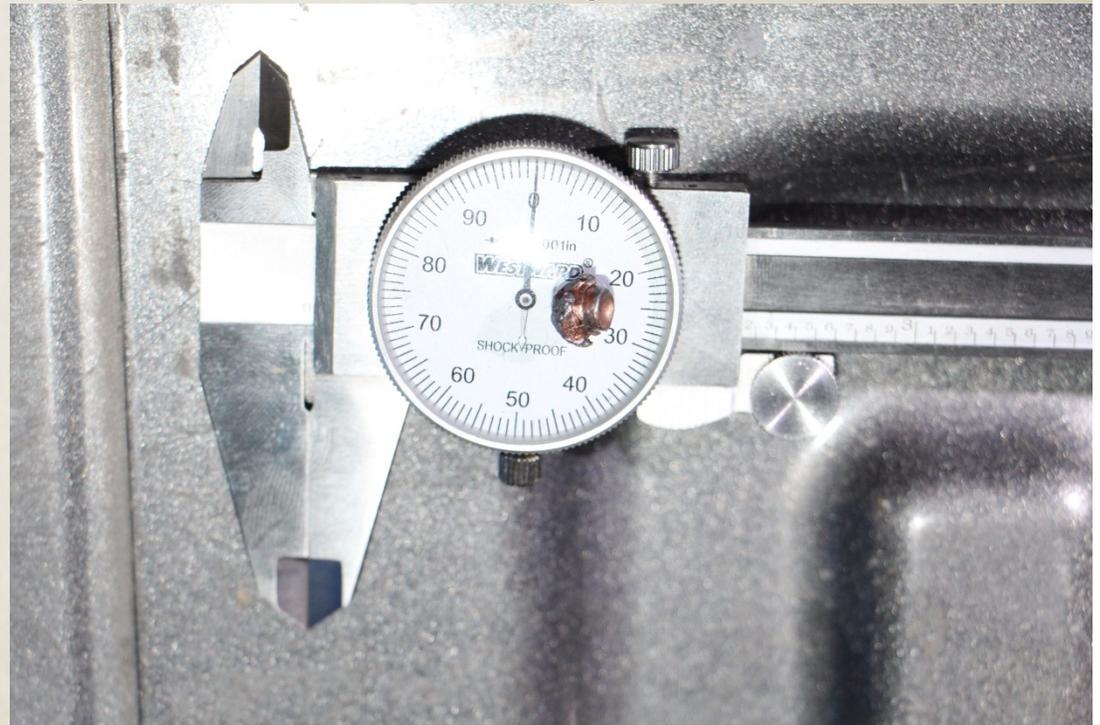


# Agenda Item 13: OPERATION GAME THIEF



# HOW OGT WORKS

- Operation Game Thief reports are taken one of two ways:
  - Toll free 24 hour phone number (1-800-432-4263)
  - Website <https://onlinesales.wildlife.state.nm.us/public/ogt>
- Callers can remain anonymous
- Those who report violations are eligible for a reward if charges are filed in the case.
- Reward Schedule:
  - \$750 – Elk & Bighorn
  - \$500 - Deer and Oryx
  - \$350 – Pronghorn
  - \$250 – All others



# HISTORY OF THE OGT PROGRAM

- Established in 1977, OGT became the first such program in the nation focused on wildlife crimes.
- Modeled after the highly successful “Crime Stoppers” program that was created in Albuquerque in 1976.
- Created a way for citizens to report wildlife crimes anonymously to NMDGF via a toll free phone number and later a website.
- Created a fund to pay rewards in cases when charges are filed.



