



**New Mexico State Game Commission
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish**

**MINUTES AND TRANSCRIPTS
NEW MEXICO STATE GAME COMMISSION**

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Friday, Feb. 20, 2026

**New Mexico Department of Wildlife Southeast Area Office
[1615 W. College Blvd.](#)
[Roswell, NM 88201](#)**

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/u7cSMW1fVWk>

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1: Meeting Called to Order

09:10:53 a.m. (00:00:00/00:00:16 on video)

Called to order by Chairman Richard Stump.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2: Roll Call

09:11:16 a.m. (00:00:23/00:00:38)

Present in person: Chairman Stump, Vice-chairman Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Harwood and Commissioner Witt.

Excused: Commissioner Lopez.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3: Introduction of Guests

09:11:42 a.m. (00:00:49/00:01:04)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4: Approval of Agenda (Action Item)

09:16:46 a.m. (00:05:53/00:06:08)

Motion: To approve the agenda for the Feb. 20, 2026, meeting as written.

Motion by: Vice-chairman Clemente.

Seconded by: Commissioner Witt.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairman Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Harwood and Commissioner Witt.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5: Approval of the Minutes from the Jan. 9, 2026, Meeting in Santa Fe (Action Item)

09:17:15 a.m. (00:06:22/00:06:37)

Motion: To approve the minutes from the Jan. 9, 2026, Commission meeting as presented by the Department.

Motion by: Commissioner Fulfer.

Seconded by: Vice-chairman Clemente.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairman Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Harwood and Commissioner Witt.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6: Approval of Hunting and Fishing Privileges Revocations (Action Item)

09:17:47 a.m. (00:06:54/00:07:09)

The Department notified the Commission of the revocations or suspensions carried out pursuant to the Parental Responsibility Act, those who have failed to pay a penalty assessment citation within 30 days, those who have entered into a civil agreement or have a civil judgment, and pursuant to the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.

- 104 individuals certified by the Human Services Department as being out of compliance with the Parental Responsibility Act [40-5A-1 NMSA 1978] were suspended until in compliance.
- 22 individuals who failed to pay a penalty assessment citation within 30 days of the violation were suspended until they are in compliance.
- 4 individuals who have entered into a civil agreement or have a civil judgment.

The Department presented the three individuals who meet established criteria for the revocation or suspension of their hunting, fishing, trapping, guiding and outfitting privileges or other privileges or authorities granted by an agreement, license or permit issued by the Department.

- 1 individual accrued 20 or more points in a 3-year period. They were mailed a notice of contemplated action, and a hearing was conducted.
- 2 individuals accrued 20 or more points in a 3-year period. They were mailed a notice of contemplated action, requested a hearing, and the Department entered into a stipulated agreement.

Motion: To approve the revocation recommendations as submitted by the Department.

Motion by: Vice-chairman Clemente.

Seconded by: Commissioner Fulfer.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairman Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Harwood and Commissioner Witt.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7: Initial Discussion of the Bighorn Sheep Rule 19.31.17 NMAC

09:18:19 a.m. (00:07:26/00:07:42)

The Department presented proposed changes to the Bighorn Sheep Rule (19.31.7 NMAC) based on survey information, management goals and public comment. The Department is currently analyzing data and reaching out to public and interest groups to evaluate alternatives and to help inform the rule development process.

Proposed changes included:

- Opening the Manzano Rocky Mountain and Sacramento desert bighorn populations to ram hunting.
- Adjusting season dates where necessary. For example, shifting start dates to maintain hunts beginning of Saturday or adjusting to calendar day starts for consistency.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8: Initial Discussion of the Deer Rule 19.31.13 NMAC

09:45:54 a.m. (00:35:01/00:35:17)

The Department presented proposed changes to the Deer Rule (19.31.13 NMAC) based on survey information, management goals and public comment. The Department is currently analyzing data and reaching out to public and interest groups to evaluate alternatives and to help inform the rule development process. The Department also presented key findings from deer projects completed in the past four years.

Preliminary proposed changes included:

- Adjust season dates where necessary.
 - Shifting start dates to maintain hunts beginning of Saturday or adjusting to calendar day starts for consistency.
 - Evaluate season dates for hunt structure consistency across the state.
 - Evaluate season dates to ensure harvest is biologically sustainable.
- Adjust license numbers to meet management strategies and reflect changes in deer herd dynamics.
- Reduce deer licenses in Game Management Unit (GMU) 2B based on input received during current rule cycle.
- Create a public muzzleloader deer hunt on Wildlife Management Areas in GMU 4 to coincide with the private land hunt.
- Create a December rifle hunt for Coues white-tailed deer in GMUs 16 and 22 to be consistent with Coues white-tailed deer hunts in other southwest GMUs.
- Designate the premium statewide deer hunt as a quality hunt.
- Structure the January hunt on White Sands Missile Range as a youth hunt.
- Consider eliminating the restricted muzzleloader deer hunts.
- Evaluate current antlerless hunts across the state.
- 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 six days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.
- Evaluate a potential “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.

The Commission took a break at 10:52:09 a.m. and returned at 11:05:56 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 9: Initial Discussion of the Elk Rule 19.31.14 NMAC

11:05:56 a.m. (01:55:03/01:41:35)

The Department presented proposed changes to the Elk Rule (19.31.14 NMAC) based on survey information, management goals and public comment. The Department is currently analyzing data and reaching out to public and interest groups to evaluate alternatives and to help inform the rule development process. The Department will also present key findings from elk projects completed in the past four years.

Preliminary proposed changes included:

- Adjust season dates where necessary.

- Shifting start dates to maintain hunts beginning on Saturday or adjusting to calendar day starts for consistency.
- Evaluate season dates for hunt structure consistency across the state.
- Evaluate season dates to ensure harvest is biologically sustainable.
- 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.
- Consider aligning hunt season start dates in GMUs containing both primary management zones and secondary management zones.
- Adjust some hunts to minimize overlap of weapons used or species hunted.
- Adjust draw license numbers based on biological data and management goals.
 - Possible reductions in the following herd units: Greater Gila, Valle Vidal (A).
 - Possible slight increases in licenses in the North Central herd unit (A) and Sacramento and Ruidoso.
- Designate statewide draw elk licenses (currently ELK-1-700) as a quality hunt.
- Require the purchase of a license at least one day prior to start of the hunt. For hunts where published season dates are less than six days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.
- Possible adjustment of management zone boundaries.
- Reassess public/private land split due to land ownership changes of the past four years.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10: General Public Comment

12:30:16 p.m. (03:19:23/03:05:55)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 11: Commissioner Comments

12:44:15 a.m. (03:33:22/03:19:55)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 12: Executive Session

12:49:56 p.m. (03:39:03/03:25:35)

Motion: To adjourn into executive session, closed to the public, pursuant to section 10-15-1(H) 7 NMSA 1978, attorney-client privilege, litigation update.

Motion by: Commissioner Fulfer.

Seconded by: Commissioner Witt.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairman Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Harwood and Commissioner Witt.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 13: Action(s) from Executive Session (Action Item(s))

02:11:08 p.m. (05:00:15/03:26:58)

AGENDA ITEM NO.14: Adjourn

02:11:19 p.m. (05:00:26/03:27:09)

Motion: To adjourn the Feb. 20, 2026, State Game Commission meeting.

Motion by: Vice-chairman Clemente.

Seconded by: Commissioner Fulfer.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairman Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Harwood and Commissioner Witt.

Transcripts:

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Welcome to the State Game Commission meeting here in Roswell. Before we get started, I'd like to take a moment introduce our newest commissioner, Kyle Harwood. Kyle, we're very pleased to have you on the Commission, and thank you for joining us. It takes a lot of your time, as you'll find out, and we really appreciate you being on the Commission, so welcome. Director Sloane, please call the roll.

Director Mike Sloane: Commissioner Witt?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Here.

Director Mike Sloane: Commissioner Lopez is excused for medical reasons. Commissioner Harwood?

Commissioner Kyle Harwood: Here.

Director Mike Sloane: Thank you. Commissioner Fulfer?

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Here.

Director Mike Sloane: Vice-chair Clemente?

Vice-chair Fernando Clemente: Here.

Director Mike Sloane: Chair Stump?

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Here.

Director Mike Sloane: You have a quorum.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Next item on our agenda is introductions. Start with the Commission, then we'll go through the audience. How about we start with Commissioner Witt?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: I'm Commissioner Christopher Witt, representing District 5, Bernalillo County. I've been on the Commission since June. I'm a biology professor at University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Good morning. My name is Fernando Clemente. I am the Vice-chair, the Commission, and I am from Sunland Park, New Mexico.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Richard Stump. I'm a Chair of the Commission of Native New Mexican for several generations, many generations, and I'm proud to be on this Commission.

Commissioner Kyle Harwood: Good morning, everybody. Kyle Harwood, resident of La Cienega, New Mexico, and your Northern Commissioner. I believe it's 4. Is that right?

Director Mike Sloane: I don't actually know.

Commissioner Kyle Harwood: Okay.

Director Mike Sloane: Was that part up through Raton and Union, Colfax, and all that kind of stuff?

Commissioner Kyle Harwood: All right, we'll check on that. Thank you.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Gregg Fulfer from Jal District 1.

Director Mike Sloane: Mike Sloane, Director of Department.

Chief Stewart Liley: Good morning, Commissioners, members of the public. Stewart Liley, Chief of Wildlife.

Jesse Deubel: Good morning, Chairman Stump, Commissioners. Jesse Deubel, I'm the Executive Director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation.

Brandon Wynn: Morning, Commissioners, Chair, members of the public. My name's Brandon Wynn. I'm from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and I'm just here as myself.

Jeremy Martin: Good morning, Commissioners, members of the public. I'm Jeremy Martin, I'm the General Counsel for the Department.

Bill Williams: Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, I'm here to represent New Mexico Cattle Growers Wildlife Committee.

Lieutenant Shawn Carrell: Good morning, Commissioners. Lieutenant Shawn Carrell over revocations.

Lieutenant Andrew Armendariz: Good morning, Commissioner. Lieutenant Andrew Armendariz over training.

Chief Kirk Patten: Good morning, Commissioners, members of the public. I'm Kirk Patten, Chief of Fisheries for the department.

Chief Paul Varela: Good morning, Commissioners, members of the public. Paul Varela, Chief of Administrative Services.

Art Arias: Good morning, Commissioners and public. My name's Art Arias. I'm an Eddy County resident.

Ty Goar: Good morning, Commissioners and members of the community. I'm Ty Goar from Ruidoso, well, local outfitter.

Don Waner: Good morning, Commissioners. I'm Don Waner, resident of Roswell, New Mexico.

Thomas Austin: Good morning, Commissioners. Thomas Austin, public at large.

Col. Tim Cimbali: Good morning, Commissioners, members of the public. I'm Tim Cimbali. I'm the Colonel over field operations for the department.

Ted Wenner: Morning, Commissioners. My name's Ted Wenner. I'm a local resident and a taxidermist.

Logan McGarrah: Commissioners, Director Sloane, Chief Liley, Logan McGarrah here representing the Southern New Mexico chapter of Safari Club International.

Melissa Garnett: Good morning. My name is Melissa Garnett. I'm the Public Information Officer for Southeastern New Mexico with the department.

