



Game Commission Report

July 14, 2010

Commission amends big game rules, extends habitat work

Sportsmen speak up on behalf of better odds for resident hunters

Meeting for nearly nine hours last Thursday in Silver City, **the State Game Commission approved new rules for elk and several other big game species**, extended the popular Habitat Stamp program and voiced support for a plan to simplify hunting, fishing and trapping licenses and stamps.

The Game Commission always offers the public plenty of opportunity to talk about issues of concern during its meetings, but some sportsmen in Silver City may have shied away from speaking after watching members of the commission challenge the testimony of hunters who came to the microphone.

Larry McDaniel, a Silver City veterinarian, went to the podium thinking he had three minutes to talk. Instead, his **testimony was interrupted several times by Chairman Jim McClintic**, his facts were disputed (erroneously, as it turned out) and his ideas were contested.

McDaniel started off his testimony in jest, saying he hadn't drawn an elk tag in several years and that he thought his chances might improve if he moved to El Paso and applied as a nonresident. He encouraged the commission to bring New Mexico more in line with other western states, citing our liberal nonresident quota (22 percent) as a major concern.

"But the big kahuna is the over 40 percent (of elk tags) that go to private landowners," he said, which prompted McClintic to interrupt him: "That's not an accurate number, sir." McClintic then delayed McDaniel's testimony and asked NMDGF Assistant Director Pat Block to clarify the percentage of tags given to landowners through E-PLUS.

Regarding the 40 percent figure, Block told the commission, "I believe that's a little bit on the high side. When you look at the licenses [that are sold through E-PLUS], it's about a third; when you look at the total number authorized, it does get closer to that 40 but it's probably on the high side. Over the last 10 years, it's never hit 40 percent, with either measure."

In fact, **it turns out that it was McClintic and Block who were in error and McDaniel who was correct in his assertions. Department figures show that E-PLUS landowners have received more than 40 percent of the licenses each of the last three years** – licenses the landowner can transfer or resell. For the 2009-10 license year, the department gave E-PLUS landowners 18,846 authorizations (45.8 percent) while putting 22,294 licenses (54.2 percent) in the Big Game Draw. (Interestingly, of the 18,000-plus authorizations given to E-PLUS landowners, only 10,974 were used. That left 7,872 licenses unsold, which translates into **lost revenue for the Department of Game and Fish and lost opportunity for New Mexico resident hunters.**)

McDaniel resumed his testimony, although he continued to be questioned by McClintic ([click here](#) to hear their seven-minute exchange.) Despite the intense questioning he received, McDaniel stayed on track, asking the commissioners to "do what you can" to improve resident hunters' odds of drawing an elk tag. Specifically, he suggested **New Mexico should follow the lead of other western states and allocate more tags to resident hunters.**

Game Commission members often address members of the public during their testimony, but usually it's to ask questions or clarify a point. Rarely do they get into arguments with the public. This week, McDaniel told NMWF he was surprised by the treatment he received and that he called Gov. Bill Richardson's Office of Boards and Commissions to lodge a complaint against McClintic. "I felt like I was treated rudely; I was interrupted repeatedly. I thought it was bizarre," he said. "I was expecting them to take what I said into consideration and say, 'OK, we've heard you and we'll consider your comments,'" McDaniel said. "I was just surprised by the whole thing."

Incentives could unlock private land for hunting

Later in the Silver City meeting, Las Cruces hunter Angel Montoya spoke on the antelope allocation and the commission's upcoming decision. "I think the A-PLUS should be thrown out," he said. **"It's just wrong for us to compensate a landowner with a tag,"** Montoya said, drawing a sharp question from McClintic: "It's their private property and they're feeding the wildlife on it, so what are we supposed to do?" Montoya replied the department should look for other ways of compensating landowners as an incentive to allowing hunters on their land. "The department should set up a system where I have to go and negotiate access with a landowner," he said.

(As a side note, last week the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced it will release funding for the Open Fields Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program. The decision provides \$50 million for states to use to pay landowners to allow hunting and fishing on their property. Each state can apply for up to \$2 million for access programs. **If the N.M. Department of Game and Fish applies for the money, New Mexico's Open Gate program could expand substantially.** For more on the USDA announcement and what it might mean for New Mexico, [click here.](#))

Later this month the Game and Fish Department is scheduled to release several options for revising the A-PLUS program, ranging from allocating nearly all licenses through the Big Game Draw to no changes. NMWF will notify sportsmen when the options are available to consider and on opportunities to comment. One opportunity is already scheduled: The Game Commission meets Saturday, Aug. 28, in Albuquerque and the A-PLUS program will be on the agenda. Mark this day on your calendar and plan to attend to speak up for your rights and your children's rights to hunt in New Mexico.

Rule changes for elk and other species approved

The commission approved several broad changes to big game rules, including extending legal hunting hours to 30 minutes after sunset, and allowing crossbows in hunts open to all other weapon types. The commission unanimously passed new rules for elk, oryx, ibex, barbary sheep, bighorn sheep and migratory game birds, and beefed up aspects of the Open Gate program. NMWF commended the department for actively seeking sportsmen's comments on the proposals and providing a 60-day comment period. [Click here](#) for details on the rules, which were approved as proposed.

Habitat Stamp Program extended another 10 years

Also unanimously, **the commission extended the Habitat Stamp program to 2021.** It had been set to expire in 2011. The program, funded entirely by sportsmen's dollars, combines state and federal revenues to improve wildlife habitat through measures such as prescribed burns, installing drinkers and stream enhancements. Program Director Dale Hall also outlined future plans that he said will include more emphasis on aquatic habitat and fisheries projects and large, landscape-scale terrestrial work.

Simpler license, stamp system could be in the offing

Department staff briefed the commission on efforts to streamline and simplify the state's complex system of sportsmen's licenses and stamps. Alexa Sandoval, chief of the administrative services, outlined a **two-part proposal which would be easier for sportsmen to understand, easier to administer and allow New Mexico to get additional federal revenues.** After commissioners approved the plan Thursday, Sandoval said she would start crunching numbers to see what the new licenses would cost. Some are expected to rise, but others could fall, she said. If the commission eventually approves the final proposal later this year, the Legislature would have to approve the creation of new license categories and license fees. At the earliest, the new license structure would take effect in 2012. [Click here](#) to read the details.

Desert bighorn on the road to delisting

Department staff also presented plans to start delisting the desert bighorn sheep, **a species that has been on the state's threatened or endangered species lists for 30 years.** Commissioners applauded the department's efforts to rebuild the desert bighorn stocks, which required regular transplants as well as a sustained effort to reduce mountain lion predation. Desert bighorn biologist Elise Goldstein noted that sportsmen funded the entire effort through their purchases of raffle and auction tickets and other fees. The vote to formally remove desert bighorn from the endangered species list could come in December, and is likely to include additional hunting opportunity. [Click here](#) for more information.

Next commission meeting on Saturday - finally

The next Game Commission meeting is Saturday, Aug. 28, in Albuquerque. Sportsmen should try to attend, both to comment on agenda items and also to show the commission that public interest is high and that Saturday meetings should be the norm, not the exception.

If you appreciate receiving these reports from the State Game Commission meetings, 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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