



## Sportsman's News Roundup

Sept. 29, 2010

### Department changes to antelope proposal even worse for sportsmen

After postponing the State Game Commission's September meeting by a month, **many sportsmen hoped the Department of Game and Fish leadership would use the extra time to make positive changes** to its proposals for allocating antelope licenses. The department's largely privatized system of license distribution has resulted in half or more of pronghorn licenses going to nonresidents each year. Thousands of New Mexico sportsmen have asked for improvements that treat New Mexico resident hunters as well as those of other western states.

Unfortunately, the department has decided to present just one option to the commission for a final vote and it made several negative changes to that option. At heart, the problem is that **the department's leadership has refused to heed the cry from sportsmen for a more fair system and failed to acknowledge public ownership of wildlife.**

The Department still has not explained how New Mexico resident hunters would be affected by the proposed revisions to the Antelope Private Land Use System, or A-PLUS. The proposal is scheduled to be voted on Thursday, Oct. 28, when the Game Commission meets near Ruidoso. The proposal itself is posted on the department's website ([click here](#) to read it), but **there is no explanation of how it would affect your chances of drawing an antelope license** in the Big Game Draw. Of the details that are available, the "new" A-PLUS offers almost no improvement over the status quo — and in fact takes several steps backward.

The highlight of Option 1 is that it creates a small straight draw for younger hunters and adds about 170 antelope permits for youths to the Big Game Draw. This is a positive step for youths, who now have very low odds for antelope hunts. Unfortunately, these hunts appear to be created by eliminating promised increases in hunting opportunity for all draw hunters rather than reducing the percentage of transferable authorizations.

### Negative change: Transferable authorizations would become unit-wide

The proposal says **all transferable authorizations can be used unit-wide after the first day of the hunt.** Draw hunters would be able to go anywhere in a unit after the first day, as well. But by making transferable authorizations unit-wide, even a landowner who allows no draw hunters on his land will receive authorizations that are good on public land after the first day. Similarly, landowners with few antelope on their land in the past can pressure the department for license authorizations, then sell them because the tags will be good on public land later in the hunt.



### Antelope hunters could be cited for accessing public land via public road

**The proposal also could create nightmares for hunters over public access roads.** Option 1 says draw hunt licenses are good only on "accessible public land." That may not sound like a big problem, but it is language that changes the state's trespass rules for antelope only and will put the burden of proof on sportsmen to prove they reached a parcel of public land by public road. Imagine you have been using a road for years to access a big parcel of public land, and suddenly a landowner whose land the road passes through says he thinks it is a private road and that you no longer have permission to use it. If the conservation officer sides with the landowner's interpretation, you could be cited and branded a poacher for using a public road. In order to clear your name you would have to go to court and prove the road was indeed a public road. Cases like this typically land on the side of the public, but can take thousands of dollars and years to adjudicate.

### Encourage commissioners to reject this proposal

Thousands of New Mexico sportsmen wrote letters and signed petitions in recent months calling for a substantial increase in antelope hunting opportunity, and specifically supporting Option 3A — putting all antelope licenses in the Big Game Draw and allowing hunters to negotiate with landowners for access to their property. Option 3A would also allow landowners to determine hunting levels on their own land with minimal interference. Department officials this summer said the straight draw option would remain on the table until the Game Commission votes. But apparently the department leadership has decided against that and pulled Option 3A off the table. **It is disappointing that the directorate continues to ignore the principles of the North American Model of Wildlife Management that wildlife belong to the public and that while landowners have a right to control access to their land, no one has an expectation or right to control access to hunting licenses.**

The State Game Commission still has the last word in this matter, and it is scheduled to vote on A-PLUS at its Oct. 28 meeting at the Inn of the Mountain Gods, south of Ruidoso ([click here](#) for the agenda and other details of the meeting). Sportsmen who support the fair and equitable distribution of antelope hunting opportunity should **ask their regional Game Commission member to "just say no" to the department's A-PLUS proposal.** The commission nixed the department's 2008 A-PLUS proposal and it should do the same on Oct. 28. Commissioners should instruct the department directorate to scrap the costly, inequitable and unfair system of transferable authorizations and instead distribute antelope licenses through the Big Game Draw. That system works in other western states; the commission should demand no less for New Mexico, or else get the department leadership to explain why it is working so hard to maintain the current system.

### State Game Commission contact information

Bernalillo County: Tom Arvas, [tomarvas@hotmail.com](mailto:tomarvas@hotmail.com)  
NE New Mexico: Sandy Buffett, [sandyNMGC@gmail.com](mailto:sandyNMGC@gmail.com)  
SW New Mexico: M.H. "Dutch" Salmon, [dutch@high-lonesomebooks.com](mailto:dutch@high-lonesomebooks.com)  
SE New Mexico: Gary Fonay, [GWFonay@aol.com](mailto:GWFonay@aol.com)  
NW New Mexico: Kent Salazar, [kentsala@aol.com](mailto:kentsala@aol.com)  
At-large: Chairman Jim McClintic, [jmsconst@comcast.net](mailto:jmsconst@comcast.net)  
At-large: Thomas "Dick" Salopek, [DickSalopek@hotmail.com](mailto:DickSalopek@hotmail.com)