Darren Vaughan: Good morning, Commissioners, members of the public. I'm Darren Vaughan. I'm the Communications Director for the department.

Natasha Montoya: Good morning, everyone. My name is Natasha Montoya. I'm the Assistant Chief of Information.

Eric Arce: Good morning. My name is Eric Arce, and I am a photographer with the department.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Good morning, Commissioners, and members of the public. Tristanna Carrell. I am the Chief of the Information and Education Division. We currently have 10 people online, but no one has raised their hand to introduce themselves.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Tristanna.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Mr. Chair, I apologize. We did have one person, if you don't mind.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Okay, thank you.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Mark Mattaini, you are allowed to talk.

Mark Mattaini: Thank you. Mr. Chair, members of the council. My name is Dr. Mark Mattaini. I live in Pueblo Village on Laguna Pueblo. I am a member of the department Citizen Advisory Committee, and I'm also a board member for the New Mexico Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. The chances I will be cut off by the wind are 98% this morning, but I will listen to everything you say online later if I lose you. Thank you.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Thank you, Mark. Mr. Chair, that was our only request for introduction.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Tristanna. Our next item is approval of the agenda. Commissioners, any discussion? Is there a motion?

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Aye. So move to approve the agenda as presented.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Is there a second?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Second.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Discussion of the motion. All those in favor?

Commissioners: Aye.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: No opposed. Motion passes. Number five, approval of the minutes from the January 9th, 2026, meeting in Santa Fe. Any discussion, Commissioners? Is there a motion, please?

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Motion to approve minutes.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Is there a second?

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: I'll second the motion.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: All those in favor?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Aye.

Commissioner Kyle Harwood: Aye.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: No opposed. Motion passes. Item number six is approval of the revocations of hunting and fishing privileges. I didn't see anything out of the ordinary. Is there any discussion, Commissioners? Is there a motion?

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Aye. So move.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Second.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: All those in favor?

Commissioner Kyle Harwood: Aye.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Aye.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: No opposed. Motion passes. The next item is the first of three on our agenda today. These items are initial discussions of proposed rule changes. As you know, these rule discussions are important to set the stage for the adoption of final rules later this year. I urge commissioners and the public to engage fully in these rulemaking processes. After these initial discussions, at future meetings, we will have subsequent discussion. The initial and subsequent discussion are the time when input is most critical. Having said that, Chief Liley, can you proceed with the discussion of the Bighorn Sheep Rule 19.31.17?

Chief Stewart Liley: Good morning, Commissioners. As you stated, Chair, this is the first presentation that you all have had on Bighorn Sheep, the Bighorn Sheep Rule 19.31.17. Also, I'll reiterate the fact that you-- discussion on the importance of public comment after this meeting. We'll also be going out with public meetings across the state on all these rules throughout this year. Early and often is the helpfulness with us when we do the proposals. You'll see our proposals as we go through some of these presentations.

You'll see on our website there is-- on our website for everyone, proposals under consideration. Follow that. We update that frequently. If we have new analyses that we've done specifically for population status that transforms into license numbers, et cetera. I just ask the public and those interested in these rules to follow that website, follow that summary of proposed changes. You'll notice on that, as we go through the year on each one of these species rules, we'll put a date when it was last updated so folks have an idea of when we were updating any different proposed changes.

With that, we'll get going in the Bighorn Sheep Rule. Little just background before we go into any proposed changes, and what we're thinking about from the department's perspective is just on where we are with Bighorn populations. What you'll see here in this graphic is both population estimates for our Rockies, which is in that blue line, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, and our deserts. I think the key with Rockies is most of our suitable habitat for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep is occupied right now.

We don't have a lot of unoccupied habitat where we think we could start new populations of Rockies. Whereas in Desert bighorn sheep, we are at a place where we still have unoccupied habitats across the state that we have potential to either start new populations through time or augment. Really, right now we're at the augment stage, and we'll get at that in some of these populations. We did start a new population, or in the process of starting a new population, since the last time we discussed this rule cycle. Real quick, on a graphic of the state where our locations are. It's a little difficult to see, but what this is is the blue squares represent individual rocky populations. There's 11 different populations we have throughout the state. As you will see, the majority of those are concentrated in the north, along the Sangre de Cristos. The last rocky population we started was in Cochiti Canyon, that's right there, just to the northwest of Santa Fe. Population's doing really well. We started hunting in that population during the last rule cycle, and has been an excellent population since we started it.

We do have a southwestern population, the Rockies that was started a long time ago in the San Francisco River drainage right there on the Arizona border. Then the Turkey Creek population, that population just to the southeast of the Arizona border along Turkey Creek. You'll notice our desert sheep populations, with the northernmost being in the Ladrón Mountains right outside of Socorro, all the way down to the Mexican border in Alamo Huecos. Our most recent population we started was in the Alamo Huecos. That's the very furthest south population you see there, right along the Mexican border. The previous population that we started in eastward expansion in 2018, of deserts, was there in the outside of Alamogordo in the mountain rim country there. You'll see there as the population estimates. I think there's a lot of room for growth potential with deserts, maybe a little bit with rockies, the bighorn sheep in general, or a lot of limiting factors. One of the biggest limiting factors for bighorn sheep is disease and concerns about disease risk. They're very highly susceptible to mycoplasma ovipneumoniae. Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae causes secondary infections, bacterial infections, and also pneumonia, that then we sometimes see whole herd die-offs. We see chronic shedding ovipneumoniae, which then leads to suppressed populations, but other limiting factors, such as predation, drought, et cetera. I would say the biggest threat to some of these populations definitely would be an introduction of disease, more so in

our Rockies than our deserts. Desert lion predation sometimes leads to the largest source of limiting factors for them.

Real quick, since the last rule cycle, since 2022, we've captured over 305 bighorn sheep and fitted them with radio collars. I'll get into why we did that in some of the different research projects we have going on. Also, in the desert, bighorn sheep populations have trans located almost 100 desert bighorn sheep, since 2022, '23, really. Most of that is to start a new herd in the Alamo Huecos, you'll see there was two different translocations, one to the Peloncillos out to Redrock. Redrock is a captive breeding facility that the department maintains.

It's a facility that we've had since basically desert bighorn sheep went extinct on the landscape in New Mexico. The last remaining populations in the San Andreas and the Hatchets, started a captive breeding facility, and it's been instrumental in our reintroduction efforts and recovery efforts for desert bighorn sheep. We were fortunate this last year to be able to do a wild-to-wild translocation from the Caballo Mountains over to the Sacramento Mountains to augment that population. We started in 2018. Some of the research projects that we have going on is there's some new technology that we're looking at. That's solar GPS ear tags.

You'll see in that top picture our standard ear tag numbered on it. That's left ear, you'll see it's an actual solar GPS transmitting device. If it's successful, it could replace some of our standard radio collaring more accessible for males, especially because males neck swells. We try not to collar much on our male populations, whether that's deer, elk, bighorn, because of the neck swelling during the rut. This would be really helpful for some of these other research projects where we're trying to look out what's going on with the male segment of the population.

The other aspect of what we are trying to do here is improving our survey precision. We had an employee that finished and completed a master's study on a double observer model on bighorn sheep surveys, Caitlin Ruhl. We're implementing some of that survey methodology. It requires some GPS collars to get better precision in the models. It allows us to look and turn up GPS radio collars on sheep where we know they are. We overfly and we could detect if we should have seen them or not, given the locations from the sheep and the locations from the helicopter when they're running double GPSs simultaneously. Then also getting at habitat covariate that would help us determine site ability indexes, et cetera.

We're also looking at a diet analysis in the Peloncillo. The Peloncillo population. That's the population of desert bighorn sheep just south of I-10 along the Arizona boundary. We do have a few animals just north of I-10 there. That population's been struggling over the last few years, and it's trying to get a better understanding of what those limiting factors are. There is a new diet analysis study that we're looking at there as well. Then I mentioned at the last commission meeting, using some of the thermal camera work that we did on ibex.

We're also looking to incorporate that potentially in bighorn sheep, especially in places that it is more difficult from a topography standpoint, from a helicopter perspective, where we just have a tendency to miss sheep in surveys. Looking at the potential to up that, and GPS collars will help us to determine also our miss versus detection rates.

This graphic here is just looking at our bighorn sheep draw hunts over times going back to 2018. You'll notice it's broken out into rocky use that dark blue bar desert bighorn rams, which is that lime green, and the rocky rams, which would be our light blue. You'll see in 2012, is when we delisted desert bighorn sheep from the State Endangered Species Act and started hunting them. That was the first big draw hunt we had in the state. You'll see we've gone from 16 licenses up to about 24, 25. It doesn't vary much. 26 was our high year in 23.

Rockies have increased through time as well, but have stabilized as well, especially on the rams. What you see is on the Rocky ewes, 2018 to really '21, we had a large number of ewe licenses. That's when we were hunting Rio Grande Gorge pretty heavily to try to stabilize the population. We did have a disease event come into Rio Grande Gorge in 2022, and you'll see the precipitous drop in ewe licenses. That's because of that disease event. We had die off in the gorge, and probably a little persistent lower recruitment because of ever presence ovipneumoniae in that population.

Getting into some of the proposals we have for bighorn sheep for this rule cycle. What we do in our bighorn sheep, you'll see we have few hunt codes. We have a hunt code for rocky rams, and then we

have the different hunt areas, the different populations under one hunt code. Then we do desert rams, and then rocky ewes rifle, and then rocky ewes archery. I should back up just a second. On all of these ram hunts, their annual hunts are up to numbers. We have the determination of how many license to issue on an annual basis, just because we see population fluctuations more so with bighorn sheep than we do with other species.

Also, because of the disease, we have the ability to adjust a season within the rule number of licenses on an annual basis. We do it as an up to number for every herd area that we could potentially hunt. We did put them-- Manzano mountains there, just to the east of Belen. It is currently in the Bighorn Sheep Rule as a potential area for opening. We have not opened it. That population was established in 1977, never has been hunted. It's just stabilized and never really went along. There are definitely some opportunities for harvest. Probably between 50 to 70 sheep in there.

One of the issues that we're dealing with in that is there is a private corporation, the Tierra Grande Corporation, that basically controls access to where those sheep are. We've been working with Tierra Grande over the last four years. We think we're at a point where we can get at a access agreement with them to where we could open the season to the Manzano Hunt. We're proposing having a private and public split in that. What we do in these places where the private controls basically access to those populations, we do a 50/50 split.

For example, if we're going to have two ram licenses there, one goes to the private, one to the public. That's what we're proposing on the Manzanos to start that hunt in 2027. There'd be a new rocky population that we would open up to hunting based off of the landowner agreement that we would have to be able to get access in there. Again, that population has been around for a long time, since the late '70s, never been hunted. Partly because of access, but also because it just is limped along. It finally is maybe moving up a little bit.

We're also going to propose opening the Sacramento Mountains desert bighorn sheep hunt to hunting this next rule cycle. Again, it says reestablish. That's a historical reestablishment. It was probably extinct for over 100 years before we put those sheep back in there in-- well, over 100 years in 2018. We are proposing putting that in the desert bighorn sheep draw a hunt for rams with a potential ram start hunt date in 2027. We're looking now at what potential hunt dates would be and the bag limit being ram, but we would do it on a case-by-case basis. We did augment that population this last year. We think there's between 70 to 80 bighorn sheep in the Sacramento Mountains now.

