

STATE WILDLIFE COMMISSION MEETING AND RULE MAKING NOTICE

The New Mexico State Wildlife Commission (“Commission”) will be hosting a meeting and rule hearing on Friday, August 21, 2026 beginning at 9:00 a.m. at New Mexico Highlands University Student Center, 800 National Ave., Las Vegas, NM 87701. Please check the Department’s website for any updates at <https://wildlife.dgf.nm.gov/commission/meeting-agendas/>. The purpose of this meeting is to hear and consider action as appropriate on the proposed changes to the: 1) Bighorn Sheep Rule; 2) Pronghorn Antelope Rule; 3) Deer Rule; and 4) Elk Rule.

Synopsis:

Bighorn Sheep Rule

The proposal is to amend the Bighorn Sheep Rule 19.31.17 NMAC which will become effective April 1, 2027. The most recent version of the rule will expire on March 31, 2027. Proposed changes include:

1) The Department reestablished a population of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in the Manzano mountains (Game Management Units [GMUs] 14 and 18) in the late 1970s. GMUs 14 and 18 have been included in the Bighorn Rule in the past however, new GPS collar data indicates this population primarily occupies private property year-round. To provide a mechanism for authorizing Rocky Mountain bighorn hunting in GMUs 14 and 18, the Department recommends adding these units as “open GMUs or areas” under the private land provisions of the rule. This change would allow for private land hunting opportunities, with dates jointly established for license years 2027-2028 through 2030-2031. The Department has a hunting agreement where 50% of the licenses would be allocated through the public draw and 50% would be provided to the participating landowner.

a. The Department will establish two hunt periods for the Manzanos: October 1-15 (Period 1) and October 16-30 (Period 2). We anticipate the first hunt being in 2027. The first hunter on the Manzanos will be a public draw hunter.

b. The Department will increase the bag limit for Rocky Mountain ram tags to better reflect bighorn abundance across a greater number GMUs, including the Manzanos.

2) The Department reestablished a population of desert bighorn sheep in the Sacramento mountains (GMU 34) in 2018. The initial reintroduction and subsequent translocations have resulted in older age class rams available for harvest. The Department will open GMU 34 with one hunt period: December 1-15.

3) In response to public comments, the Department will shift the hunt periods for the Little Hatchets and Big Hatchets desert bighorn hunts from September and October, to December. Both hunt areas would have two concurrent hunt periods from December 1-15 and December 16-30.

4)) The Department will make adjustments to season dates in some areas. For example, if a hunt normally starts on a Saturday, this date shift would be maintained throughout the rule so the hunts continue to start on Saturday or adjusting to calendar starts for consistency.

5) Require the purchase of a license at least one day prior to hunting.

Pronghorn Antelope Rule

The proposal is to amend the Pronghorn Antelope Rule 19.31.15 NMAC which will become effective April 1, 2027. The most recent version of the rule will expire on March 31, 2027. Proposed changes include:

1) Require the purchase of a license at least one day prior to hunting. For hunts where published season dates are less than 6 days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.

2) Implement a ranch registration process for purchase of private land OTC pronghorn licenses, similar to the current registration process used for private land elk licenses in Secondary management zones.

3) Implement a cap on private land OTC licenses and consider a more even distribution in hunts, similar to the public draw. If license distribution within a GMU is disproportionately skewed toward a particular hunt due to private land sales patterns, licenses will be redistributed to reduce that skew, though not necessarily distributed equally across all hunts. See table in Appendix 1 for details.

4) Shift GMU 4/50/52 rifle hunt to muzzleloader hunt

5) Adjust season dates where necessary. For example, shifting start dates to maintain hunts beginning on Saturday or adjusting calendar day starts for consistency.

6) Based on discussions with McGregor and White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) staff, we recommended the following:

- a. McGregor: Decrease from 2 hunts of 7 licenses down to 2 hunts of 2 licenses
- b. WSMR: Decrease from 1 hunt of 5 down to 1 hunt of 3, and adjusting the bag limit from

ES to MB

7) Include GMU 48 alongside GMU 47 to allow hunters to access both GMUs during their draw hunt. Licenses will remain the same.

