

Director search not on Commission agenda

The State Game Commission met Thursday, Aug. 25, in Santa Fe and discussed a wide range of topics including Rio Grande cutthroat trout, the Habitat Stamp Program and mule deer problems in Silver City, but it **failed to take up the most important issue facing New Mexico sportsmen today: planning the search for a new director of Game and Fish.**

The search was not on the agenda and only came up when Commissioner Bill Montoya mentioned it at the end of the meeting. But it was apparent from Commission Chairman Jim McClintic's comments to Montoya that the chairman has already initiated the search process – he said he has asked Department of Game and Fish staff for guidelines and information. It was equally clear that other commissioners and the public have been left out of the loop. Gov. Susana Martinez, who has said she would make transparency a cornerstone of her administration, should demand that the commission's search for a new director be conducted in a fully transparent manner, including allowing the public to know who is being considered as finalists. See below for more on the director search and how to ask the governor to rebuild public trust in her Game Commission.

Proposed budget for next year remains flat – again

Commissioners unanimously approved a proposed a \$38.5 million operating budget for the Department of Game and Fish next year. The budget, which still needs approval by the Martinez administration and the Legislature, is for the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2012. **It reflects no increase from past years, but it does continue to fund numerous positions that have been vacant** because of a state hiring freeze, staff members told the commission. The department budget has been flat or negative for at least four years, despite the fact that funding is available for more staff – sportsmen's licenses, fees and equipment taxes make up 100 percent of the department's budget. [Click here](#) for more on the proposed FY 2013 operating budget.

Depredation law reform possible in 2012

Department staff updated the commission on potential legislation that could come up during the 2012 Legislature. It will be a 30-day session, which is generally limited to bills affecting state finances. But the governor can also introduce bills on any subject, and Assistant Director Pat Block said possible **legislation could include another look at the state's depredation law** – the so-called Jennings Law that allows landowners to kill wildlife that are eating or even threatening their crops. Commissioner Rob Hoffman of Las Cruces said he would like to see the law revised to at least ensure that any landowners who shoot elk, deer or antelope do not waste the meat. "It is abhorrent to me" to let game animals rot in a field simply because they were eating alfalfa, Hoffman said. "There's plenty of people that need that protein." Commissioner Scott Bidegain, who sits on the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association board but is supposed to represent sportsmen from northeast New Mexico, asked who would pay for processing animals taken under the depredation statute. Hoffman immediately replied that the processing should fall on whoever killed the animal. [Click here](#) to listen to the discussion.

The governor will decide later this year whether to bring up the depredation law reform during the legislative session that begins next January.

Las Animas trout restoration approved this time

The commission also approved plans to restore Rio Grande cutthroat trout in Rio Las Animas, an idea that had been nixed several years earlier. Plans call for poisoning the creek to remove non-native species and then restocking with pure-bred native cutthroats and other native fish. The work still needs environmental approval by the Forest Service and the state Water Quality Control Commission, but department staff said they expect that approval and that work would probably begin in the fall of 2012. **It will likely take two or three years of stocking for the cutthroat population to return to pre-treatment levels**, but catch-and-release fishing may be allowed during that period. Las Animas flows out of the Gila area north of Hillsboro and runs through the massive Ladder Ranch.

Youth hunt draw improvements proposed

The commission's refusal to meet on Saturdays continues to keep public participation low, but one sportsman who spoke up on Thursday showed why Saturday meetings could benefit the state. David Walker of Albuquerque took advantage of the public comment period and **proposed a sensible change in the Youth Encouragement Hunt drawing.** The way it works now, young hunters who are unsuccessful in the Big Game Draw can apply later in the summer for the Youth Encouragement elk hunts. This year, 1,955 antlerless hunts over the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays were offered. But excluded from those hunts are youths who may have drawn a deer or javelina tag, but not elk -- and who would love to get an elk license also, Walker said. Even now, he said, hundreds of encouragement hunts are still open and probably won't be used. **The current system denies avid young hunters another opportunity to hunt and robs the department of thousands of dollars** in license fees, he pointed out. He suggested giving unsuccessful draw hunters the first shot at elk licenses, but allowing all youth hunters an opportunity afterward. Commission Chairman Jim McClintic said it seemed like a good idea but did not ask the department to look into it.

Silver City deer, off-range oryx, desert bighorn sheep

Silver City is being overrun by mule deer that are snacking on local gardens, being killed by cars and trucks and attracting mountain lions and other predators into town, but Department of Game and Fish said there's no easy solution to reduce their numbers. The most efficient way to eliminate the deer – estimates run as high as 2,000 animals within a 40-square-mile area – would be to kill them, using either professional sharpshooters or perhaps opening up limited hunts. While Grant County is open to the idea, probably half the deer are within city limits and the town of Silver City opposes the idea of hunting them, Mayor James Marshall said. Marshall, a hunter himself, also pointed out that the **problem is exacerbated by residents feeding the deer, but no regulations currently exist to ban feeding wildlife.** Trapping and transporting is also possible, but not nearly as effective at reducing the population and much more costly, said Ray Aaltonen, chief of the department's southwest region. There's also no guarantee that transplanted deer would survive. Aaltonen said his staff would continue to work on solutions for the commission to consider and approve in November. [Click here](#) to for more on the Silver City deer problem.