Then, in general, we always adjust season dates. According to a lot of these seasons start on a Saturday, so we shift every year, you get a day earlier, two days earlier on a leap year. We move them back according to calendar shifts on start dates. We also always look at hunter density within each individual hunt to ensure that we don't have an overcrowding issue. Before the next commission meeting, when we come back, we'll have our proposed hunt dates, seasons for each one of these populations. Again, take that out to public comment and post on our website. With that, I would take questions on big horn sheep.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Commissioners. Anybody have any questions? Thank you. I actually have a question. How many areas are you targeting to introduce?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, four deserts right now. If we go back to this map, right now we're working in the Alamo Huecos. Again, the Alamo Huecos is that green square right on the Mexican border. I think we probably have a year or more of augmentation, at least there to try to get that herd. It might eventually become a metapopulation with the hatchets. The hatchets is the square just to the north of there. We have Big Hatchets, Little Hatchet. We might see a larger metapopulation in there through time.

Again, these squares aren't representative of just exactly where they are. It's the general location of the mountains. Those sheep do run up and down. I think in terms of desert bighorn sheep, after we moved from the Alamo Huecos, we'd be looking potentially to the further east. The Sacramento Mountains was our furthest east we've gone since we started reintroducing populations. The issue that we probably have with introducing more desert sheep populations to the east is barbary sheep populations and aoudad populations.

Right now, there's not necessarily unoccupied ranges where we go right now because it's ready. I think it's more augmentation in some of these. We'll probably still need to augment the Peloncillos Mountains as well. If there's going to be anywhere through time, and time's probably a scale of 20 to 50 years, it's

more to the East Guadalupe Mountains, those kinds of things into historic range. Bighorn sheep were connected all along the San Andreas, that's that square in the middle, north of Las Cruces. All the way up and down that mountain chain used to be the largest desert sheep population in the state. There's the potential for more sheep in there. It's a question of augmentation versus starting completely new populations.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Chief Liley. Commissioners, anybody else have a question? Mr. Fulfer?

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: I was just curious on the thermal, that bright spot, is that collars on there? Is that just a--

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Fulfer, that is the nose of them. It's just the heat generation because it's in the summertime where they release heat from the nose more or less. What you're seeing there is just the nasal bones releasing heat.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: That seems like a lot better way of counting on then. How's that working?

Chief Stewart Liley: Yes. Mr. Chair, Commissioner Fulfer, our plane actually is going next week to Colorado to get the camera installed. We used a contract company on this, and I think it has a lot of potential. I was mentioning at the last commission mean when we used it on ibex, you could even get heat signatures off of bald eagle eggs. Not only the nest, but the eggs itself. I think it has a lot of potential. I think what we're going to have to see is closed canopy, how well it works in that, and if we could get the heat signature. It definitely has the potential to be a lot more utility. I think especially what's the biggest thing with the plane is you're not going in disturbance. With helicopters, you have to be low enough, or when we're doing visual surveys out of the airplanes, you're low enough, you're disturbing the animals. Sometimes you get running before the aircraft gets there, whereas this animal stays still don't even know aircraft is above them because you're flying about 1000 meters above them. The camera's detecting 1000 to 2000 meters above them and zooms in, and so you could actually look at it. It switches between thermal and real camera, too. Absolutely has potential to really improve surveys for a whole suite of species.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Does the department have its own plane or--?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Stump, yes, we have one aircraft right now. It's a Partenavia twin-engine observer plane.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Oh, thank you, Commissioner Fulfer. Commissioner Clemente?

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: I just have a question, just curiosity on the testing GPS, all are years on the ear tags. What is the life expectancy on those? I'm assuming it's a lot more than the collar because of being solar-charged.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Clemente, I think it's still in the right. Life expectancy is really a function of, on GPS collars, how often it takes a point and how often it uploads to the satellites. That's what really kills a collar or kills the ear tag. If you're looking at one point with an upload once a week, you could probably go 10 years, seven years. If you're looking at a point every hour and uploads every day, you're going to kill the battery in a year. Probably even on these solar ones, because there is an internal battery too that charges it. It's probably not much longer of a lifespan than that.

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Clemente. Commissioner Witt?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: How much do each device cost?

Chief Stewart Liley: Commissioner Stump, Commissioner Witt, I think each one-- your airtime on the satellites probably cost more than the actual device. \$1500 to \$2,000 is what the cost on most of these collars are. Because we do enough captures across the state, across multiple species, we normally contract and do bids with the telemetry companies to get a lot of reduction in cost than what you would see on an individual purchase, because we purchase at bulk. Anywhere from \$1500 to \$2,000. The biggest cost is actually getting them on the animals. Trying to get the capture and organized, that's our largest cost for the most part.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: One more question. I'm struck by just how small each of these populations is, 19 populations, but only 2,600 sheep total. It made me wonder about predator control. I

know the department does predator control for some of these populations. What's the extent of that effort to maintain these populations?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt, really, where we see predation as our limiting factor is in our desert sheep populations, not as much in our Rockies. Rockies, it's more limited. There's two limiting factors year like this, snow a lot of times in our high altitude ones, Wheeler Peak, Pecos, Latirs, Culebras, it's what winter range could hold. In the desert, it definitely is mountain lions is a lot of our limiting.

I think our thresholds, and we've seen this through time, like the Caballos, once we get above 150 ewes, 100 ewes predation, it starts to be not as much of a limiting factor. They escape that predation threat. There's a threshold where that predation is just exacerbated by small numbers of ewes. I think in a lot of those populations, Peloncillos, Hatchets, Ladrons, we do see that. We do do some line control in that. We're averaging less than three lions per mountain range per year on that. That's just a function of lion density. We initiate lion control only when we have data to suggest that's the limiting factor for those populations. Again, it's mainly been in our desert sheep populations, and mainly been when we've seen the ewe population definitely less than 100, where we see more of that as just an exacerbated predation force.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Commissioner, thank you. Anybody else have anything? Looks like we have a couple people from the public. Brandon Wynn, do you want to come up?

[pause 00:30:57]

Brandon Wynn: Looking at church bowing down when you guys make me bend over here. My name's Brandon Wynn. I live in Albuquerque. I'm actually a avid sheep hunter. I've done a lot of sheep hunting. I have about a half a million-dollar sheep head collection at my house. I was thinking the other day sitting on my couch, looking out my six-bedroom mansion in Northeast Heights up in High Desert, looking across my swimming pool at my million-dollar view, and I saw the proposal for the bighorn sheep.

The initial discussion came out. I can tell you, I want to really thank the Commission, the Department, because that thing's built for guys like me. You're going to still lump all the bighorn tags artificially outside the statute, carve out some outfitter tags, which is great for me. Because my kids who have real nice fat paycheck careers all across the country in tech, and medicine, and law, they can double their odds by paying \$10,000 to one of the outfitters in the room and stuff.

I just want to thank the commission from my heart for always privatizing this more than any other state for guys like me, so we can have an advantage over just the working class and the Mexicans. I'm glad to see the Manzano is right out the gate. You're going to split that half and half between private and public. Maybe my family, that's a little rich for our taste, the private tags, but sometimes those go for only \$100,000. I think we could swing that. I want to thank the Commission for always having fortitude to stand up for guys like me, make sure that we can borrow away their head of line.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Brandon Wynn. Jesse Deubel?

Jesse Deubel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and commissioners. Jesse Deubel, Executive Director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. We talked about this four years ago extensively. New Mexico Wildlife Federation is completely opposed to this statutory violation of the definition of a hunt code in the way that the bighorn sheep tags are all lumped together. There's only one reason that the Commission does that, and that's to take tags out of the pockets of New Mexico residents and put them into the pockets of non-residents.

Now, the agency will tell you that there's conflicting statutes, so they have to choose one of the statutes to follow. It seems to me that the New Mexico State Wildlife Commission would choose the statute that benefits the residents of New Mexico, opposed to choosing the opposite statute that does the opposite and takes away from the residents of New Mexico. We're only talking about five or six tags here. We're not talking about a lot of tags. I'm not suggesting fixing the lumping wood; make sure every new Mexican gets an opportunity to hunt bighorn sheep.

That certainly wouldn't be the case. As commissioners, you're sending a message to your constituents. Do you prefer to prioritize the residents of New Mexico, or do you prefer to prioritize non-residents? That's the question. Now, some people will argue that we need the money from the non-residents. Again, five or six tags, not a big deal. Last legislative session, the residents of New Mexico fought to get this agency a

\$10.5 million appropriation, the largest appropriation from the general fund ever to reach this agency. Residents did that.

If you gave every single bighorn sheep tag to non-residents for the rest of my life, you're not going to get \$10.5 million out of it. Just a few years ago, residents fought to create the Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund. The agency's now getting, approximately, \$3 million a year from that fund. That was done by residents. Residents are taking care of this agency, and I would hope that this Commission would start to take care of New Mexico residents. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Jesse Deubel. Is there anyone online, Tristanna? This is not an action item, so let's move to the next, which is the initial discussion of the Deer Rule 19.31.13 NMAC. Chief Liley, proceed with your presentation, please.

[pause 00:35:27]

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, members of the commission, as you stated, this is the Deer Rule 19.31.13. Just like the bighorn that you just heard, this is the initial proposals from the department on this rule like on the other ones. This will be our first cut edit. We'll go back out, have public meetings, post our summaries on the website, and come back to you all after that with a more refined recommendation for proposed changes.

Like bighorn, just going over a little bit of an overview before we get into the proposals. Population estimate statewide is approximately 80,000 to 100,000 deer. Deer really is driven by adult female survival, which tends to be more consistent both spatially and temporally over time than fawn survival. It's driven really by the two, both adult and fawn. Whereas fawn survival has a lot more variability, not only spatially, but also temporarily. We really see large fluctuations both within places and within time.

Really, limiting factors for deer are significant. A lot of different things. Whether it's habitat conversion through time, where you see deer prefer early serial stages, so early forest conditions, browse conditions. They're a browser more than they are a grazer, and so it's important from a habitat standpoint to have those early serial stages that's post-fire. You see that come in. They do really well with that. What we have is a lot of decadent in browse in some of these areas, mountain mahogany, bitterbrush, et cetera. You also see impacts of drought mainly driven on fawn survival, and pretty significant fawn survival drought impacts, where we just see really low survival in years of drought on our fawns that impacts overall population performance. Predation is another one. Then, from a standpoint of can impact, but we don't really see it here is human harvest on does. We don't really harvest does in this state. 99% of our harvest on mule deer and whitetail is on bucks. We're basically a buck-limited harvest.

Buck harvest isn't limiting population growth, so our buck harvest isn't determining what the population size is. It's just determining our ratio of bucks to does, or our age class of bucks in the population. Really, when bucks can actually determine or impact population growth is when you get below a threshold. That threshold has been found to be about 10 bucks per 100 does. If you get below that, that's when we start seeing potential breeding impacts. Pregnancy rate drops, less secrecy in birth timing, but we're not seeing that in any of our populations.

