the trust and I look forward to working hard on Valles Caldera issues, including improved public access for hunting and fishing," he said. **Salazar said he supports the legislation introduced in Congress by Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall to transfer management of the preserve to the National Park Service.** The legislation mandates that hunting and fishing activities be permitted, as they are in other national preserves managed by the Park Service.

In other federal news

All of New Mexico's U.S. representatives have thrown their support to a commonsense bill introduced by Rep. Martin Heinrich of Albuquerque and Rep. Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming that calls for revenues obtained from the sale of any federal land to be used to purchase other, high-value recreational or conservation lands from willing sellers in the future. The bill, cosponsored by Reps. Steve Pearce of Hobbs and Ben Ray Lujan of Santa Fe, calls for reauthorizing the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act for another seven years. New Mexico Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, along with others in the Senate, have introduced similar legislation reauthorizing FLTFA for 10 years.

Hunters and anglers continue to speak out against a bill in the U.S. House that would allow development on millions of acres of roadless public lands throughout the West, including New Mexico. The Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act, HR 1581, would strip longtime protections from areas that are currently roadless on U.S. Forest Service and BLM lands. Most sportsmen's groups oppose the bill, saying it would ruin the places where hunters can still find trophy elk and deer and where anglers can find native trout streams. [Click here](#) to read a recent opinion piece about the bill that ran in the Santa Fe New Mexican. [Click here](#) to see a map of areas of New Mexico that would lose protection if HR 1581 becomes law.

Another extreme piece of legislation by anti-public lands forces in Washington, D.C., would sell off some 800,000 acres of BLM and other public land in New Mexico alone. HR 1126, sponsored by Utah Rep. Jason Chafetz, calls for selling 3.3 million acres across the West. The list of public lands, however, was drawn up in 1997 without input from local residents. Advocates of the legislation want to mandate the sale of public lands without local input or knowledge of which areas would be sold. The bill would also direct the proceeds away from acquiring other public lands in favor of "paying down the deficit." NMWF President Ray Trejo called it "an absurd piece of legislation" that is not even accompanied by maps or legal descriptions of the lands proposed for sale. "Even if they did manage to sell off the land without telling where it is or asking what we think, it would still be a ripoff to the federal government to force a sale now with the real estate market at rock bottom," he said. [Click here](#) to see a county-by-county assessment of lands proposed for sale in New Mexico. The legislation currently has more than 21 Republican cosponsors in the U.S. House, including powerful Public Lands subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop of Utah.

Hunters feed the hungry

Hunters around the country have helped put meat on the table for millions of Americans, according to a new study commissioned by the National Shooting Sports Foundation. The study found that last year **11 million meals were provided to the less fortunate through donations of deer, elk and other wild game**. Nearly 2.8 million pounds of meat was donated by programs such as Hunters for the Hungry in Las Cruces. "These contributions are just one way hunting and hunters are important to our way of life in America," said Stephen L. Sanetti, president and CEO of NSSF.

Become a voice for sportsmen

One of the best tools sportsmen have in the effort to protect public lands, habitat and wildlife is sportsmen themselves. Decision-makers listen when regular citizens make the effort to contact them, whether it's at the state Legislature, the State Game Commission or in Congress. This winter NMWF will offer free, one-evening courses in how to become a stronger voice for sportsmen's issues through letter writing, telephone contacts and talking before a group of strangers. It's not difficult to do, but **it's critically important that sportsmen like you speak up about issues that matter to yourself, your friends and your family.** Contact us at (505) 299-5404 or simply reply to this email for more information.

Photo contest winners

The new issue of the Outdoor Reporter has been mailed to NMWF members and is also available at many sporting goods stores around New Mexico. On the cover is the overall winner of our 2011 Photo Contest, and inside are the best photos of hunting, fishing and kids. Congratulations to all our winners, and thanks to all the photographers who sent in their best shots. **But it's not too early to start thinking about next year's contest.** Send us your best hunting, fishing or kid photo for a chance to win fabulous prizes. **And if you have a good story to go along with your photo, send that too.** Who knows, we may decide to publish it and give you a \$20 gift certificate. Submit your photos and stories to nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org. If you want to receive the next issue of the Outdoor Reporter in the mail, **join NMWF. It's easy** – just go online to www.nmwildlife.org and click "Join Now" in the upper right side of the webpage.

Hunt of a lifetime

Neil Overbay of Albuquerque definitely had a once-in-a-lifetime oryx hunt recently on White Sands Missile Range. With old hunting partner Allen Wells and guide Steve Pecos, they spotted animals at 2,000 yards on the first morning and stalked to within about 300 yards. Then the oryx broke into a run. Overbay said he fired and dropped one, but as the hunters approached the animal it got back on its feet. He fired again, and this time it stayed down. The hunters gave thanks, including a special prayer and corn-pollen blessing by Pecos, who is from Jemez Pueblo. The oryx measured 37 inches on one side, 35.5 inches on the other, but the horns had a 7.5-inch base. When the hunters checked out, the hunt coordinator said Overbay's was one of the bigger oryx taken in recent years and probably would be the biggest of that hunt. "So the hunt was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience," he said. (At right, Overbay, center, poses with hunting partner Allen Wells and guide Steve Pecos.)



Pass it on

If you appreciate receiving the Sportsman's News Roundup, please share this newsletter with a friend and ask them to get involved by joining our Sportsman's Alert network. New Mexico sportsmen need to stay involved to ensure our hunting and fishing traditions continue. **And please make a contribution to NMWF.** With sportsmen like you, we can continue to make a difference. [Click here to donate now.](#)

About the New Mexico Wildlife Federation

Founded in 1914 by sportsman and conservation pioneer Aldo Leopold, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation is New Mexico's first and most effective conservation advocate. We are dedicated to protecting New Mexico's wildlife, habitat and outdoor way of life. We spearheaded permanent protection of our hunting and fishing rights in the Valle Vidal, and stopped cold the previous sell-off of your public lands. We believe that the best way to get things done is to build consensus with common goals.

Our key priorities are: Opportunity Habitat Youth

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