8) Similar to bighorn sheep and ibex, shift all F-IM license numbers to be “up to,” allowing the Department to adjust draw licenses up or down depending on population surveys.

9) Decrease license numbers in GMUs 41, 47, 56, 57, 58, and 59 to match current hunting levels. Specifically, the 20% license reduction implemented in 2025 will be retained as the baseline for the 2027-2030 seasons, rather than reverting to pre-2025 license numbers.

10) Public draw hunt license numbers will remain unchanged from the 2023-2026 rule cycle, except those outlined in point 9 above.

11) Shift season dates in SW later to address a later breeding and fawning period, with hunts beginning mid-September.

Deer Rule

The proposal is to amend the Deer Rule 19.31.13 NMAC which will become effective April 1, 2027. The most recent version of the rule will expire on March 31, 2027. Proposed changes include:

Northwest

- 1) Reduce deer licenses in GMU 2B based on input received during current rule cycle.
- 2) In addition to general license reductions in GMU 2B, based on input received during the current rule cycle, the Department analyzed the total number of license reductions required to move GMU 2B to a Quality Hunt unit. Moving GMU 2B to a Quality Hunt unit would require a reduction of 885 deer licenses across public and private land (see table 1 below).
- 3) Create new rifle hunt code in GMU 51A to spread out pressure. The overall license numbers will remain the same.
- 4) Create a public muzzleloader deer hunt on Wildlife Management Areas in GMU 4 to coincide with the private land hunt (10 licenses).

Southwest

- 1) Structure the January hunt on White Sands Missile Range (GMU 19 WSMR only) as a youth hunt.
- 2) Create a December rifle hunt for Coues white-tailed deer in GMUs 16 and 22 (20 licenses in each GMU) to be consistent with Coues white-tailed deer hunts in the southwest.
- 3) GMU 23 and 24 archery hunters who do not harvest an FAD, will no longer be permitted to hunt the Silver City Management Area antlerless hunt. A new hunt code will be created for the Silver City Management Area antlerless archery hunt (50 public licenses and 20 private licenses).
- 4) Change youth rifle hunts in GMUs 13 and 17 to youth muzzleloader hunts to match elk weapon type for the same time and increase licenses for muzzleloader hunts in these units.
- 5) No longer include Fort Bayard as a special management area. Hunters drawing a tag for GMU 24 can hunt any legally accessible land in GMU 24, including Fort Bayard management area.
- 6) Create a public rifle hunt for Mimbres River WMA in GMU 24 (5 licenses).

Southeast

- 1) Remove the REG antlerless hunt in GMU 32 Roswell and Fort Sumner Hunt Areas. Keep Youth Only antlerless hunt (15 public and 20 private licenses).
- 2) Remove the antlerless hunt on the Huey WMA; change the ES hunt to FAD bag limit.
- 3) Significantly reduce licenses in GMUs 29 (-120), 30 (-525), and 34 (-100).

Northeast

Adjust license numbers to meet management strategies and reflect changes in deer herd dynamics (see table 2 below).

General Statewide Proposed Changes

- 1) Adjust license numbers to meet management strategies and reflect changes in deer herd dynamics (Table 2).

- 2) Adjust season dates (Table 2).
 - a. Adjust season dates to ensure harvest is biologically sustainable.
 - b. Shift start dates to maintain hunts beginning on Saturday or adjusting to maintain consistent hunt structure.
 - c. When possible, adjust season dates for hunt structure consistency across the state.
 - d. Adjust season dates to avoid overlapping hunts with mixed-weapon types.
- 3) Designate the premium statewide deer hunt as a Quality Hunt.
- 4) Require the purchase of a license at least a day prior to the start of the hunt. For hunts where published season dates are less than 6 days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.
- 5) Require a “ranch registration” process for OTC private-land deer licenses, similar to the current registration process used for private land elk hunting in Secondary Management Zones.
- 6) Implement a cap on private-land only OTC deer licenses for each GMU. If license distribution within a GMU is disproportionately skewed toward a particular hunt due to private land sales patterns, licenses will be redistributed to reduce that skew, though not necessarily distributed equally across all hunts (Table 3).