You'll look there. The next one that looks at our five-year average of our buck-to-doe-to-fawn ratio, pretty decent on the fawns. Actually, in mule deer, we like to see greater than 35 fawns per 100 does to see a stable population. That's what we figure is a stabilizing population. Anything above that might show a little bit of growth. Anything below is a little bit of potentially decline. That's averaged across the state. We definitely have areas where it's--

Like I said, fawn ratios vary more spatially and temporally, so there's some places in the state, some areas that were way below that, some that were way above that average, and some areas that differentiates even within that given year. The buck-to-doe ratio, I think, it's important. In deer, we do post-harvest surveys. Our surveys to collect that ratio is after the hunts have concluded. That's our buck-to-doe ratio after we've hunted. Overall, again, we're not concerned about getting to a point of a buck-to-doe ratio that would impact breeding, and therefore, opportunities for fawning in the spring.

Real quick, we do have two species deer within the state of New Mexico, both mule deer and whitetail. I didn't put a graphic of mule deer up on here just because they're pretty well spread throughout the entirety of the state of New Mexico. There are some pockets where we really don't have mule deer, but overall

can be found basically anywhere. The two subspecies of whitetail is our Coues whitetail deer that's on the left graphic there.

We're seeing a little bit of expansion of Coues whitetail to the north into the Gila, and you'll see that with some of our proposals here, but historically isolated throughout the Sierra Madre up into the Boot Hill of those sky islands of New Mexico, moving into the Gila, the Borough Mountains, et cetera. Then what you'll see on the graphic on the right is the eastern white tail, following river corridors, and then also some of the eastern plains.

We do get the occasional white tail that we will find in the mountain ranges in the Pecos, Manzano, et cetera. It's not necessarily a new phenomenon.

If you read some of the old Elliot Barker looking when he spent a lot of time in Vermejo up in the Sangre de Cristo, whitetails were prevalent in the Pecos all the way up through there. We've always had eastern white tails, maybe a little bit of expansion on the eastern plains in the Northeast, but overall, not a huge expansion across the state.

Looking at a historical, this goes back to the '50s on deer licenses and harvest. What you'll see there is really in the '50s, that's probably when deer were at the all-time high, the highest that they probably ever were, probably highest they ever will be. You had a lot of things going on there. You had a lot of logging, early serial stage forests. You had a lot of predator control from poisons on the ground, et cetera.

Predators were probably at their all-time lowest levels during that period. Deer thrive during that period. Then you see, as you've seen forest canopy close, you've seen less earlier sterile stages, less intense predator control, we've seen deer populations decline through time. Especially through the '80s, '90s is when we probably saw the steepest declines. Then what we've probably seen is a little bit of flattening out, and I'll show that in the next graph, but you'll see those bars. The first bar there that you see, horizontal bar, is when licenses went from over the counter to limited to the draw on public land. Then, you'll also see that next bar is when we went to mandatory hunter harvest.

Prior to over-the-counter, we had voluntary hunter harvest fairly well tracked. You'll see populations and harvest tracked fairly well together. When you had a high population, you had high harvest. When you had a low couple years, you had lower harvest. We're still seeing that trend a little bit right now. Harvest and license numbers track each other fairly well.

Looking back at the last 25 years. This is our buck-to-doe and fawn-to-doe ratios. You'll see the trend line on that. This is a statewide post-hunt. That bottom line is our buck-to-doe ratios. May be a slight upward trend to stabilize. It's fairly stable across that 25 years. Again, fawn-to-doe ratio is way more variable inter-year variability, but also maybe a little slight tracking downwards through time.

Probably being pulled down more by our more severe drought years. It's hard to tease out in 25 years' worth of data. If I went into more three or five years, you'll see where we had decent years. I think the other thing that can show is in a couple back to back good years, you could have really high fawn survival. You'll see that like 2012 through '15, we had some pretty good year. Monsoonal season rains and some decent snowfall after a drought year in the '10, '11, '12. They can rebound with the right climatic conditions. [silence]

What this is, is we could divide the state into 17 different herd management zones. I say herd management zones loosely. We do, as you know, put hunters on the ground based on each individual GMU. Sometimes we combine and let a hunter hunt multiple GMUs, but we try to track these populations at our herd levels. 17 different herd levels. It's more or less for deer on the eco regions. You could see, we look at the eco regions within the state, and more or less describes a distinct population segment where we think it's more or less a closed population of deer.

This is being updated through time as we do more research, especially with the advent of GPS collars, and we start to see how a deer move more about the landscape. Where we see more population connectivity, where we don't see connectivity, maybe more isolation. It keeps getting refined through time with our GPS collars, with some of our research, but then we look at this as more or less, these are the population centers. This is specifically for mule deer, not necessarily whitetail in there.

Real quick, just on license numbers, in this rule cycle, approximately 36,000 deer licenses on an annual basis. As I stated earlier, 99% of that is for bucks. We're really limited in our doe harvest across the state. You'll see there, we harvested an estimated 134 doe's in 2024-'25 season. That's when we really had

more strategic doe harvest, where we have areas of maybe depredation, or for example, in Silver City, where we have a limited doe hunt that's trying to get around deer in town.

Like I mentioned before, we have a mandatory hunter harvest reporting. We have a high reporting rate on our deer hunts. 88% of hunters that draw a license do report. 30% success rate overall across the state, and a fairly decent satisfaction rating. That satisfaction ranges from a 1 to a 4. We like to see it above a 3. Right about 3.5 on average.

Looking at licenses over the last 20 years, you'll see a decent stability. The top line is licenses, the bottom line is harvest. If you look over 20 years, like I said, pretty stable, but if you really look at the last 10 years, it's fairly stable across that little bit of a jump in the last rule cycle. We've decreased licenses in this current rule cycle. Harvest tracks fairly well. As you see, harvest and licenses track fairly well there.

Little bit of some of the research that we've done in monitoring, we've done in recent history, is more in our northern mule deer populations, looking at migration and migration corridors, et cetera. These are different populations. The Rio Chama is, if you're familiar with it, up in GMU 4, Rio Chama Wildlife Area. There's a big winter range for those animals. We've captured quite a few, and you'll see that movement out of those wintering animals typically move to the northeast to summer end. Higher ends of either in GMU 52, the two is that area 51 and then some, all the way up into Colorado.

Crow Mesa, that's our 2C population. It's a very limited harvest, but more of a resident population. There are some migrants. Why you don't see those dark lines that band of orange or purple is because we don't have a consistent migration out of that. More resident deer, but we do see a little bit of movement back and forth out of 2C. Then just to the north of that is Rosa Mesa, that's in 2B. Almost every single animal we radio collared in there does migrate, and almost every one of those migrate up into Colorado. You could see winter in New Mexico, but some are in Colorado, and then come back on an annual basis.

A couple other areas where we've been able to monitor not as big of a movement, but still a movement, and definitely summer, winter ranges in the Jemez Mountains. Wintering more around if you're familiar with Ponderosa Jemez Springs, and then spreading out, you'll see two forks summering up towards San Pedro Parks, and then over into the **[unintelligible 00:49:03]** is more of our summer range, not as distinctive summer range as winter range.

Then an interesting one is the Urraca Wildlife Management Area. We did radio collar deer in the winter range on that. You'll see it's a very small migration, probably stopped by the highway. That's the highway that's right there outside of Costilla, but they come and go from the high peaks of the Latirs back down into the Urraca. Then an interesting one was this San Cristobal, so Lama, San Cristobal area, Flag Mountain, right outside of Questa.

We radio colored some deer in there in the wintertime. We saw some interesting movements, including some animals crossing the Rio Grande, crossing 285, summering into what's GMU 52, and then coming all the way back to that San Cristobal winter range. More movements in there, but the majority of those animals did go to the high country in the Latirs or Wheeler Peak Wilderness.

Some other ongoing research that we have and that we're getting ready to participate more in is we're looking at some movement data in the Pecos Mountains and that herd. Part of that is just trying to get a better understanding there, but we did, as everyone is familiar, the Calf Canyon/Hermits Peak Fire should be very beneficial for deer. Trying to see what's happening, do we see movements into that in the summertime? Is it a migratory herd in there? We're in the process of capturing deer right now. We'll have some more information in the next year to two on that to look at what those pathways are, how they utilize those burn areas, et cetera.

Then we've been working to radio collar animals in the Mount Taylor population, really centering around the L Bar, which is the new wildlife management area. Looking at how deer moves throughout that ecosystem. It not only helps us with our movement to help set what are these core populations, how should we set licenses, et cetera. It also helps us with survival and trying to get at survival rates, so we know what doe survival is, and we could be able to document that as well.

Obviously, documenting habitat use hopefully to help guide us in habitat projects. We do a lot of different habitat projects for deer across the state that we think are beneficial, but this can help us determine what are deer actually selecting for and is it things that we've done on the landscape from a habitat

perspective. Then a project that we're getting to launch in the next week to week and a half is a buck survival and seasonal movements of deer in GMU 2B.

As some of you have heard on the Commission, there's been a lot of concerns about harvest in 2B. 2B is the one that borders the Jicarilla. That deer population, as you saw in the previous graphic in that Rosa migration, summers a lot in Colorado. Comes back winters. That's all from does. We think it's the same for bucks, but we don't know. We don't have empirical data from that. It crosses potentially four jurisdictions, being the Jicarilla, Southern Ute, Colorado, and New Mexico. It's a complex system that you're working to harvest amongst all jurisdictions.

We're hoping that this research will get us a better understanding of how bucks move across that landscape, how they're exposed to harvest pressures across that landscape. How we can work together on as all the jurisdictions to work on harvest management across all of that. Like I said, we're going to use those satellite ear tag transmitters that you saw in the bighorn sheep presentation. That's what we'll be using on mule deer. Again, on bucks, we don't like to put radio collars on them because the neck swelling during the rut allows us to collar adult animals.

We'll start that in two weeks. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is looking to cooperate next year on this project to collar a bunch, and we're looking from other entities if they're interested in cooperating to try to get a better understanding of how those bucks, especially, move across the landscape. As I mentioned, we're almost a strictly buck harvest. Especially in this area we don't harvest does, and trying to understand how harvest drives some of the population dynamics there.

Some of the other information just that we use to help generate license numbers and allocations throughout is we do a post-hunt survey. Like I said, looking at what our buck-to-doe ratios are post-hunt, looking at our fawn-to-doe ratios, helping us to inform what potential population trajectories are going to be. Then we do, like I said, these research projects that we have, the survival data we gained from those radio collars. Whether it's a movement study, we still can get survival information to help us better understand what's going on from a population dynamics, especially on does survival.

Real quick. There's two different management scenarios that we have in the state of New Mexico for harvest. It's defined in commission rule. One is either quality or the other is opportunity or standard hunts. Really, that quality is to provide a combination of harvest from a wider selection of bucks, basically saying a harvest from a wider selection of age classes of bucks, and so everything from one to two year olds to a potential eight to nine to 10-year-old. Because it has a wider selection, it typically is a higher buck-to-doe ratio in those populations.

It also potentially is a more pleasurable experience based on season timing and season success. I'll get to that in the next, where we have certain hunts within certain GMUs that are designated as quality because it's closer to the rut and success rates are higher. Higher probability of harvest, but a lower probability of drawing the tag because we don't have as many. Typically, these quality hunts are a lower hunter density on the landscape, too. Then, because of that, it's typically a lot lower license allocation than it would be if it was opportunity.