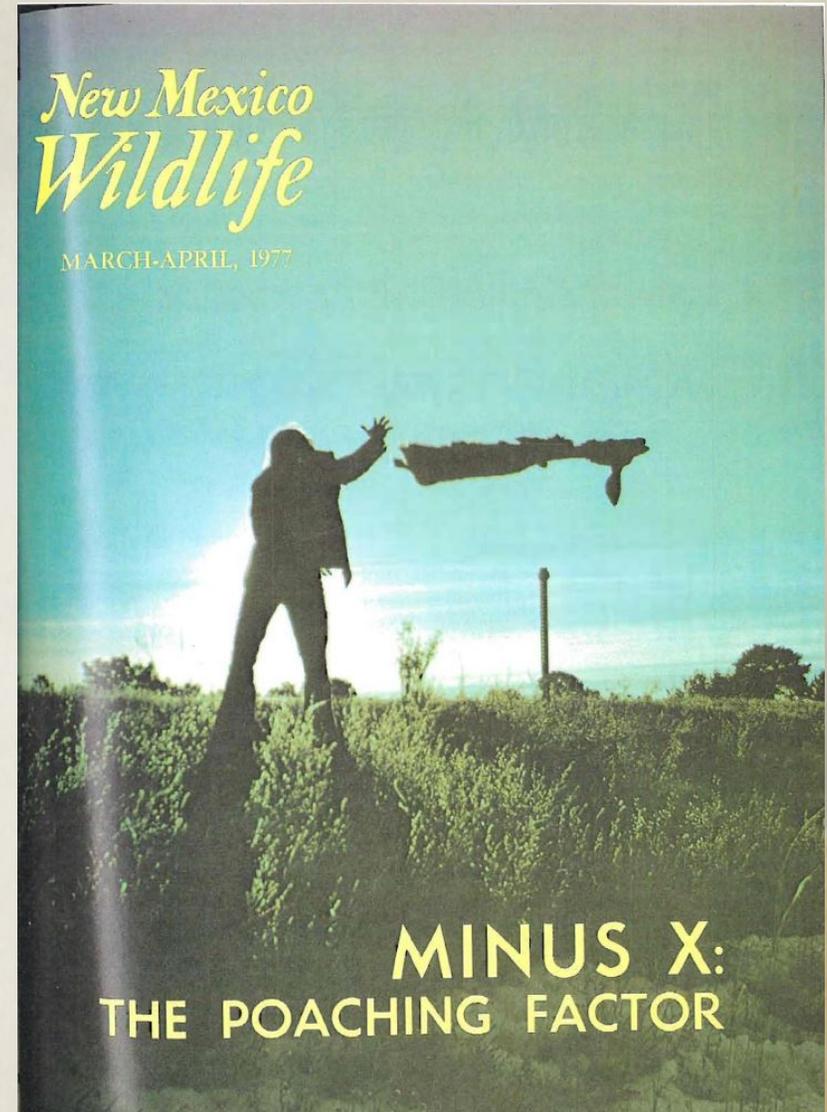
# Why OGT was created

- In the early 1970's NMDGF recognized that poaching was often tolerated by the public due to several misconceptions including:
  - Poaching isn't a real "crime"
  - Poachers were "just feeding their family"
  - Poaching is relatively uncommon and doesn't have an impact on wildlife populations



# How much poaching really goes on?

- In 1975 NMDGF conducted an unusual study on the level of poaching and its potential impacts. It found the following:
  - Nearly no wildlife crimes were being reported, even when committed right in front of witnesses.
  - An estimated 34,000 deer were being killed annually by poachers.
  - As many deer were being poached each year as were being killed by licensed hunters!



# What did they find?

- Conclusions from the study, published in New Mexico Wildlife in 1977, were:
  - Officers districts were way too big and they had to cover too much country
  - Officers were not getting any help from the public



# Then vs. Now

- Since 1976 New Mexico's population grown by ~100%, from ~1M to ~2M.
- Since 1976 the number of NMDGF Officers has increased ~33-73%
  - 1976 - 46 field officer positions (there were an additional 16 commissioned specialists in the areas who also performed law enforcement duties)
  - 2020 - 80 field officer positions, 17 of which are currently vacant (there are 3 commissioned specialists in the areas who also perform law enforcement duties).



# Overall Violation Rates

- Conservation Officers typically issue nearly 4,000 citations for violations of Chapter 17 annually.
  - 2018 – 3,874 citations issued
  - 2019 – 3,574 citations issued
- Conviction rates are currently ~85%.
- Average fines:
  - 1976 - \$36 (~\$173 in 2020 dollars)
  - 2018 - \$36.80\*
  - 2019 - \$22.46\*

\* does not include court costs



# OGT Today

## Number of reports filed by year

- 2018 – 177
- 2019 - 152

## Number of charges

- 2018 – 93 (58 convictions)
- 2019 - 50 (11 convictions)\*
  - \* Many of the 2019 cases are still being investigated or are pending in court

## Results

- Approximately 10-20% of all OGT reports result in charges being filed
- ~85% conviction rate on OGT cases



# OGT Today

## Fines

- 2018 – \$9,092 (\$156.75 average)
- 2019 - \$1,858 (Most cases still pending)

## Rewards Paid

- 2018 - \$4,500
- 2019 - \$2,500\*
- \*Many 2019 cases are still under investigation & rewards have not been paid yet.



