

COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA BRIEFING

Meeting Date: May 28, 2026

Agenda Number: 14

Presenter: Stewart Liley

Corroborator: N/A

Agenda Title: Subsequent discussion on the Bighorn Sheep Rule (19.31.17 NMAC) for the 2027 – 2030 hunting seasons.

1. Summary of Agenda Item

The Department will present proposed changes to the Bighorn Sheep Rule (19.31.17 NMAC) based on survey information, management goals and public comment. The Department held two hybrid in-person/virtual public meetings and has also received comments regarding the Bighorn Sheep Rule.

The Department is proposing the following changes to 19.31.17 NMAC:

Rocky Mountain Bighorn:

- Opening the Manzanos (Game Management Units (GMUs) 14 & 18) for ram hunting under both public and private sections of the rule.
- Establishing two hunt periods for the Manzanos: October 1-15 and October 16-30
- Increasing the bag limit for private Rocky Mountain bighorn ram licenses from 6 to 10 to accommodate a new herd being opened for hunting (Manzanos)

Desert bighorn:

- Opening the Sacramentos (GMU 34) for ram hunting under (Dec. 1-15 hunt period)
- Shifting the hunt periods for both the Little Hatchets (GMU 26, west of NM 81) and Big Hatchets (GMU 26, east of NM 81) from September 15-30 and October 1-15 to December 1-15 and December 16-30

General

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

2. Background Information

The bighorn sheep rule (19.31.17 NMAC) is re-evaluated every 4 years and changed based on population data, harvest data, management goals, and public feedback. The Department will begin reaching out to the public for input.

Bighorn sheep hunting in New Mexico is conservative and managed to produce older age class rams for harvest. Ram licenses are once in a lifetime (Rocky Mountain and

desert) and are quite limited in number every year. In cases where bighorn populations are large enough to be limited by winter range or issues involving dispersal behavior (i.e., some Rocky Mountain bighorn populations) the Department prescribes a conservative ewe harvest to maintain populations at appropriate levels. Currently there are no desert bighorn populations large enough to support ewe harvest and the Department is actively restoring desert populations to historical vacant range when surplus sheep are available.

3. Strategic Plan References and Possible Impacts of Agenda Item

The process as presented to the Commission meets the Conservation Services Program Objectives 1, 2 and 5 of the Department's Strategic Plan: FY 2019 – FY 2023

4. Considerations Regarding Duplications and/or Conflicts with Existing Rules or Statutes

None

5. Description and Summary of Public Involvement Process and Results

The Department held two hybrid in-person/virtual public meetings in Albuquerque and Las Cruces. Public comments will be presented at the Commission meeting. Proposed changes to the Bighorn Sheep Rule have been posted on the Department's website.

Suggested Motion

This is a discussion item and no motion is necessary, unless Commission discretion dictates otherwise.