Opportunity is just that. It's the higher chance of getting an opportunity to draw a license, higher opportunity of drawing a tag, higher opportunity of just getting to go out there and hunt. Which might mean a lower buck-to-doe ratio and not as spread out of a age class distribution, probably younger age class. Again, we're trying to maximize hunter opportunity without impacting the population. When I say impacting the population, just try not to get below a threshold of buck-to-doe ratios or impact breeding and fawning rates of those populations.

Looking at the state in terms of where we have quality deer units versus hunts. Like I mentioned, we have some hunts that are quality-based off the timing. For example, in 2B. 2B is in a designated quality unit, but we have two hunts designated as quality. The ones that are closer to rut, that third rifle hunt in 2B, and the January bow hunt. Whereas we do have some units, those ones in blue that are designated as quality units. When we're quality units, it's a significantly reduced license numbers compared to our opportunity units.

Moving on to some of our general proposed changes across the state. Some of this I mentioned, like in the bighorn, adjusting the season dates were necessary. Again, to maintain a Saturday start, we have to move seasons back every six years because of the leap year it falls a week earlier, so we move those

back within this rule cycle. I think the other thing that we always do is evaluate season dates and hunt structure to make sure we have some consistency across the state. We don't have consistency everywhere.

The biggest thing that we want to look at is to ensure that season dates are biologically sustainable on the buck harvest. Some of those season dates, as we get later, have higher success rates, potentially not as sustainable. If we're going to keep offering the same amount of licenses, we might have to move that season earlier, et cetera. Then, adjusting license numbers. We're in the process of analyzing the harvest and population data right now to come back with the next presentation on our recommendations for licenses.

We will look at license numbers to make sure they're meeting management strategies, either quality or opportunity, and any reflections in herd dynamics. If we're seeing lower reproduction or fawn survival or buck-to-doe ratios decreasing, we might come back with a reduction in licenses. Then we have one hunt that is a draw tag that is a statewide tag that is up. It's not listed in rule as quality. It just should be a quality hunt. I think that's just an oversight. It is just one license, one hunt code that has it in there, just listing that as quality.

One of the things that we're also considering, and we'll go through it when we get to the regions, we have a few what we call restricted muzzleloader hunts. In those restricted muzzleloader hunts, you couldn't have a scope on it, you couldn't have an inline, et cetera. When the last rule cycle, we made a recommendation across all of our big game hunts, that muzzleloaders no more scopes on that. This restricted muzzleloader hunt maybe isn't as much of a necessity anymore.

That's why we're looking at potentially removing the restricted muzzleloader hunt and just keeping them all muzzleloaders, because we do prohibit scopes on muzzleloaders now. Then again, as we do every rule cycle, we'll evaluate the current antler list hunts that we have across the state to see if we still are necessary for population management, or if not, and then adjust licenses appropriately.

The other thing that we're proposing, and this is a proposal for all of the big game licenses across the state, is requiring a hunter to purchase the license at least a day before the hunt starts. We mentioned this at the last rule cycle. We have the potential right now, especially on our over-the-counter tags, where a person can purchase the license and E tag immediately. You could purchase a over the counter tag while the hunt's going on, and then if you select E tag option, tag that immediately.

We do know of cases that they've made where people have been hunting by the license after the kill and then tag it. Then the other aspect of where people are out in the field hunting around, not buying the license until they find an animal, before maybe buying it right then, and then shooting it, and then tagging it. This will curb some of that. We're going to make sure people try to buy that license prior to going out in the field and hunting one day before, calendar day before. The other thing that we're looking at, and again, all these will go out for public comment, is looking at those hunts that are less than six days. Our five-day hunts, three-day hunts for pronghorn, et cetera, is once that hunt starts, is no longer allowing having the ability to purchase the license once the hunt starts, and so trying to curb some of the buying a license post-harvest kind of issues.

Then the other thing that we are proposing, we are looking at this for oryx, like I mentioned last time, but also for all of our over-the-counter private land licenses, is require a ranch registration process for the purchase of an over-the-counter license. Similar to what we do in secondary management zone for elk. For example, right now on over-the-counter private land deer, you could go on our website, you could go to a vendor, buy a license for private land and never have the permission from the landowner before you buy that license.

There's concerns about some abuse of that where people are buying those licenses and then hunting on public land, harvesting, and not actually hunting on private. This ranch registration process will require a hunter to get basically permission from a landowner within that GMU prior to being able to buy that. Every landowner in the GMU would have a unique code that they could give to themselves to buy a license for somebody else and it will tie back to that land of where that came from.

It also will help us on some of the concerns we hear of landowner X with this much acres is buying or selling 50 hunts. We don't know that right now from our data because we know how many licenses were sold for the GMU, it's not tied to a private land. This will be able to better track licenses that are sold to

specific lands, for example. We could flag that. There's some concerns about abuse that a 10-acre property had 50 deer hunters on there.

We don't know that, but if we had a system like that in there, we could put a flag in our system that says, "Hey, this is a 10-acre property, they just bought above a threshold of license. We should maybe look at that to see if there is-- Are they hunting on that property? Are they hunting illegally at the private property in the unit or not?" Then we'll have in those agreements that if you are using those fraudulently, we could remove that land from purchasing in the future. It's to tighten that over-the-counter private land system. We're proposing that for all of our over-the-counter private land systems. Pronghorn, deer, oryx, barbary sheep, just like we have for secondary elk.

This is the northwest area. Looking at that quadrant, we'll adjust license numbers based off any biological data we've collected. One of the things that you all have heard and we're proposing is looking at reducing licenses in 2B. You heard that a lot during the last rule cycle of some concerns about the hunting too high in 2B. We're also looking at potentially moving that to a quality hunt unit. Not quality hunt, specific hunts. What we'll do in the interim is we will come up with a proposal on licenses reductions that we would have to make to get to quality hunt designation in that unit.

I think we're looking at a minimum 50% reduction in licenses in 2B, maybe upwards of 70% reductions in licenses in 2B to get to our quality hunt designation. Again, like I said on the license numbers, we'll post all this online, take public comment, but we're probably looking at approximately anywhere from 50% to 80% reduction in licenses to get to a quality hunt designation in that.

One of the other proposals that we do have, there is a early season muzzleloader hunt in GMU 4 on private. We think there is the availability to have an early muzzleloader hunt on our wildlife management areas in GMU 4. That would be late September, early October. An opportunity to be able to have that unique hunt. Moving back to 2B, I just want to go through, these are rifle licenses, both public and private over the last 15 years roughly. You'll see we've been fairly stable in license numbers across there. That the red line is our license numbers. We did reduce license numbers in 2B at the last rule cycle in 2022. After the '22 season, we also reduced, if you recall, licenses by 20% for this upcoming season. That's what you'll see in the '26. That's our estimated licenses based off what we see on private land sales. We are looking at a reduction in licenses again. That blue line is the actual estimated harvest. We have not completed the harvest report for 2025 yet. Those reports are still coming in as people are putting in for the draw. February 15th was the deadline. Most people do put in their harvest report between the deadline, but we get a lot of reports between February 15th and our actual draw deadline.

We'll have that 2025 estimate in there. I would imagine it's somewhere near the '24 season, maybe a little bit less. Again, this is where we'll be looking at. If we're moving to a quality hunt management anywhere from, again, most likely greater than 50% reduction in those licenses, maybe upwards of almost an 80% reduction in licenses for a quality designation.

In the southwest area, you'll see that they just draw license numbers and biological data for all of those so I won't repeat that, but one of the things that we are proposing is creating a cow's whitetail deer hunt for GMU 16 and 22. I mentioned right now it's just any deer, mule deer or coues white-tail. We'll make a specific coues white-tailed deer hunt for those units to try to take advantage of that unique opportunity of coues in that area. We do have one deer hunt on White Sands Missile Range. We're proposing in concert with the military moving that to a youth hunt for youth on White Sands Missile Range, and then we'll evaluate the status of that archery hunt in Silver City to see if that's still achieving goals or if it's still what we need it to be.

In the southeast, again, looking at license numbers, I will say that we are probably looking at some reductions in license numbers, especially in the 30, maybe 31. Those with maybe even 34, license number reductions on that. Then as I mentioned on the restricted muzzleloader, there is a restricted muzzleloader hunt in GMU 33. We just changed that from restricted muzzleloader to a general muzzleloader hunt. Then we have some antlerless hunts in GMUs 32 and 33. It's portions of, it's not the whole unit. Trying to evaluate if those are still necessary or not.

Then in the northeast, looking at, we have a muzzleloader hunt in GMU 15, that's restricted muzzleloader, making that a general muzzleloader hunt. The other thing that we're in the process on a statewide is looking at is if we should have caps on the private land over-the-counter deer licenses. Right now it's an

unlimited. I think some of this ranch registration process might help with some of those potential abuse of those licenses.

I think we still though are looking at if we should have caps across private land, especially in those hunts that are closer to where deer are more susceptible to harvest later in the season dates. We're in the process of looking at that. We'll put that out for public comment, but again, looking at caps on our over-the-counter private land deer hunts across the state. With that, I'll take questions.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Chief Liley. Commissioners? Anybody have any questions? Mr. Witt?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Thanks for that great presentation. That was fast. It was a lot of information. I wanted to ask first, the timing of the rut is really relevant to, especially the quality of the hunt. Has there been any shifts in the timing of the rut? Then second, as a follow up, how does that timing vary across the state as it pertains to that statewide hunt which you're saying should be moved to a quality designation?

Chief Stewart Liley: Chairman Stump, Commissioner Witt, I'll go more to the timing of rut first. You'll see there we definitely have, unlike elk, mule deer timing of the rut, and this is mule deer specific. This is based on some previous research and what we see from fawn size. The timing of the rut varies across the state with the north having an earlier rut period than the south.

You'll see the southwest, the most desert is the latest rut period all the way into January. While up north you're really seeing the rut starting in late November, early December, and ending by that middle of December, whereas it's just starting about middle of December in the central portion of the state, southeast portion of the state, southwest starting at the end of December.

Yes, definitely see variability in rut timing across the state in terms of ecotype is what we see there. In terms of have we seen the rut shift and deer, I don't think we've seen the shift in rut as much as we may be. We'll get to that in elk, is I wouldn't even say a shift in the peak of the rut, but a shift in how long the ruts been prolonged.

It's more in terms of female body condition that prolongs the rut period of just coming into estrus.

We see that a little bit with deer. Deer, it definitely is synchronized like elk, but not as tight. The rut it'll be a longer time period than what we see in elk where you have big pulse peaks, especially when cows are in decent conditions. As you mentioned, in the north, we'll look at hunts that start bumping up against that middle to end of November and looking at if those licenses, if they need to be adjusted, what our success rates, are we pushing too high a harvest closer the rut?

Whereas as we move further south, a later November hunt probably would be more like an October hunt than it would to the south. That's how we look at the hunt season structures based off of rut time. I guess the biggest thing I would say is, we'd try not to hunt the peak of the rut just because of susceptibility of males, harvest would be so high. If we do have any hunts that are in that rut period, we try to really limit the number of licenses available.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: What's the timing of that statewide hunt that you discussed?

