



Game Commission Report

June 4, 2010

Sportsmen's voices heard on controversial elk rules

Hunters convinced the Department of Game and Fish to drop several radical ideas for changing elk season dates and instead stick with the traditional season structure for the next four years. More than 200 individuals attended meetings or submitted comments on proposed rules for elk and other big game, department staff told the State Game Commission at its meeting Thursday in Gallup, and "probably 80 percent" of those sportsmen opposed a proposal that called for, among other things, extending the rifle season to a month. "The public spoke loudly and clearly that they don't want the seasons to change," said Jim Lane, chief of the Wildlife Management Division.

After the first round of public comment on the so-called Group B rules, which also include exotic species, bighorn sheep and the Open Gate program, the department revamped its proposals and submitted them to the commission Thursday. All the proposed rules will be posted on the department's website (www.wildlife.state.nm.us) by Tuesday, June 8. Sportsmen then have another 30 days to comment on the revised rule proposals before the commission votes on the changes July 8 in Silver City. (For more on the Group B rules and discussion, [click here](#).)

Public comment also came in for the Group A species – turkey, javelina and upland game – and most supported the department's proposals, which generally expand hunting opportunity, Lane said. Last-minute concerns were raised about a proposal to offer unlimited over-the-counter tags for turkeys in portions of Units 2A and 2C in both spring and fall seasons, but the commission was not swayed. Department staff explained that the expanded harvest plan is aimed at reducing a sub-species of turkey not native to the area (the Rio Grande turkey) to reduce interbreeding with the native Merriam's. The commission approved the Group A rules unanimously. ([Click here](#) to read highlights of the new rules, including justification for each.)

In other action, the commission approved changes to the state's aquatic invasive species regulations. The new regulations will allow authorized personnel to transport invasive species such as quagga mussels and zebra snails as well as boats or other equipment found to be carrying the species, and provide for other measures to control the spread of invasives.

The rest of the commission meeting was purely informational. Staff discussed the spread of feral hogs in New Mexico and called for their eradication, although no formal program has been proposed. Lane said barnyard pigs that escape or are set loose become feral in two years, and that they are rapidly becoming an ecological nightmare. Feral hogs kill native species of plants and animals, pollute surface water and threaten livestock. In 1982 only a portion of the Bootheel reported feral hogs; now they're found in nearly half the state. Because they're not considered wildlife, a license is not needed to hunt them, there is no closed season and a hunter cannot be cited for wanton waste. Lane encouraged hunters to target them. "Eradication is the goal," he said.

The commission also heard updates on two financial matters. Staff reported they're starting work on next year's budget, and said they expect a flat budget and possibly a reduction. Commission Chairman Jim McClintic asked why the department would suffer a budget cut when its funding comes strictly from license and permit fees and taxes on sporting goods. Alexa Sandoval, chief of the Administrative Services Division, explained that the governor can order every department to cut its budget, even the Department of Game and Fish. In that case, she said, "What happens is we're saving our money." Not spending the money in one year actually puts off the need for license fee hikes in the future, she added.

Sandoval also said the department is starting a review of its many different license, stamp and permit requirements. The Legislature asked for the review, but several commissioners concurred with the need. "I would like to see it simplified," said Commissioner Dick Salopek of Las Cruces, so a fisherman, for example, might need just a single license rather than a license and two stamps. Commissioner Gary Fonay of Roswell suggested that a single big game draw might also be better than the current system of two. Staff will bring back some ideas for consideration at the next commission meeting, but Sandoval said any change in licenses will require legislative approval.

The commission also heard reports on the department's big game enhancement projects and its proposed exotic species importation rules. Donald Auer said the big game enhancement funds are used for a variety of landscape-scale habitat improvement projects that benefit elk, mule deer, turkey and other species with special tag auctions and raffles. Law Enforcement Chief Dan Brooks said his division has come up with new rules on importing exotic species which are more flexible for hobbyists, pet stores and other exotic species aficionados, yet give the department more control over potentially dangerous animals such as venomous reptiles. The commission is expected to vote on the proposal July 8.

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