



Sept. 30, 2009

Game Commission Report

Q/HD system headed for review; deer permits ditched

Slim public turnout for Thursday's meeting

The **State Game Commission met in Las Cruces** last Thursday in its second-to-last meeting of the year. As so often happens with Thursday meetings, only a handful of sportsmen were able to attend. Several sportsmen mentioned friends who **would have liked to attend but who can't take off work during the week**, and during the public comment period asked that as many Game Commission meetings as possible in 2010 be held on Saturdays.

Public access and transparency in the decision-making process are crucial. NMWF's Sportsman Survey of 750 New Mexico hunters and anglers earlier this year found that 68 percent said they would be more likely to attend meetings if the meetings were held on weekends. **You can make a difference by speaking up for Saturday meetings.** [Click here](#) to send the commissioners a quick e-mail saying who you are and that you support Saturday commission meetings so more of the public can attend and voice their opinions on decisions that affect wildlife and sportsmen in New Mexico.

You might also ask the commission to make it easier to contact them. Only three of the seven commission members – Sandy Buffet, Kent Salazar and Dutch Salmon – have posted their e-mail addresses on the commission's Web page. The Department of Game and Fish has a centralized e-mail address, ispa@state.nm.us, that anyone in the public can use to ask questions about hunting, fishing, birdwatching or anything else. Several sportsmen have suggested that the commission needs to ensure that all commissioners can get e-mail messages. **One possible solution is to post a single e-mail address on the commission's Web page that would distribute the same message to all seven commission members and the department administration.**

Q/HD rules on agenda for review in December

Probably the most far-reaching decision made Thursday was proposed by Chairman Jim McClintic. It called for a review of the controversial decision in December to require anyone who had drawn a Quality or High Demand license for deer or elk, or any antelope license, to sit out the draw for such hunts the following year.

The measure was approved in December 2008 with virtually no analysis or public comment. A NMWF survey found that about 36 percent sportsmen supported the concept as it exists, but several unforeseen problems have come to light since it was adopted. For example, it has since become clear that all transferable licenses, including unitwide licenses that can be used to hunt on public land during the same time as Q/HD hunts, are exempt from the restriction. **The net effect of this exemption of transferable licenses is to shift even more hunting opportunity toward those who can afford or have the personal connections to obtain transferable permits.** This strikes many sportsmen as unfair and against the intent of the rule. Also, many bowhunters have pointed out that many relatively easy-to-draw bowhunts for deer are designated as quality hunts.

The commission will decide whether to continue, modify or scrap the new rule in December — the last chance to change it before it is locked into the 2010 hunting proclamation. [Click here](#) to send your comments to the department, or [click here](#) for a list of the commissioners' public contact information.

Habitat Stamp Program looks to the next 10 years

New Mexico's popular Habitat Stamp Program is up for renewal and program manager Dale Hall gave an update to the Game Commission on the positive habitat impacts since its inception in 1991, as well as a synopsis of ideas for how to improve and change the program.

Several sportsmen spoke in favor of the measure, which uses a small fee from public land hunters and anglers to catalyze wildlife habitat improvement projects across the state. Suggestions for improvements to the program included a stronger focus on large, landscape-scale habitat projects and a greater focus on aquatic resources, since so much of the fund is brought in from fishing license buyers.

A final decision on whether to approve the program for another 10 years will come before the commission in 2011. We'll keep you posted when a decision date is set.

Commission changes 6A/6C unit boundaries

The commission approved changes to the northwest boundary of Game Management Units 6A and 6C. The change is largely an effort to alleviate concerns about declining elk herd quality and quantity in 6C.

Department staff produced an analysis outlining the pros and cons of the boundary change, and recommended "no action" on the issue. After weighing the options, however, the commission went against the department's recommendation and adopted the proposal. [Click here](#) to read the proposal and see the boundary change map.

Regardless of where you stand on the boundary change, **the process marked an important step toward a more transparent decision-making process.** The department should be commended for providing pros and cons on the proposal, rather than simply presenting the commission's preferred option with no background documentation.

Deer draw deadline will stay the same

Ever since public land deer hunting in New Mexico became managed by a statewide draw, **hunters have been struggling with a confusing system of licensing that was different from draw hunts for other species.** Unlike for elk or antelope, a deer hunter needed both a permit and a license. Furthermore, the deer drawing was held after the new license year began, so hunters who wanted the lower-price combination deer/fishing license had to make that decision before knowing whether they received a deer license.

No more. On Thursday, **the commission approved a plan that eliminates the need for a separate permit.** Only a license will be required in the future. The deer application deadline remains in April, but resident hunters who apply online can now buy discount licenses, such as hunting/fishing, as well as a Habitat Stamp and other validations, without fear of losing any money. Hunters who apply online but do not win a deer license in the statewide draw will receive a refund for the deer portion of their license fees. [Click here](#) to read the details.

G.A.I.N. program modified

The commission implemented department recommendations to **modify the relatively new Gaining Access Into Nature program**, which set fees for nonconsumptive uses of state Wildlife Management Areas such as hiking, biking and birdwatching. The changes approved Thursday did away with relatively expensive activities such as department-guided elk bugling tours that were not paying for themselves with the new license fees. **The changes also allow a valid hunting or fishing license to count as a permit for other allowed uses**, such as birdwatching or hiking. Another change will require just one permit per vehicle, so that, for example, a family of four in the same vehicle will not need separate permits to hike on a wildlife management area. To view a list of Wildlife Management Areas owned by the State Game Commission and funded overwhelmingly with sportsmen's dollars, [click here](#).

The next commission meeting is set for Dec. 3 in Hobbs. If you're able to attend or would like more information about the meeting, contact us at (505) 299-5404 or at nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org.

Also, [send us your thoughts](#) on any matters related to hunting, fishing and wildlife. If you're not already a NMWF supporter, [consider making a donation](#) so services like this Game Commission Report can continue.

Not too late to fill out our hunter survey

If you haven't filled out the Sportsman Survey to give us your opinion on how to improve hunting opportunities for youth, go to www.nmwildlife.org. The survey closes Friday, Oct. 2.

Jeremy Vesbach
Executive Director

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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