Chief Stewart Liley: It's one license and it's September 1st to December 31st, anywhere in the state.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you Commissioner Witt. Mr. Clemente.

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Thank you for the presentation. Really good information, and unlike a lot of things that I see here. One of my questions is, I see your ratios, back to the ratio very stable, but your population declining in some of the areas. One of my question is, what is the percentage of the survival rate of the actual fawning?

Chief Stewart Liley: Chairman Stump, Commissioner Clemente, it really is so variable on an annual basis. In terms of fawn survival, we'll see some years in some GMUs that are very isolated where you'll have fawn-to-doe ratios of 10 to 100, and then the next year it might go back up to 30 to 100. You'll see in here when we pull the data on a statewide average, that's that red line, it definitely has more variability than the buck-to-doe ratios. You'll see it's fairly consistent and high across the state.

What we get, like in 2018, you'll see the overall state average is pulled down below 30 to 100. That's a concern on a statewide issue, because anything below 35 to 100 we feel like we're having declining populations. What we do see is there are times within any one of those years where you might have an

eco region, one of those herd management units that will have a fawn-to-doe ratio of 10 to 100, and then it might bounce back. I think it's really driven by local conditions. I think deer are affected more by local conditions than elk.

Elk still are affected, but because they have such site fidelity, they go back to the same summer range, they go back to the same winter range. Regardless of conditions, I think you see them being impacted more by what the current status of that habitat is. I think you'll see fawn-to-doe or fawn survival being impacted more by local site conditions, local habitat conditions.

Overall, we're looking for a 35 to 100 to get stable. We're a little bit above that, but the last 20 years, it shows there we've maybe been declining some, a little bit on a statewide. There are definitely populations in the state that have been better in the last 10 years, and some that have been worse. I think it just is localized impacts to those animals.

Vice-Chairman Fernando Clemente: With that being said, thank you for that explanation. With that being said, I noticed that a lot of future research and work that you have planned is on the north part of the state. Can you tell me something about what you have in mind for the south part of the state as for male deer population is very important.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Clemente, the north I pointed out more on the migration because we get migrations. That doesn't mean we don't have radio collars in some of the south. We have some in the southeast for example. We put some out in relationship to a sand conveyor belt that was going in from Texas to New Mexico to look at how that potentially would impact. I think what we could look at a little bit more is, do we see differentiation in survival of females north to south?

A lot of the radial collar data that we've been doing recently has been more on migration, partly because that's where the fawns have come in from. We have received a lot of external funding from the department specifically to look at migrant deer populations. We had this extra flow of radio collars and money come in to put on populations where we knew there was migrants. Because of that corridor migration, money didn't go towards where we had more localized non migrant populations. We haven't collared as much from there.

I think through time, absolutely more interest in what's going on, probably from a survival standpoint than a migration standpoint that we would look at into some of these southern regions. I didn't show it here, because it's been some time, but about roughly 10 years ago, we had three different research projects in some mountain ranges in the south southwest, one in the [unintelligible 01:16:49], one in the San Francisco River, and then one in the [unintelligible 01:16:51] mountains looking at deer survival. Fairly consistent with what we saw up north, but definitely not migrant animals.

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Last, a comment. I like that proposal of the landowners being able to be assigned a number to be able to identify that. I think that is very important for you to be able to track which landowners are, how many are harvesting, how many license, where is the pressure, where is the harvest report on all of that. Obviously, if it's a 10 acre private property, obviously, as you mentioned, if they're harvesting or trying to harvest 50 deer, obviously we know it ain't going to happen, so where is that coming from? That's really good. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Clemente. I agree with that completely. Any other commissioners have any. Commissioner Fulfer.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: He was talking about on the southeast part might have to drop the number of license. What are you seeing affecting the population in the southeast? Is it environmental or predatory or what are you seeing?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Fulfer, I think it's a combination of both. Environmental conditions, predation pressure as well. I think the important thing on all these license numbers is an important thing to note is, even though we might reduce buck license numbers, there's no expectation it'll change the trajectory of the population. If we reduce the license numbers on bucks, we're not going to grow more deer, like an overall arching deer population.

What it'll probably do is increase the hunting experience, more bucks potentially, older age class bucks, but we're not going to see populations all of a sudden start growing, because we have a reduced buck harvest on them. If we were harvesting those, that'd be a different story, but there's other impacts.

Harvest isn't driving population declines. Human hunter harvest on mule deer populations, because we harvest as you saw less than 200 those on a statewide basis.

Other things are driving that. Whether that's habitat, conditions, predation, combination of everything, I think it all adds up in there. Working with land management agencies trying to get more habitat, rain would be huge. If we could get some rain for everything, it probably will have way more impacts on deer populations across the state than anything we do from a license reduction. License reduction is really to deal with quality of the hunt itself rather than the population size of the deer.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: What about the mountain lion? Do y'all monitor those and monitor the population, or how do you handle those? Are they considered a predator of deer?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Fulfer, absolutely, mountain lion's definitely one of their key prey items is mule deer. We monitor mountain lion populations throughout the state. When we went through that, the Bear and Cougar Rule, which happens next year, we'll go through some of the data on that. We've moved throughout the state, looking at spatially explicit models to try to estimate lion populations. In the last 10 years, we probably put 200 to 300 collars on mountain lions to help us refine our models to determine population size of mountain lions that refines our harvest estimates. Excuse me. On mountain lions, we have harvest limits. Basically once we reach a limit, we close the season.

Season opens April 1st through March 31st, but once we reach a threshold, we close it. We adjust those every four years based off any new information we find. One thing I would say on the mountain lion harvest in our southern zones, where we don't get snow, we don't see as much harvest and that's just a function of difficulty of harvesting mountain lions outside of areas where it's easier with snow.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Fulfer. Did you have something else, Chris?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: First of all, just to follow up on Commissioner Fulfer's question, you mentioned the sand conveyor belt specifically. Does the department have any information about the effects of that on deer or other wildlife?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt, I would have to look at the data. I think they're still in data collection so they were doing pre-post and I think the building of the conveyor belt finished recently. We're still monitoring that. We're going to look to see it move. It was more to see if it changed movements and changed how deer move across that landscape. If they go under the conveyor belt, the conveyor belt came higher in some portions to allow deer to pass through. It was really working in cooperation. We worked with, I believe it was called Kermit Conveyor Belt Company. They actually helped fund the study to look at deer movements through there. I'll come back with you and see if they have more up-to-date info on that.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Thanks. I have a couple of other comments. I wanted to mention specifically that I wanted to agree with Commissioner Clemente's comment about the private land registration idea. I support that. I think that's the right direction to move for a number of reasons. That's really good to hear. I also wanted to mention that I really am encouraged to see the shifts toward the quality hunt. In GMU 2B, there's clearly demand for that. We're hearing that. I haven't heard any opposition to it, but I'd be interested if you're getting any pushback. When we discussed this issue last year, I remember one of the big issues was that the same herd is also hunted in Colorado and so, in part, managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. With your potential shift to a quality hunt, will there be coordination with Colorado Parks and Wildlife?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt, yes, absolutely. That was kind of going back to that research project that we're initiating in there to look at buck movement, buck harvests. It won't be in time for this rule cycle. I'll be next rule cycles, is looking at how harvest across jurisdictions happened. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is on board with the study, will probably be capturing in Colorado next year with us too. It's not just a one-and-done this year. We'll probably continue to capture, hoping to have, if not hundreds, multiple hundreds of deer bucks collared throughout in cooperation with Colorado, Southern Newton and potentially Hickory to look at how mule deer bucks move across landscape and how harvest dynamics change across the landscape too.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Thank you. One of the other issues that came up was the management as it relates to best practices for concerns about chronic wasting disease. Can you address that?

Chief Stewart Liley: Yes, Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt. I guess I'd say we're fortunate in that we have chronic wasting disease in New Mexico, located where we've detected it, mainly just in the South Central Southeast in White Sands Missile Range to McGregor. What some of the research has found is spreading of the prion. Chronic wasting disease is a prion-based mutation in the proteins that then are neurological fatal every time. Older age class males are probably larger spreaders of the prion, and so the concern comes in if you have older age class, higher buck-to-doe ratios, you might be potentially having more prevalence of chronic wasting disease.

Some of the research is coming out of Wyoming, Colorado has shown that maybe when you reduce the male segment of the population, you could reduce prevalence in there. I think it's something that we absolutely need to monitor and keep track of and recognize that if it does come into different populations, it might be a management strategy later in time that we need to look at if we do have chronic wasting disease, move into a population, monitor prevalence.

We do chronic wasting disease testing voluntarily, but we will try to do it as much as we can. Colorado does a lot as well to just monitor that population. I think that is a time when we need to come back and look if we do anywhere in the state where it comes up of what is the current strategy in that regional population. Does that promote spreading? Does it promote higher prevalence or not and should we recommend the different change if it is detected in those populations?

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Witt. Circling back to 2B, you mentioned that the Jicarilla and the Utes are going to participate in the migration study?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, the youths have committed to working with us whether they're going to actually radio tag on there. The Jicarilla is still looking at the potential of that. We'll continue to work with them to see what that cooperation looks like and we'll definitely share the data with them, and if they want to actually participate in radio tagging, et cetera, we would be happy to work with that as well, too.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: All right. Thank you. Chief Liley. Anything else, Commissioners? Let's move on to the public areas.

Art Arias: Commissioners, director, first time I've ever been to one of these, so it's pretty exciting for me and a lot of really good information. I'm from Eddy County. I am a 37-year career government employee with the Bureau of Land Management right now. I've worked for the US Forest Service up on the Guadalupe Ranger District. I'm not here representing them.

The reason that I brought that up is to let you know that I have worked my whole career in Eddy County, in Unit 30, out in the Sand Country, Mountain Moore and so forth. I've met a lot of people throughout my career, from the ranchers on the east side of the Guadalupes, to the top of the Guadalupes, to the north side of the Guadalupes. I still talk to those people. I know a lot of guys that work in the oil and gas out in the Indian Basin from Oxy to EOG. We all talk about deer.

To this day, we talk about deer, and the conversations that we're having today is our deer population is really, really declined, really bad in Eddy County and over in Unit 30. I pulled the report for this year's deer tags. We got 2,315 tags that are permitted this year for Unit 30. Talking to people from the north to the South in Unit 30, we almost agree we don't have almost 2,315 deer in there. Our deer population has declined seriously. We've got a problem.

I don't know what it is. I'm not a biologist, but I know that we've got a problem there. We have got to do something to fix it. Thank you for addressing that. You're going to look at Unit 30 down there for maybe a reduction, but we can't go another four more years with these numbers. We have really need to decline our permits that we put out for Unit 30 down there.

I'm a deer hunter myself. I enjoy deer, seeing them. I've done a lot of work up there to improve the deer habitat from prescribed fires, to sheep wire fence removal, to wildlife installations, to this day, I still, if I see a wildlife water arch, drive into there to make sure that it's up and functioning. If it's not, we're reporting it. We're going to go and get it fixed on Unit 30, 31, and 33.