### Sound off on Santa Fe Forest off-road vehicle plan

Outdoors enthusiasts still have time to submit comments to Santa Fe National Forest on its proposal to manage motorized travel. The U.S. Forest Service is required to designate a system of roads, trails and areas for motorized use. Five proposals for the Santa Fe forest are under discussion in this draft stage of the process, ranging from status quo to restrictions on the total area and mileage of motorized trails in the forest ([click here](#) to read more and to comment). **Many hunters are supporting proposals that reduce the amount of motorized trails in hopes of seeing big game return and hunting improve.** For more information about how the plans could affect hunting in Santa Fe National Forest, sportsmen can contact Garrett VeneKlasen at [interangler@newmexico.com](mailto:interangler@newmexico.com) or (575) 770-6103. Written comments on the travel management plan should be e-mailed to [sfravelmgt@fs.fed.us](mailto:sfravelmgt@fs.fed.us) by 4:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 1. That's the official deadline, but don't hesitate to write afterward as agencies typically accept comments throughout the entire scoping process.

### Habitat Stamp Program looking for sportsmen's input

Sportsmen also are being asked to comment on New Mexico's Habitat Stamp Program. The program, which sportsmen fund through their purchase of a \$5 Habitat Stamp, was recently renewed by the State Game Commission for another 10 years, but program managers want to start taking a broader, landscape-scale approach to habitat improvement projects. Public meetings to discuss the program have been held in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, but more are scheduled. All are from 6 to 8 p.m. at the following locations:

- Deming — Monday, Oct. 4, Mimbres Valley Learning Center, 2300 E Pine St.
- Roswell — Tuesday, Oct. 5, Bureau of Land Management office, 2909 W. Second St.
- Farmington — Tuesday, Oct. 19, Bureau of Land Management office, 1235 La Plata Highway

### Desert bighorn sheep delisting up for discussion

If you have questions or concerns about the Department of Game and Fish recommendation to delist desert bighorn sheep from the state threatened and endangered species list, you can speak up at public hearings later this month in southern New Mexico. Hearings are set for:

- Truth or Consequences — 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 12, in the Civic Center Chambers, 400 W 4<sup>th</sup> St.
- Las Cruces — 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 13, at the Department office, 2715 Northrise Drive
- Lordsburg — 6 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 14, in the Hidalgo Complex, 524 DeMoss St.

Desert bighorn were listed as a state endangered species in 1980 when their population was estimated at fewer than 70 animals. Through management efforts including a cougar removal plan, the population has grown to some 600. For more information on the desert bighorn plan, [click here](#).

### Land and Water Conservation Fund still needs Senate approval

The U.S. Senate's gridlock has prevented — so far, at least — action on what should be an **easy, bipartisan solution to some of the nation's most pressing wildlife and outdoor recreation concerns.** The Senate still has not followed action by the House of Representatives to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a 40-year-old program that supports a wide range of projects, from protecting critical wildlife habitat to building municipal parks to making improvements in national forests. The LWCF is authorized to receive up to \$900 million a year in federal offshore oil revenues but Congress usually diverts a portion of those revenues. Earlier this year the House voted to fully fund LWCF, and while New Mexico Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall support the idea, Senate gridlock has prevented the measure from coming to a vote. Hopefully Bingaman and Udall can convince their colleagues that full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund is in the best interests of the nation and to bring it up for a vote this year.



### 'Protected Land, Protected Economy' forum a success

Otero Mesa is another of New Mexico's public land treasures, with healthy herds of pronghorn antelope and a huge reservoir of potential drinking water deep beneath it. But some in Otero County raised concerns last spring when the Department of Interior said it was considering some sort of protection for the region. New Mexico Wildlife Federation recently hosted a forum in Alamogordo focusing on the positive aspects of protected public lands that brought together about 100 people and showed how protected land strengthens a region's economy.

State Sen. Steve Fischmann of Las Cruces, the keynote speaker and a participant in efforts to establish the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness, urged the audience to keep an open mind about land protection efforts. He said **Dona Ana County residents on all sides of the wilderness idea worked together to find workable solutions to their concerns,** benefiting all. Others at the forum talked about the economic value of protected lands and how communities elsewhere have benefited from them, despite earlier misgivings. Forum organizer John Cornell called the event a success. "The New Mexico Wildlife Federation and our coalition

members made a commitment to the elected officials and residents of Otero County that there would be open public meetings where all the facts are presented and the whole community could be included, regardless of what side of the issue they are on. This was the first step in that commitment and we hope to have more," he said.

### NMWF seeks your input, too

**Please take a moment to fill out a brief online survey regarding NMWF publications.** Your answers will help us do a better job protecting New Mexico's outdoor way of life. [Click here](#) to take the survey — it should only take a few minutes to complete.

### Add your events to NM Conservation Calendar

Does your organization have an archery shoot, gun show, annual banquet or other event coming up? Let everyone know by posting your events on the New Mexico Conservation Calendar, a free service of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. Send your information to [nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org](mailto:nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org) or call us at (505) 299-5404.

### And finally

**If you appreciate receiving these monthly news updates, please share them 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 donation to NMWF.** With sportsmen like you, we can continue to make a difference. [Click here to donate now.](#)

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#### 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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New Mexico Wildlife Federation | 121 Cardenas Drive NE | Albuquerque | NM | 87108