Also on the Nov. 3 meeting agenda will be a decision on how to reallocate 130 off-range oryx licenses. The department eliminated the May and June oryx hunts as a side effect of changes the Game Commission made after the passage of Senate Bill 196. **Three alternatives are under consideration.** Alternative one would put all the licenses into Youth/Mentor hunts from November through March, putting 26 additional licenses (13 pairs) into the field each month. Alternative two would put all the licenses into the remaining 10 months (putting an additional 10 adult and three youth-only licenses into the field per month.) Alternative three would put the extra licenses in the cooler months, November through March, or 26 licenses per month. [Click here](#) to comment on the plans.

After running into administrative hurdles last year, the department is **trying once again to get the desert bighorn sheep officially removed from the state's endangered species list.** Public comment on the plan will be taken at meetings in Deming and Truth or Consequences on Sept. 6. Both meetings begin at 6 p.m. [Click here](#) for more information on the desert bighorn meetings and the delisting process.

Outfitter regulations, Habitat Stamp Program

New Mexico outfitters will soon face several new regulations, as required by the approval of Senate Bill 196. On Thursday, department staff updated commissioners on the proposed new regulations. Among the changes that will come up for final adoption in November are a requirement that clients and outfitters have a **signed contract** before the client applies for the outfitter mandated pool in the Big Game Draw, and that **outfitters spend at least two days in the field** with each client. As part of SB 196, 10 percent of draw licenses are guaranteed to outfitters, a pool that is open to both resident and nonresident hunters. Prior to SB 196, the outfitter mandated pool was 12 percent and restricted to nonresident hunters.

The commission heard yet more discussion about possible changes to the Habitat Stamp Program, but again **failed to make hard decisions about how to divide program revenues** between regions of the state. Earlier this year the commission nixed a plan put together by Game and Fish, the BLM and U.S. Forest Service to divvy up funding for some \$800,000 worth of habitat improvement work every year. On Thursday, Assistant Director R.J. Kirkpatrick said the newest plan is to bring sportsmen's groups into the conversation – despite the fact that the Habitat Stamp Program already has regional Citizen Advisory Committees that provide sportsmen's feedback. Nevertheless, commissioners supported Kirkpatrick's plan to bring in other sportsmen's organizations to help come up with a plan that has broader support.

Commissioner Maracchini out, Espinoza in

Earlier this month and with no explanation, Gov. Susana Martinez **removed Jerry Maracchini** from the Game Commission seat representing northwest New Mexico and **appointed Robert Espinoza of Farmington.** Espinoza is executive director of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife. When the Game Commission was considering possible changes to antelope hunting rules, Espinoza joined a coalition with the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association and the New Mexico Council of Outfitters and Guides to oppose the idea of putting a higher percentage of antelope licenses in the Big Game Draw. Espinoza also opposed legislation that would have given New Mexico residents 90 percent of Big Game Draw licenses (and 10 percent to nonresidents) and worked to reduce the resident share under the legislation to 84 percent. Espinoza then supported giving even fewer licenses to New Mexicans, just 83 percent.

Director search begins behind closed doors

Although a search for the next director of Game and Fish was not on the agenda, former Game and Fish employee John Crenshaw (who was recently elected to the board of NMWF) took advantage of the public comment period and made a plea for a full and open search. He **suggested the commission appoint a search committee** that included sportsmen, a department employee and the agriculture industry, which would conduct a national search and bring a group of five to 10 finalists to the full commission for interviews and a final decision. "I think that would really make your lives a little easier and it would certainly remove any doubt that there's been some sort of decision made ahead of time," Crenshaw said. His recommendation was echoed by Garrett VeneKlasen of Trout Unlimited, but no one on the commission said a word after either of their comments. [Click here](#) to hear Crenshaw's testimony.

Director Tod Stevenson announced in early August that he plans to retire on Oct. 26, yet the **only time the commission addressed the issue was at the end of the meeting.** As Chairman McClintic said it was time to adjourn, Commissioner Bill Montoya asked about holding an impromptu executive session, presumably to discuss the search. McClintic cut him off ([click here](#) to listen to the exchange.), saying, "Everybody is trying to push me to do that." McClintic then went on to explain why the search would not be discussed.

First, he said there hadn't been time to put the issue on the agenda – even though Stevenson announced his retirement weeks ago and the commission can change its meeting agenda up to 24 hours before the meeting, including many times in recent years. Second, he said he was waiting for information about how to conduct a search before bringing it to the full commission. "I asked them (department staff) to give us exactly what legally we can do – whether it's a national search, whether it's a statewide search, whether it's just inside the deal (sic)."

The chairman said he asked the department to poll each commissioner and ask how they want to proceed on the search – a potentially illegal action known as a rolling quorum. "Whatever way the commission chooses to go about it or however they want to conduct the search, that's the way I would see us doing it."

Unless the commission holds a special meeting, the earliest it could publicly decide on a search would be at the Nov. 3 meeting in Farmington – a week after Stevenson retires.

Take a moment now to contact Gov. Susana Martinez and ask her to demand that the Game Commission be more open and transparent in its search for a new Director of Game and Fish. Tell her the current leadership of the Game Commission has lost credibility with the everyday sportsmen of New Mexico, and that she should also ask the commission to elect a chairman who has the support of New Mexico hunters and anglers. [Click here](#) to contact the governor.

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

[NMWF Website](#) | [Donate Now](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#)

New Mexico Wildlife Federation | 121 Cardenas Drive N.E. | Albuquerque NM | 87108