Elk Rule

The proposal is to amend the Elk Rule 19.31.14 NMAC which will become effective April 1, 2027. The most recent version of the rule will expire on March 31, 2027. Proposed changes include:

General Statewide Proposed Changes

- 1) Adjust season dates where necessary
 - a. Shifting start dates to maintain hunts beginning on Saturday or adjusting to calendar day starts for consistency.
 - b. Evaluate season dates for hunt structure consistency across the state.
 - c. Evaluate season dates to ensure harvest is biologically sustainable.
- 2) Consider aligning most primary management zone hunts to have a muzzleloader hunt first, followed by any-legal-weapon hunts. Early October hunts shift to muzzleloader to address increased male susceptibility to harvest.
- 3) Adjust some hunts to minimize overlap of weapons used for species hunted.
- 4) Adjust draw license numbers based on biological data and management goals.
 - a. Possible reductions in the following herd units: Greater Gila, Jemez (A), Valle Vidal (A).
 - b. Possible slight increases in the San Juan, Northcentral, Sacramento, and Ruidoso herd units.
 - c. Consider establishing elk hunts in GMU 32 to address an increasing elk population in the area.
- 5) Designate the premium statewide elk hunt (currently ELK-1-700) as a Quality hunt.
- 6) Require the purchase of a license at least one day prior to hunting. For hunts where published season dates are less than 6 days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.
- 7) Possible adjustment of management zone boundaries.
- 8) Re-assess public/private land split due to land ownership changes over the last 4 years.

Specific Proposed Changes

Youth Encouragement

- 1) Eliminate all Youth Encouragement hunts within the Greater Gila elk herd unit (GMUs 15, 16A, 16C, 16D, 16E) to reduce harvest pressure on adult females. Population indices suggest these elk herds are declining as a result of low calf recruitment and high adult female mortality, further intensified by drought conditions. A portion of these licenses will be redistributed to other Youth Encouragement hunts throughout the state.
- 2) Create two new Youth Encouragement hunts of 75 licenses each within GMU 2 to increase harvest pressure on adult females and increase youth opportunity.
- 3) Increase Youth Encouragement hunt licenses within GMUs 34 and 36 to increase harvest pressure on adult females within increasing elk populations in the Sacramento mountains.
- 4) Increase Youth Encouragement hunt licenses within GMU 51.

Northwest Region

- 1) Increase antlerless ('A') licenses within December Youth Only (YO) and December 2C only rifle hunts.
- 2) Change early October Mature Bull ('MB') licenses from any legal weapon to muzzleloader hunts in GMU 5A (10 licenses).

North Central Region

- 1) Create a muzzleloader hunt within the Sargent WMA to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB/A', 10 licenses.
- 2) Create a muzzleloader hunt within the Humphries/Rio Chama WMAs to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB/A', 10 licenses.
- 3) Create a muzzleloader hunt within GMU 5B to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB', 56 licenses.
- 4) Redistribute 37 December 'MB' rifle licenses to the muzzleloader hunt in GMU 5B. Muzzleloader hunts typically have lower success rates; thus, these licenses are redistributed at a ratio of 1:1.5
- 5) Create a muzzleloader hunt within GMU 50 to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB', 65 licenses.
- 6) Redistribute 45 late October and early November 'MB' rifle licenses to new muzzleloader hunt in GMU 50 at a ratio of 1:1.5
- 7) Create a muzzleloader hunt within GMU 51 to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be Either-Sex ('ES'), 145 licenses. All licenses for this hunt were redistributed from the existing December muzzleloader hunt in GMU 51.
- 8) Increase 'A' licenses within GMU 51 for both mid and late November hunts from 251 to 265 licenses.

