



## Sportsman's News Roundup

Jan. 5, 2011

### Commission appointments yet to be announced

Gov. Susana Martinez has a full plate in front of her, including a legislative session that begins Jan. 18 and a budget deficit as much as \$400 million to fill, so it's no surprise that she hasn't announced plans for appointments to the State Game Commission. While hunters and anglers who pick up the tab for wildlife management are eager to see change on the Game Commission, sportsmen aren't looking for a rush job, but rather to see a new approach to the appointment process that helps restore the trust of everyday hunters and anglers.

**Past governors have largely ignored sportsmen's interests** by appointing major political donors or big landowners with a personal financial stake in Game Commission decisions to fill the five sportsman seats on the commission. In a recent report, NMWF outlined two recommendations to help restore the public's trust in the State Game Commission and the Department of Game and Fish:

- 1) Appoint hunters and anglers **without personal financial interests** or a history of large political donations to fill the five regional sportsman seats on the commission;
- 2) Ask the commission to conduct an **open hiring process** when it selects a new director for the Department of Game and Fish.

**By law the Game Commission hires and fires** the director of Game and Fish, but that doesn't mean past governors have honored the law when hiring new directors. Former Gov. Bill Richardson announced the hiring of current Director Tod Stevenson without asking or even informing the Game Commission, according to three commission members at the time.

Dutch Salmon, who was vice chairman in late 2008 when then-Director Bruce Thompson transferred to another post, said **the commission never had a say** in the decision to bring Stevenson out of retirement and hire him as director. "Nobody asked me about it," Salmon said. "There was no search, no array of candidates we could choose from. His was the only name on the list" when the commission was asked to approve Stevenson's hire at its Dec. 4, 2008, meeting in Deming—weeks after Richardson announced that Stevenson was the new director.

Then-Commissioner Oscar Simpson echoed Salmon's recollection. "There was no decision, no discussion; I just heard about it after the fact," when the governor's office issued a press release saying that Stevenson had been named as Thompson's replacement, he said. "It's the commission's job to hire and fire the director. **There should have been a national search.**"

Similarly, Commissioner Sandy Buffett said she remembers a press release from Richardson's office naming Stevenson as the new director, followed by a second release saying that he was interim director, then a third press release saying he was director. "There was no search," she said.

In many states, including Arizona, Wyoming and Alaska, the game commission is required by law to give the governor a list of nominees for the department director and the governor makes the decision. In other states, like New Mexico, Washington and Oregon, the game commission itself hires the director. But in either case, when a search is done right it is standard practice that finalists' names and qualifications are made public. **Sportsmen have a right to know who is under consideration for the top wildlife job in their state.** States as diverse as Arizona, Wyoming and Arkansas have hired directors recently and announced the names of finalists to the public and the press. In some instances the best candidate came from within the agency, in others from outside, but this basic transparency ensures that the public has faith that the choice of a new agency leader was not a backroom decision.

Martinez, who wants to make state government open and transparent, could create a legacy with sportsmen by establishing a new system for making State Game Commission appointments. The most important thing she could do is **reject the pay-to-play system** that past governors have employed, and rather than fill the five regional sportsman seats with political donors or large landowners with a financial stake in decisions, instead appoint everyday sportsmen with no personal financial interests to those seats. (The seven-member Commission already has two statewide slots for special interests.) [Click here](#) to read our special report on pay-to-play appointments to the State Game Commission, "**A Blueprint for Restoring New Mexico Sportsmen's Trust.**"

Sportsmen are encouraged to contact Martinez and respectfully ask her to **set a new bar and begin to restore the trust of sportsmen by ensuring that an open and transparent search is held** for a new director of the Department of Game and Fish, and to ensure that everyday New Mexico hunters and anglers – not special interests or big donors – are appointed to the five public seats on the Game Commission. [Click here](#) for her contact information.

### New plan out for Gila motorized travel

The Gila National Forest **responded to sportsmen's comments and concerns** voiced last fall and has developed a new preferred alternative for its motorized travel plan. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement released recently lays out six alternatives, ranging from the status quo to substantial changes in where motorized vehicles can be used. The Forest Service's preferred option, Alternative G, falls near the middle. It would reduce redundant routes and the total mileage of open roads in the forest to about 3,300 miles, but allows the network of ATV-width trails to expand.

The preferred option also shows the Forest Service has **listened to hunters on the issue of off-road motorized game retrieval.** Alternative G would not allow unlimited motorized retrieval, but would instead permit game retrieval up to 300 feet on either side of the road in areas where motorized dispersed camping or woodcutting is allowed. This follows the recommendation of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and a majority of sportsmen's comments.

