

COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA BRIEFING

Meeting Date: March 20, 2026

Agenda Number: 17

Presenter: Stewart Liley

Corroborator: N/A

Agenda Title: Subsequent Discussion of Migratory Game Bird Rule (19.31.6 NMAC) for the 2026 – 2027 hunting season.

1. Summary of Agenda Item

The Department will present proposed changes to the Migratory Game Bird Rule (19.31.6 NMAC) based on public comment, the latest information from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), recent survey information, and management goals. Season selections and bag limits are determined in conjunction with the USFWS working through the Central and Pacific Flyway Councils. The proposed amendments focus on:

- Changes to regular waterfowl season dates based on public comments and calendar dates
- Change certain season dates to be later in the year because of calendar shift
- Based on population survey data, increase sandhill crane permits in MRGV and SW draw hunts by 18 total, to be distributed among existing hunts

2. Background Information

The migratory game bird rule is amended annually, ensuring compliance with Flyway recommendations and Federal guidelines. In New Mexico, season selections and bag limits are determined in conjunction with the Central and Pacific Flyways and the USFWS. The process for setting migratory bird hunting regulations is described briefly below.

Migratory game bird management in the US is a cooperative effort between state and federal governments. The US and Canada are divided into four regulatory flyways, and each has a Flyway Council consisting of representatives from state and provincial wildlife agencies. Flyway Councils are advised by technical committees made up of state and provincial biologists. These technical committees make management recommendations to the Councils based on population, harvest, and hunter data. After considering technical committee input, the Flyway Councils then recommend migratory bird hunting regulations to the USFWS. The USFWS evaluates these recommendations and presents them to the Service's Regulations Committee for a decision. These decisions are then forwarded to the USFWS director and Assistant Secretary of the Interior for approval. Once approved, these proposed annual migratory bird hunting frameworks are published in the Federal Register for public comment. After considering public comment, final recommendations and frameworks are developed and published in the Federal Register. After publication of these final migratory bird hunting frameworks, states can select their hunting seasons.

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 has posted proposed changes to the migratory game bird rule on its website. Input has been gathered from mail, email, and a public meeting with interested members of the public. Hybrid public meetings were held on March 11th in Albuquerque and March 12th in Las Cruces to gather public comments on the proposed changes to the migratory game bird rule. A final proposal to this rule will be developed and presented at the May 2026 Commission meeting.

Suggested Motion

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