Southwest Region

- 1) Create a muzzleloader hunt within GMU 12 to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB', 35 licenses.
- 2) Create a muzzleloader hunt within GMUs 16A, 16B/22, 16C, and 16D to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB', 35 licenses for each GMU. Although overall 'MB' licenses will increase slightly within the Greater Gila elk herd, anticipated harvest should be stable or slightly decrease as muzzleloader hunters, on average, have lower success rates. Additionally, pushing rifle 'MB' hunts later in the season will decrease bull susceptibility to harvest during rut.
- 3) Redistribute 15 'MB' rifle licenses from GMU 16A to new muzzleloader hunt at a 1:1.5 ratio.
- 4) Reduce 'A' rifle licenses within GMU 16A, 16C, 16D, and 16E by 27-30% and shift cow hunts earlier in the season to reduce adult female mortality in the Greater Gila elk herd unit.
- 5) Create a muzzleloader hunt within GMU 21A to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB', 15 licenses.

Southeast Region

Increase 'A' licenses within both late season (Jan/Feb) cow hunts within GMU 34 from 200 to 230 licenses to increase harvest on adult females in an increasing elk herd unit.

Northeast Region

- 1) Create a muzzleloader hunt within GMU 49 to begin after archery and before rifle hunt seasons. Bag limit shall be 'MB', 20 licenses.
- 2) Redistribute 'MB' a total of 13 October rifle licenses to new muzzleloader hunt in GMU 49 at a ratio of 1:1.5.

Secondary Management Zones

- 1) Create new 'A' late-season rifle hunt in GMUs 29/30 to address increased population within these units (20 licenses).
- 2) Create two new 'ES' rifle hunts within GMU 32 as elk have moved into this region and become more resident than seasonal (30 licenses total).
- 3) Create 2 new 'ES' bow hunts with 20 licenses each in GMU 38 as this elk population is becoming more established.

Special Management Zones

Reduce 'A' licenses by 17% within the Valle Vidal (GMU 55A) to reduce adult female mortality.

A full text of changes for all rules will be available on the Department's website at: <https://wildlife.dgf.nm.gov/>. Interested persons may submit comments on the proposed changes as follows: Bighorn Sheep Rule to DGF-waterfowl@state.nm.us; Pronghorn Antelope Rule to DGF-Exotics-Rule@dgf.nm.gov; Deer Rule to DGF-Deer-Rule@dgf.nm.gov; and Elk Rule to DGF-Deer-Rule@dgf.nm.gov. Individuals may also submit written comments to the physical address below. Comments are due by 1:00 p.m. on August 18, 2026. The final proposed rules will be voted on by the Commission during a public meeting on August 21, 2026. Interested persons may also provide data, views or arguments, orally or in writing, at the public rule hearings to be held on August 21, 2026.

Full copies of text of the proposed new rules, technical information related to proposed rule changes, and the agenda can be obtained from the Office of the Director, New Mexico Department of Wildlife, 1 Wildlife Way, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87507, or from the Department's website at <https://wildlife.dgf.nm.gov/commission/proposals-under-consideration/>. This agenda is subject to change up to 72 hours prior to the meeting. Please contact the Director's Office at (505) 476-8000, or the Department's website at <https://wildlife.dgf.nm.gov/> for updated information.

If you are an individual with a disability who is in need of a reader, amplifier, qualified sign language interpreter, or any other form of auxiliary aid or service to attend or participate in the hearing or meeting, please contact the Department at (505) 476-8000 at least one week prior to the meeting or as soon as possible. Public documents, including the agenda and minutes, can be provided in various accessible formats. Please contact the Department at 505-476-8000 if a summary or other type of accessible format is needed.

Legal authority for this rulemaking can be found in the General Powers and Duties of the State Game Commission 17-1-14, et seq. NMSA 1978; Commission's Power to establish rules and regulations 17-1-26, et seq. NMSA 1978.