# Solved OGTs

December 31, 2017

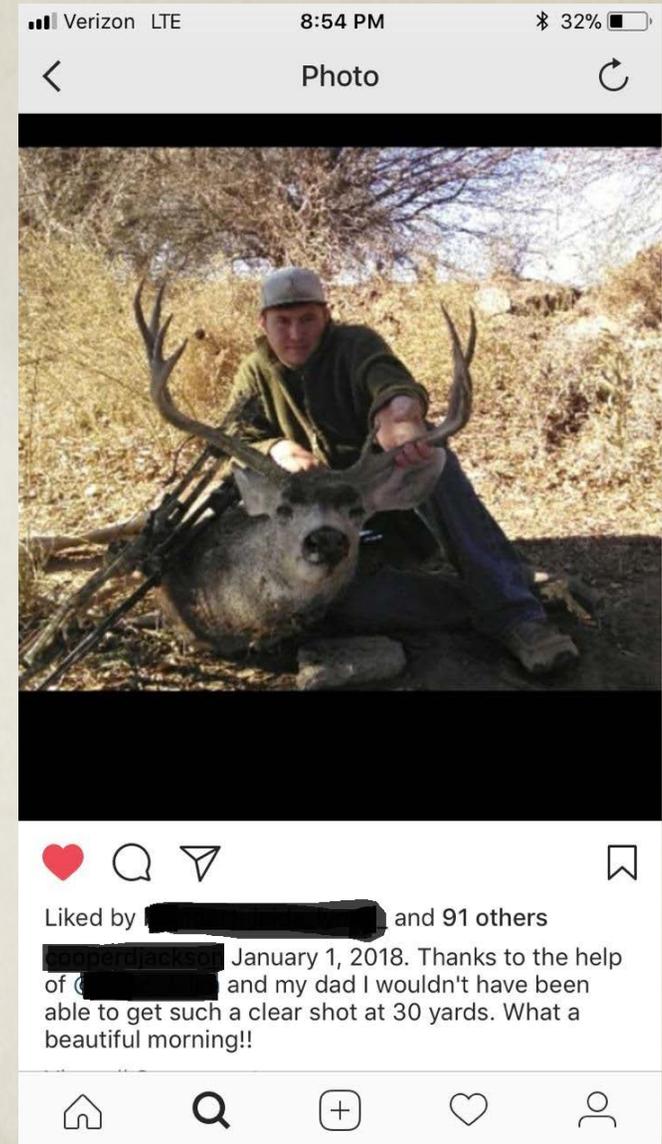
- Deer killed the day before season in GMU 25
- Deer killed with rifle using a bow license

January 10, 2018

- OGT reported
- Officer investigates and finds carcass

Results:

- 2 men charged
- 7 charges filed, 5 convictions 9/13/18
- \$1,355 in fines



# Solved OGTs

June 17, 2019

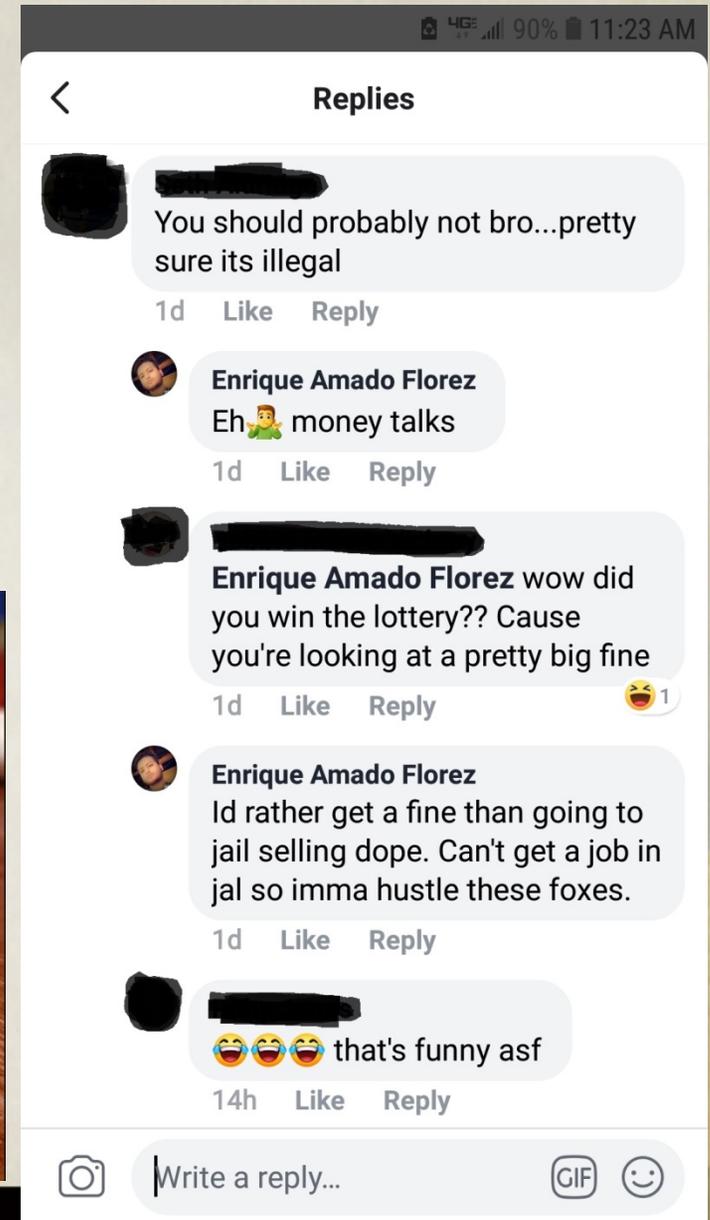
- OGT received of a man selling a fox pup for \$500 on Facebook in Jal, NM.
- Undercover officers attempted to buy the fox but were told it had escaped.

January 21, 2019

- A search warrant was obtained and an arrest warrant for 1 suspect.

## Results:

- 3 men charged
- 4 charges filed
- 2 convictions so far
- \$626 in fines and 7 days in jail for 1 suspect so far
- 2 more trials to come



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

# OGT FUNDING

OGT receives no Game Protection Funds (license \$\$), instead it is 100% reliant on donations from the public.

- Expenditures -
  - 2019 - \$30,728.25 (Including ½ the cost of a new Poach Coach)
- Donations –
  - 2019 - \$25,956.05



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