[Click here](#) to read more about the alternatives, or plan to attend one of four open houses to learn more. Forest Service personnel will be on hand to answer questions. Open houses are scheduled for:

- **Thursday, Jan. 13,** 3-7 p.m., Sierra County Fair Building, Truth or Consequences
- **Saturday, Jan. 15,** 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Grant County Convention Center, Silver City
- **Thursday, Jan. 20,** 3-7 p.m., Catron County Fairgrounds, Reserve
- **Saturday, Jan. 29,** 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Hotel Encanto, Las Cruces

### In the news

**The Whites Peak land trade got slammed** in a new report by the State Auditor's Office. After a two-year investigation into dozens of land transactions conducted by then-Land Commissioner Pat Lyons, the audit report found irregularities in the Whites Peak land appraisals that may have undervalued the state land traded to rancher David Stanley. NMWF has contended the swap was bad for sportsmen, with a net loss of nearly 3,900 of valuable hunting area. Even worse, the Department of Game and Fish agreed to give Stanley more than 40 elk license authorizations out of the Big Game Draw, despite the fact that the land swap was challenged by the Attorney General's Office. The state Supreme Court is still considering the legal challenge to the Stanley trade and three others proposed in the White Peak area. [Click here](#) to read the Raton Range newspaper story on the new audit report.

**Fishing eventually could improve on the upper Rio Grande and the Red River** as the long-brewing plan to clean up the Molycorp Superfund site near Questa takes shape. After several years of consideration, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last month announced its final decision on what needs to be cleaned up. Chevron Mining Inc. will pay for the effort, which the EPA says could cost up to \$800 million. The plan calls for excavating millions of tons of contaminated soil and waste, intercepting water that is draining from waste piles and treating ground water, which runs off into the Red River and then the Rio Grande. The EPA and Chevron are now in negotiations over how and when to conduct the work. Chevron will continue to mine ore at the site after the work begins.

### Las Cruces sportsman honored



**Jim Bates, a longtime Las Cruces hunter and angler,** was honored by the National Wildlife Federation for his conservation efforts at a well-attended meeting of Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen in November. Bates has been involved in sportsmen's issues for years. He is the state chapter president for the National Wild Turkey Federation and chairman of the Mesilla Valley Longbeards chapter, a member and former chairman of Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen, a director and former president of both the Dona Ana County Associated Sportsmen and the Wild Turkey Sportsmen's Association, and an active member of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, Ducks Unlimited and New Mexico Quail Inc. John Gale, representing NWF, told the audience Bates was chosen "as a result of his life-long dedication and contributions to the many conservation and sportsmen's groups in this community and state. He has worked passionately on behalf of New Mexico's resident sportsmen and women, improving wildlife habitat and helping to promote more hunting opportunities for resident hunters."

*Jim Bates (above left) along with NMWF field organizer John Cornell and NWF Regional Representative John Gale share a moment after Bates was given the NWF Conservation Award.*

### Time to plan 2011 big game hunts

Hunters can pick up a copy of the 2011-12 Big Game and Trapper Rules and Information Booklet at sporting goods stores and Department of Game and Fish offices, or read it online at [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us). A few items to put on your calendar:

- Feb. 2 is the application deadline for oryx, bear WMA and turkey draw permits.
- March 28 is the deadline to apply for public land deer, elk, antelope, ibex, Barbary sheep, javelina and bighorn sheep draw licenses, as well as population management hunts except oryx.
- June 8 is the day drawing results will be announced.

In other news in this year's proclamation, draw license application fees have been reduced to \$8 for residents and \$20 for nonresidents, and legal shooting hours for big game species and turkey have been extended by 30 minutes, from a half-hour before sunrise to a half-hour after sunset.

### Corrections:

Las Cruces hunter and octogenarian Sanford Schemnitz shot his trophy mule deer in November, not October, as reported here last month.

Some versions of the NMWF report on how former Game Commission member Leo Sims steered the transplant of 61 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep to land his family owns and leases near Clayton incorrectly reported that Sims is an attorney. As stated in other versions of the report, Sims lists his occupations as rancher and the oil and gas industry.

The report also said that Sims contributed more than \$76,000 to Gov. Bill Richardson before and after he was named to the commission. Sims clarified those contributions at the Game Commission meeting last month in Clovis, saying his aunt and uncle who owned the ranch near where the bighorn sheep were transferred actually contributed \$50,000 of that amount through their corporation Leo V. Sims LLC. Sims has since taken over the ranch and signed a deal with ex-Land Commissioner Patrick Lyons that shuts the public out of the state land where the bighorn sheep were relocated for the next 50 years. To read the full report, [click here](#).

### New Mexico Conservation Calendar

**If your group has an upcoming event of interest to sportsmen,** post it on the New Mexico Conservation Calendar, a free service of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. E-mail the information to [nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org](mailto:nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org) or call (505) 299-5404.

### 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

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