I really hope that we can make a change, because, like I said, if we go another four more years with these numbers, we are going to have a serious problem. It's going to be hard to get that deer herd back up to

where it used to be. Back in '90, '91, '92, if you sat up at the Queen store and had a mountain burger, you could go through photo albums of all the deer hunts and pictures that were there. That used to be the best deer unit in the state of New Mexico. If you've been around for a long time here in the state of New Mexico, we used to have an over-the-counter and everybody go up to the Queen area, hundreds and hundreds and be successful.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you Mr. Arias, your 3 minutes is up.

Art Arias: Yes? I'm sorry.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you very much.

Art Arias: I'm sorry. I don't know how many minutes I had, but anyway, please take this into consideration when you guys are looking at putting out the next four years of deer tags in Unit 30. Thank you, all. Great day. [crosstalk]

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: We appreciate that input. Thank you. Brandon Wynn.

Brandon Wynn: Mr. Chair, Commission. Obviously, my last comments were completely satirical. Like any good satire, it needs to be grounded in fact, and so here's the thing. What I commit to going forward is I'm going to be involved as a citizen in this process as we make these new rules. I commit to be serious. This is a very serious thing and I'm doing it out of a passion for my fellow New Mexico residents. I think that anyone that does an honest assessment of how tags are allocated across the West would say and realize, anyone that knows, right, is that New Mexico does two things with the tag allocation that are unique and unusual at an order of magnitude difference scale. We have a lot more private palm pay-to-play, whatever you want to call it. We have more of those tags in New Mexico, and these are true numbers, than the rest of the Intermountain West combined. We have a pretty small fraction of the total tags and we have more of the private pay-to-play type tags than the rest of the Intermountain West combined, and that's true.

Then there's another factor in there that, that necessarily doesn't have to really be a bad thing, because if you have those private tags like the other states do, what they do that New Mexico doesn't do is they include direct public benefit in that, so like in Utah has. It's probably number two on private tags in the Intermountain West on almost all their private tag programs. If there's going to be private tags, there's going to be some public tags in that same place as part of it, 10%, 20%, 30%. Say, you got a ranch or a group of ranches, so you have small properties. That's an issue, right? What they do in Utah, they force them to make an association, so you're looking at a bigger area so you can share tags between public and private in that area.

That's what I'd like to see, is, obviously, you're not going to just completely gut this and do a whole new thing. You wouldn't want to do it. We have such an entrenched system. You can't just do it overnight, but what I would ask the Commission to at least think about doing is maybe even on a pilot basis, try to create a system, and there's a lot of them. If any commissioners are interested, I know how, basically, all the systems across the West work.

I don't think anyone has done more research on how states privatize and add public benefit than me. I know I'm a pain in the ass in here, but I am committed to giving you constructive help if you are interested in doing this. What I'm thinking is maybe for the private deer and the private elk, maybe have some associations formed, voluntary to the landowners. There's so much money that we've had from these different funds. I'll finish my thought on the elk rule. I'll just continue there. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you. Thank you, Brandon. Jesse.

Jesse Deubel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, Commissioners. I'd like to start by thanking Chief Liley and his team for meeting with the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. We've already had an opportunity to discuss a lot of the feedback that I'll provide here. I would like to say that the New Mexico Wildlife Federation would like to see some of those primitive muzzleloader hunts kept. We certainly supported the removal of scopes. I understand the reasoning.

Now, that the scopes are gone, it kind of evens the playing field regardless of weapon type, but I would argue that there's still a pretty significant difference between an inline muzzleloader and a flintlock or a percussion cap. There are certainly some hunters in New Mexico that really appreciate the nostalgic nature of some of those primitive muzzleloader hunts. We as an organization would like to see those remain available for the hunters of the state.

The second thing I'd like to mention is that ranch registration is certainly a huge step in the right direction. We appreciate the department and Chief Liley and his team coming up with that proposal and strongly support that. We also really appreciate the idea of capping those unlimited tags. The New Mexico Wildlife Federation is a strong proponent of the North American model of wildlife conservation.

As you all know, there are seven tenets to that model, one of which is that wildlife management must be based on science. I just don't think you can really make a strong argument that unlimited tags being decided by any individual, who may or may not be a wildlife biologist or ecologist or qualified scientifically to be able to make the decision as to how many to sell, I don't think that qualifies as scientific wildlife management. I think the cap is a really good idea.

I think that those numbers need to be set based on population estimates, population goals, so on and so forth. I think we ought to let the agency and the biologists make those decisions rather than allowing private landowners to decide how many tags they can sell with no ceiling. With that, I'll just again appreciate the agency for their hard work. Thank you, Chief Liley, for the presentation.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you very much for that, Jesse. Did you register, ma'am?

Christina Mann: My name is Christina Mann, and I am a wildlife biologist.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Could you go ahead and get a tag or a registration filled out real quick?

Christina Mann: It's pertinent right now to the deer management.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Okay, go ahead, but go ahead and fill one out after you're done, please, so we have it on record.

Christina Mann: Sure. My favorite zone is 31, and there's no lack of bucks in there, trophy bucks too. The problem is it's near carrying capacity, and water is a limiting factor, especially when they're competing with livestock with grazing. The solution would be a doe hunt. I put out game cameras. I see all the time senescent does, non-reproductive does. I've also seen what I suspect to be CWD-carrying deer. They're just skin and bones, and always the does. Hunting restriction is only one tool in wildlife management, but we need to go hunt desperately.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Ma'am, could you give me your name, please, so I can-- [silence] Okay. Oh, do you have anybody online? Yes.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Mr. Chairman, we will start with Jonathan.

Jonathan Skiles: Hello, can everyone hear me okay?

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Yes, we can.

Jonathan Skiles: I just wanted to add a quick comment/recommendation on the private land owner ranch registration, basically. I do have a small property. I have about 3 acres. I live in the middle of National Forest and I am not opposed to the idea of the private land registration. I was curious, however, if that's going to be as complicated as the EPLUS system. The EPLUS system, if you've ever looked into that, is pretty involved. I would prefer, if we're going to do the private land opportunity registration that that be a little bit less complicated than the EPLUS system, because I'm not asking for elk tags that I can sell. I have a small property, but I do have a fair amount of deer on the property and I would like to be able to buy a tag every once in a while for myself or my children to maybe take one deer. I don't necessarily mind the idea of private land registration, if the size of the property is not a limiting factor, and it's less complicated than the EPLUS system is. Again, I don't have an issue with that. I have actually run into hunters that were hunting on public with private land tags. They were hunting close to their private land, but they were hunting on public, and it did irritate me that they could just buy a tag and I had to draw the tag.

I'm not opposed to the idea at all. I think it's a reasonable idea, but I would like to see it not limited by the acreage. You can maybe limit the number of tags to the size of the acreage, but not exclude properties because they are "too small". I would love to have a thousand acres, obviously, but that's not the case at the moment. Anyway, those are my two thoughts on that. I'm in favor of it, if it's less complicated than the EPLUS system and the size of the acreage doesn't matter. I do appreciate the opportunity for input.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Thank you, Jonathan. Next, we have Kerrie Romero.

Kerrie Romero: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Commissioners. Carrie Romero on behalf of the New Mexico Council of Outfitters and Guides.

I just wanted to chime in real quickly just to say that we are in general support of basically the entire presentation, even though I missed three quarters of the presentation.

Everything that Chief Liley said towards the end of it, we're in favor of. I just wanted to mention that we're also in favor of registering of the private land ranches. Hopefully, that will cut down on some of the abuses that the previous gentleman spoke about. We really would like to see private land tags only on private land only. If it would be possible to do some type of a program similar to the EPLUS program for deer and then also for pronghorn, that would be great. We would love to see that. I know that that could be a struggle in terms of staffing and whatnot for the department, but we are in generally in favor. Thank you.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Thank you, Kerrie. Mr. Chairman, that's everyone.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Tristanna. Before we move on to the next presentation, which is elk, how about we take a break? How about 10 minutes? Chief is going to proceed with the presentation of the initial discussion of the Elk Rule 19.31.14 NMAC. Go ahead, Chief Liley?

Chief Stewart Liley: Members of the commission, as you say, this is our first presentation on elk as well. Just like the rest of the rules, will go out to public comment and more formalize the rules as the year progresses. Just a little bit of background on elk and elk management. Elk is split into three different management zones across the state, primary, secondary, and special. What you see here is the highlighted GMUs are one of our 14 distinct herd units, one of those different herd units that we really focus on. Herd units for elk is what we more or less consider a closed population of elk.

There definitely is some movement between them, but it's how we try to manage those herds. Within those herd management units, you'll see a diagonal hashed line within those GMUs. That's our primary management zone. The primary management zone is where licenses are set by rule and distributed between public and private based upon land ownership and land ownership split. If it's a GMU where the land ownership in the primary is 50% public, 50% private, we determine sustainable harvest is a hundred bulls, 50 go to the private land, 50 go through the public **[unintelligible 01:43:11]**. That's how it happens in the primary management zone. Again, that's that diagonal hash lines that you see within those herd units.

We then have secondary management zone. Let me back up real quick on primary. We have two different herd objectives. Optimal opportunity management or quality herd management. We'll discuss that here in a second. Similar to deer, where we have an opportunity versus quality, different kind of criteria for elk than we have for deer. In the secondary management zone, a lot of that is where it's either the GMU is almost entirely private land, or maybe marginal habitat, or maybe agriculture, where we're not trying to promote elk growth or elk in those periods, or trying to prevent elk establishment in some of those areas. We don't have a management objective specifically set by rule in those areas like we do in the primary, where it's either opportunity or quality. Then we have two GMUs that are entirely private land up in the north, central northeast, 55A and 54, where we consider that special management zones. Those are where we have elk herds that we work with private landowners to do an allocation ranch-by-ranch basis. A lot of large ranches, some of those ranches are in excess of 500,000 acre ranches. Entire populations almost sit on those herds. Those are three management zones. I just point that out, because of that, we have different license structures in how we set a seasons, et cetera.

Real quick, just looking at. What you have highlighted here is the two years. Again, our rules are four-year rule cycles. 2021/22 is the previous elk rule. 23/24 is the current elk rule. Just looking at that license numbers, as you see, is fairly consistent across the two-rule cycles. Not much changes there. Harvest reporting rates are fairly stable. Success rates are stable as two.

One of the things that I want to point out, cow harvest is fairly consistent, but what you'll see there in the new rule cycle is bull harvest dropped. That was strategic at the last rule cycle. That's where you see when we pulled scopes off muzzleloaders is when we wanted to try to get at not reducing hunter opportunity, but allowing for bull harvest sticker decrease in some of these areas. We saw that.

We'll get to that more in the Greater Gila herd management, where that's where a lot of our muzzleloader hunts are. We definitely saw a decrease in success rates in our muzzleloader hunts. That led probably to that decrease in bull harvest, even though license numbers virtually stayed unchanged, maybe increased a little bit. Just wanted to point that out.

In terms of our management objectives, I mentioned in our primary management zone, we have two different management objectives. What you'll see there is really it's we're trying to manage for a bull mortality rate. Elk are a little bit more unique than some of our other species, where as a yearling male, there're typically spikes. Sometimes you see a fork at the top of the spike.

