

## Commissioners reject idea of selling Marquez

**Also: Desert bighorn delisted, bird preserves approved, potential legislation reviewed**

New Mexico hunters will continue to have the Marquez Wildlife Management Area for quality elk, deer, turkey and other opportunity after the State Game Commission voted Thursday in Farmington against the idea of selling it. In other action, the commission capped a long, successful effort by **officially removing the desert bighorn sheep** from the state's endangered species list. It also approved two new private upland bird hunting preserves near Roswell, adjusted the quotas for off-range oryx hunts and approved new rules for registered guides and outfitters.

## Marquez sale proposal nixed with no comment

The commission in the past has rejected proposals to sell the Marquez Wildlife Management Area, a 15,000-acre tract in GMU 9, and **many hunters were surprised to see the idea was on the commission's agenda for Nov. 3**. Cebolleta Land Grant, which also has land in the area, had asked the commission to consider selling the Marquez with terms yet to be negotiated. There was no public presentation on the proposal and public comments were not taken. The commission met in closed session for about 20 minutes to discuss the idea, then came out and voted unanimously against entering negotiations to sell the area. There was no discussion, so it isn't clear why the commission voted the way it did, **but many sportsmen who appreciate the quality hunting opportunity the Marquez offers breathed a sigh of relief**.

## Desert bighorn delisting means more opportunity for hunters

The commission made history by officially removing the desert bighorn sheep from the state's endangered species list. The move was made possible by a research-driven effort to determine what was responsible for the bighorns' demise and then establishing a program that, over the course of almost 40 years, brought their numbers back from fewer than 70 to nearly 600. Mountain lion control proved to be a key element in the recovery program, bighorn biologist Elise Goldstein said, and control will likely have to continue for some time in order to build up the expanding herds. Eventually New Mexico could have several thousand desert bighorns, she said. Not only is the delisting a positive note for the department, hunters can probably expect to see as many as 12 desert bighorn sheep hunts next year. Department staff and the Game Commission are justifiably proud of the delisting vote.

Next year will also see some **changes in off-range oryx hunt numbers**. Earlier this year the commission eliminated the April and May off-range hunts because of Big Game Draw scheduling conflicts. On Thursday, commissioners approved a department proposal to redistribute the April and May hunts into the remaining 10 months. As a result, each month will now have an additional 10 standard and three youth hunts.

**One of many changes stemming from Senate Bill 196** – the measure sponsored by Sen. George Munoz of Gallup that gave New Mexico resident hunters some 3,400 additional big game licenses a year – was in the guiding and outfitting industry. The bill puts residents and nonresidents in the same pool to apply for the 10 percent of Big Game Draw licenses set aside for the outfitting industry. It also requires hunters to have a signed contract with a specific outfitter before applying for licenses in the outfitter set-aside. And it bans nonresident guides and outfitters from applying for the 10 percent set-aside. The commission approved the new regulations with little comment.

Two new private upland game shooting preserves near Roswell won approval on Thursday, though one of them raised some concerns about **potential problems with releasing captive birds where native populations exist**. There was no objection to Fenn Farm's plans to release pheasant and chukar on its 544 acres, located three miles east of Roswell. There are no native pheasant or chukar in the area, and Game and Fish Southeast Area Chief Leon Redman said neither the department nor the farm's neighbors had any problem with the proposal. But Riverview Ranch's plan to release pheasant, chukar and bobwhite quail drew sharp questions from Commissioner Rob Hoffman, an avid upland bird hunter himself. The Pecos River runs through the 430-acre ranch and Hoffman said he feared that released birds could breed with native pheasant and bobwhite. Department Director Jim Lane said that without strict standards on imported birds, disease was probably a bigger threat than genetic dilution. He also said New Mexico's bird importation regulations should be strengthened and said he planned to work with his staff to make stricter standards. The commission vote 5-1 to approve the Riverview Ranch proposal, with Hoffman opposed.

## Updates on San Juan work, possible legislation

Also Thursday, the commission heard updates on several issues including the San Juan River. Department staffer Marc Withington said work has started on habitat improvements in the Quality Waters Section below Navajo Dam. A sediment-trapping lagoon at Rex Smith Wash is about 90 percent complete, he said, while the contractor was just beginning work in The Braids that will dig holes in the bedrock and redirect water flows. **The \$300,000 project should provide better habitat for trout and improved fishing opportunity for anglers** when water levels in the San Juan decline. (Our Winter 2011 Outdoor Reporter has the full story on the San Juan improvement project. To read more, [click here.](#))

New Mexico hunters and anglers could have a **simpler system of licenses, stamps and permits** under a proposal the Department of Game and Fish hopes to bring before the Legislature in January. The license simplification bill is one of several measures the department presented to the commission on Thursday. It would eliminate the Habitat Management Stamp (\$5) and the Habitat Access and Management Validation (\$4) and tack both fees onto the cost of a general hunting or fishing license. Sportsmen would no longer have to purchase the stamps separately. A second bill would **pay vendors \$2** for every license they sell (up from \$1), although one vendor told the commission that even \$2 doesn't come close to covering his costs. A third bill would allow the department to issue **refunds on big game hunting licenses if a natural disaster**, such as the Las Conchas Fire, prohibited hunting in an area. In light of the commission's decision to remove desert bighorn from the endangered species list, a fourth bill would **authorize the commission to issue two additional bighorn sheep enhancement licenses**, one auction and one raffle. Gov. Susana Martinez must approve all agency bills before they are submitted to the Legislature.

The Farmington meeting was the **first with Jim Lane sitting at the head table** as Director of the Department of Game and Fish. Lane has been the department's Director of Wildlife Management since May 2009 and has attended virtually every commission meeting since then, but this was his first as director. **Darrel Weybright** is acting director of the Wildlife Management Division. The Farmington meeting was the last for department Legal Counsel **Jim Karp**, who is retiring.

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