



## Game Commission Report

March 1, 2010

### Commissioners challenge Lyons, schedule big game rules review

**State Game Commission members grilled Public Lands Commissioner Patrick Lyons** over the proposed Whites Peak land trades at their Feb. 25 meeting in Santa Fe, challenging his assertions that the commission had been kept abreast of the exchange and that trespass is a major problem in the area. **The commission also welcomed two new members and approved a schedule for revising big game rules this year**, including the Antelope Private Lands Use System (A-PLUS). It did not, however, approve a meeting schedule for 2010, **leaving open the possibility of scheduling at least some Saturday meetings to allow more sportsmen to attend.**

### State Land Office misrepresentations continue

**Lyons had asked to update the Game Commission** on four proposed Whites Peak land trades set in motion in 2007 and brought to light by NMWF last fall. The state Attorney General's Office has challenged the legality of the exchanges, however, and the state Supreme Court has put all four trades on hold.

**Despite the legal challenge and the near-unanimous opposition from New Mexico sportsmen**, Lyons maintained that the trades would benefit the state. But Commissioner Sandy Buffet spoke for many in the room when she told Lyons, "I wish you had come a year ago and we could have avoided a lot of the issues here."

**Lyons' presentation contained several pieces of misinformation** that were challenged by commission members. For example, his slide show suggested there had been 80 trespass citations from 2006-2008, when in fact there were six in 2006, three in 2007 and two in 2008. That declining trend is due in large part to enforcement efforts by Department of Game and Fish staff, noted Commissioner Kent Salazar. When the Northeast Area chief was asked if trespass was rampant in GMU 48, Lief Ahlm had this to say: "In my experience, it's not unusual to any other unit that we have in this state."

**Salazar also questioned Lyons' statement** that the State Land Office would gain nearly \$13 million in land values in the exchanges. That figure doesn't include the loss of more than \$12 million in state lands outside the Whites Peak area that is part of the deal, he pointed out.

**In addition, Salazar noted that the public would likely lose elk hunting opportunity** if the first two trades go through as proposed. Several commissioners and attendees appeared surprised by the NMWF analysis that shows GMU 48 would lose about 50 elk licenses in the big game draw due to the substantial reduction in public land in the COER (core occupied elk range) caused by the two advertised trades. Presumably, most of those tag authorizations would go to landowners enrolled in the E-PLUS program.

**Chairman Jim McClintic** could have let Lyons' presentation go unchallenged but instead allowed commissioners and the public to question the head of the State Land Office. Many sportsmen took advantage of the opportunity. Said Miguel Angel of Las Vegas, "This is not only an issue for the hunters, this is an issue of saving a valuable asset for the state of New Mexico."

### New approach proposed for big game rule revisions

**A novel approach to tackling this year's review of big game rules** was presented to the commission by Jim Lane, chief of the Wildlife Management Division. The commission approved his plan to break up the review into three parts, starting with the turkey, upland game and javelina rules. The department will post proposed recommendations on those hunts on its Web site and take public comments starting in March, with a commission presentation set for April and a final vote in May or June.

**Bighorn, exotics, elk, waterfowl and Open Gate rules** will be second up, with recommendations posted for public comment in April and a final vote in July. The final set of rules – for bear, cougar, pronghorn and deer, along with A-PLUS (Antelope Private Lands Use System) – will be posted for public comment in June, with the final vote in September.

**Lane also proposed changing the schedule for reviewing big game rules from two years to four.** Emergency issues could always be taken up by the commission when needed, but the four-year schedule makes sense: It would allow decisions to be made on three years' worth of data instead of one, increase consistency in rules for sportsmen, and allow department staff to spend less time on the administrative issues that accompany big game rule changes.

**Among the proposals that will come up later are:**

- Changing the end of legal shooting hours from sunset to one-half hour after sunset except for migratory birds.
- Allowing crossbows during any "legal sporting arm" and muzzleloader hunt.
- Opening additional Wildlife Management Areas to javelina hunting.
- Adding Arizona gray squirrel, fox squirrel and eastern gray squirrel to the legal bag limit.
- Prohibiting hunting upland game and turkeys over bait.
- Increasing the spring turkey bag limit to two, without purchase of a second license, except in the Valles Caldera.
- Changing the fall turkey season to Nov. 1–30.
- Opening certain additional GMUs to spring and fall turkey hunting.

**[CORRECTED INFORMATION:] The department has been directed to place on the agenda a discussion for opening the furbearer rule** at the next Game Commission meeting and present a timetable for proposals, public comments and a final vote. New Mexico Wildlife Federation will keep you updated on the progress and issues of concern to sportsmen during this entire rule revision process.

### Antelope review scheduled

**The Game Commission's review of the A-PLUS program is still on track** for a final decision this fall. The commission had directed the department to propose revisions that would, among other things, increase hunting opportunity, distribute hunting pressure and provide landowners with clear hunt options and incentives for public access.

**In another fresh approach**, Lane said the department would assemble stakeholders – including sportsmen and landowners – to discuss proposed A-PLUS options before the plans are presented to the Game Commission. The current schedule calls for proposals to be submitted for public comments in June, with a final decision in September. Options to date include: the fall 2008 proposal; an undisclosed option currently undergoing internal review; no change in A-PLUS; and providing one license to each enrolled landowner with the balance of licenses allocated through the big game draw – which would double hunters' opportunity by putting more than 2,000 additional licenses into the draw.

### New commissioners attend first meeting

**The two newest members of the Game Commission** are Dick Salopek of Las Cruces and Gary Fonay of Hobbs. Fonay spent nearly 30 years in the oil and gas industry before retiring in 2004. He was an outspoken proponent of protecting the Valle Vidal. He owns and manages a farm and ranch and is a member of a number of organizations including the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, Quail Unlimited, Trout Unlimited and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Salopek is a third-generation pecan farmer, an avid hunter and bowhunter and a member of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the NRA. Salopek fills the statewide seat representing landowner and agricultural interests on the commission, while Fonay represents sportsmen from southeastern New Mexico. Both commissioners' terms expire in December 2013.



### Unfinished business: Meeting schedule for 2010

**The commission still has not established its meeting schedule for the coming year.** In recent years all regularly scheduled meetings have been on Thursdays, which has made it difficult for many members of the general public to attend. A NMWF poll last year found a majority of New Mexico sportsmen believe they are largely left out of key decisions and 68 percent said they would be more likely to attend commission meetings if they were held on weekends.

**Take a moment now** and contact Game Commission Chairman Jim McClintic or your regional commissioner and **ask that all or most State Game Commission meetings be held on Saturdays.** The new Off-Highway Vehicle Commission agreed to meet on Saturdays; the Game Commission could, too.

Chairman Jim McClintic, statewide (505) 271-4550 Fax: (505) 271-2472 (no e-mail)  
Bernalillo County: Tom Arvas, (505) 293-3515 (no e-mail)  
Northeast: Sandy Buffett, [sandyNMGC@gmail.com](mailto:sandyNMGC@gmail.com)  
Northwest: Kent Salazar, [kentsala@aol.com](mailto:kentsala@aol.com)  
Southeast: Gary Fonay, [GVFonay@aol.com](mailto:GVFonay@aol.com)  
Southwest: Dutch Salmon, [dutch@high-lonesomebooks.com](mailto:dutch@high-lonesomebooks.com)  
Agricultural & landowner interests, statewide: Dick Salopek, [DickSalopek@hotmail.com](mailto:DickSalopek@hotmail.com)

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#### 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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New Mexico Wildlife Federation | 2610 San Mateo Blvd. NE | Suite A | Albuquerque | NM | 87110