Rarely do you see a branch antlered bull at a year-old animal. From a helicopter, we could really detect what percentage of the bull population we harvest on an annual basis. If we look at 100 bulls on the ground and 50% of them are spikes, we assume that we're killing about 50% of our bulls. If you have a consistent population. If the trajectory is a survival or more or less consistent survival of calves, that we would say, yes, you're killing about 40-whatever percent of your ratio to branch antlered bulls to spikes are, kind of get you at what we assume our bull mortality rates are.

That's also been looked at within not only survey methodologies, but empirical data from radio collars too. It's a good surrogate for us to be able to use just because of the phenology of an elk in terms of growth. In our quality hunt management, we try to keep our bull harvest mortality below 35%. A lot of these units we're significantly below. We're in the 20%. Then we want to make sure those season dates are aligned to be where the timing and length the hunts are desirable. They might be closer to the rut, higher success rate, but fewer licenses.

Then we look to see to make sure two-thirds of our hunters are satisfied with the experience in their hunt. That's one of the things that we ask in the harvest reporting, what's your satisfaction? That's how we do that. Optimal opportunity, we're not as concerned about bull mortality rates. Just like deer, we don't really see a population-level effect of bull harvest on elk until we get below a ratio of maybe 8:100 on elk. Maybe a little bit lower than we see on a deer. Just a much larger harem than we see in deer or breeding groups. We also look at a season structure to make sure that it's not such that the season dates or timing, we have such high success that we can't have the amount of opportunity we want to offer. It might be further away from the rut, et cetera. Then we look at to make sure that at least one-third of our hunters are satisfied with the experience. Going through just some of our general proposed changes. I'm going to go through with elk herd unit by herd unit here in a second. Again, like all rules, adjusting to season dates for the calendar shift.

One of the bigger proposals that we are looking at this rule cycle, and this comes back to Commissioner Witt, your question about rut and rut timing. What we're seeing, probably with elk, especially in recent years, is peak of rut, which corresponds to peak of birthing, is still happening at the same time. We're still seeing peak of calves being born around the first week of June. What we're starting to see is a prolonged birth rate. Elk, if they're in really great condition, if everything's well, you get this huge pulse right around the 1st of June, but plus or minus five days, and then calving stops.

We're seeing the tail end of that start to be extended. The peak still is right around the 1st of June, but we're starting to see calving come later and later. What you hear from hunters is the ruts later. The rut necessarily isn't later. The peak of calving is still the same. The peak of the rut is still the same, but the rut is being protracted. It's a function of most likely cows coming into estrus at a later time period because of habitat conditions, most likely. Habitat conditions or some other conditions where elk really cycle very tight when they're in really good body condition. If they're not, they cycle later.

I think you're seeing that more so in recent years, because of the drought. You have this dry spring, low snowfall winter, and then you really aren't seeing monsoons kick in hard until maybe late July, if they kick in into August. Even if you've seen in recent history monsoons going all the way into September more. I think you're seeing cows come into estrus at a later period. There, you hear the ruts coming later.

Again, the peak is still the same. There's been some comments saying we should move the archery season later. We are not proposing that because it still would be right in the peak of the rut if we move that archery season later. What we are proposing in our primary management zones, though, is moving the start of that first rifle hunt back. We're also proposing starting everyone in the primary management zone have the first hunt via muzzleloader hunt.

Again, at the last rule cycle, we took scopes off muzzleloaders. For your all's information prior to taking scopes off of muzzleloaders, our success rates on muzzleloaders and rifle hunts were virtually the same. You might as well just made them a rifle hunt from a success rate standpoint. After taking scopes off of muzzleloaders, we've seen success rates drop. We're proposing making that first hunt, maybe in this

prolonged rut period, to be the first hunt-- muzzleloader hunt followed by a rifle hunt. In all of our primary management zones, we're proposing again in that hashed area, having the first hunt be a muzzleloader hunt, then followed by any legal sporting weapons the following weekend. In 2027, we'd be looking at October 9th for the first muzzleloader hunt, followed a week later by the first rifle hunt **[unintelligible 01:52:00]**.

One of the other things that we're proposing, and we heard this really a lot during this last rule cycle and the rule cycle a little bit before that, is in those GMUs where we have primary management zone and secondary management zones. For example, in GMU 13 or 17, 13 would be the primaries up around the **[unintelligible 01:52:28]** mountains, secondary would come in around like San Acacia along I-25, those areas. You go from the mountains, where the core of that elk habitat is, to where you get into ag land along the Rio Grande corridor. When we put that in secondary because we don't want it to be elk establishing necessarily along those ag land, et cetera, in the deserts. We're looking at aligning right now the primary management zone and secondary management zone have different hunt start dates. There's concern about having secondary management zone hunt prior to the primary management. We're looking at trying to make that where we have split PMZ, primary management zone, and secondary management zone GMUs that they hunt starting the same date.

We have 21 hybrid units. When we go through the presentation, not each one of the herd management units it'll show which one has a hybrid. One of the things that we do as we potentially go to this model, what we would be concerned about is still depredation on private land in those hay fields. In those meadows, chile fields. For example, in 17, is working on a case-by-case basis with landowners, probably on cow harvest, maybe prior to the start of a primary management's zone hunt, not necessarily for bulls. That's what we're looking at here is to align those primary and secondary in those hybrid zones.

The other thing that we're looking at is we do have some issues of overlap of weapon types used for different species in GMUs. For example, we might have a rifle deer hunt in a unit where we have a right muzzleloader elk hunt going on at the same time. It just creates confusion and issues from a law enforcement perspective, but also from a muzzleloader elk counter competing with someone hunting with rifle deer. We're trying to standardize weapon type across species if there is overlap in hunts.

What we do every rule cycle it just license **[unintelligible 01:54:34]** on biological data? I should have mentioned at the start, elk we do harvest a lot of cows. We do harvest cows as population management, typically to stabilize those populations or reduce if we have some populations we're reducing. Of all of our species elk, we harvest the female segment fairly heavily compared to most of our other species in the state. What you'll see here, and we'll get into more details on the others, is some potential reduction in licenses potentially in the Jemez herd unit, Greater Gila, Valle Vidal and if you see that AM brackets, that's for analyst licenses. We're maybe looking at both reductions if it's not bracketed, and then maybe some increases in the San Juan herd, north central, Sacramento, and Ruidoso. We'll go through those in a second.

Just like the deer hunt I mentioned, where we have a statewide deer hunt for one draw tag. We have a statewide elk hunt that's one draw tag. It's not designated as quality, but just put the designation on as a quality on that one. Just like deer and the rest of the species, the same on the buying the license prior to the hunt start. Then, for any hunt where the published season dates are less than six, you wouldn't be able to buy the license once the hunt starts.

We always look at every rule cycle management zone boundaries if it's necessary. For example, if we should extend the primary management zone or if we should shrink the primary management zone, expands secondary. We do that at every rule cycle based off of some of the biological aspects that we would see. If we see herds establishing in areas where it's not depredation complaints, where we want that herd to establish, we'll look at those boundaries. I mentioned we split the licenses based off the public-private split in the primary. We ensure that there was no change in the private-public split because the land swaps or land sales every four-year rule. We adjust that if there was a land sale between public and private or a land swap. It's very rare. It doesn't happen that much. It typically doesn't change the makeup of the GMU, but we ensure that we reassess that based off of any land swaps or sales.

I'll go in detail more on the herd units. You'll see in here each herd unit that's listed, including the GMUs that it may encompass. This first slide in the northwest, there are single GMUs for these herd units and a

lot of these there are multiple GMUs in the herd units. Underneath each herd unit is the first bullet is if that unit's designated or the herd is designated as optimal opportunity management or quality. None of these are under quality. Then what you'll see there underneath that the bull-to-cow-to-calf ratio, so the bull is first. For example, in San Juan that's 36 bulls to a 100 cows, 31 calves to a to a 100 cows. In elk, we're looking at a little bit lower calf-to-cow ratio for a stable population right around 30 is what we think is stable. Potentially above 30, we could see some growth. Then what you'll see underneath that, if it says PMZ/SMZ, that means it's a hybrid unit. That ties back to that recommendation that we would have where the hunt dates on primary secondary start the same. You'll be able to see our hybrid units and then any recommendation in there. San Juan herd, for example, we're looking at slight increases in antlerless licenses. That's GMU 2 as a whole. We don't split it out for elk. We're really trying to manage that more for deer. We're seeing an increase in that elk herd in that area. We did increase licenses at the last rule cycle. We're looking at potential increases again at this rule cycle to look at that. Lindrith herd moving down is a fairly stable population. Those ratios are the last five years. I should have stated that that's not a single point estimate. That's the average over the last five years. Variability more on the calf ratio than the bull ratio, of course, but that is the last five-year average. We're proposing maintaining no changes basically in the Lindrith herd.

Mount Taylor is one herd that was really struggling over time. Really in the early 2010 is where we saw calf-to-cow ratios at 6 to a 100, 9 to a 100. Over the five-year average, you'll see it's bumped up to 36 to a 100, which is great. That's part of also where El Bar lives is in the Mount Taylor herd. Calf recruitment has improved over this last five-year growth cycle. It's not necessarily consistent. We see these big variability. Within that five-year average, we saw as high as in the 40s as low as in the 20s, but the averaged out at 36. We don't think it's ready to start a cow harvest during this rule cycle. It's the only herd in the state where we don't have cow harvest in it. We're not proposing a cow harvest yet. We're trying to still grow back that herd. Only herd in the state that we've been trying to grow.

Zuni herd just to the south of there fairly consistent. We're proposing no changes in there. Moving on to the North central region, this is probably our largest elk herd in the state encompasses GMUs-4, 5B, 50, 51, 52. It is the north-central portion of the state. We call the San Antonio/Taos Elk Herd one of our highest elk herds where we have harvest opportunities in there. We have seen some decent recruitment across there over the last five years. Nothing in the '40s, '50s, some years we'll get there with some of our other herds, but it has the potential to maybe see a slight increase in antlerless licenses, probably in GMU 51. You'll see that in the bottom bullet there. We have issued some population management hunts in GMU 51 since 2014, mainly to address winter concentrations and depredation concerns.

That's **[unintelligible 02:00:50]** that area. A big area of concern from a depredation standpoint. We've worked with landowners in there. Again, if we're going to look at harvest at whole across that herd unit, we typically look at where we have those ag conflicts, mainly in the Chama-Luna area. If we were to propose increases in there, it'd probably be antlerless and looking in 51. All those units have two hybrid primary secondary management zones in there, and that's 5B, 51. Where that occurs is along the Rio Chama River, basically along that corridor where you have a lot of agriculture running from Abiquiú down into Española, more or less.

Because we do a lot of harvest in the herd, it's monitored probably more than some of our others, this and the Gila elk herd. What you're looking at here is just our observed bull-to-cow and calf-to-cow ratios through time, going back through 2016. As you see there, our calf ratios are more variable than anything. It's just like deer, but it's fairly consistent, not ever changing that much. We're pretty stable. We did see a decrease probably this year in that calf-to-cow ratio. Probably more drought-related than anything. Bull-to-cow ratios have been fairly consistent over time as well.

Then, in terms of bull and cow harvest, you'll see we've been fairly consistent in bull harvest through time. We did have a dip in 2019, both in cow and bull harvest. I think that was driven by climatic conditions during the hunt. Really hot during that year. It just reduced success rates in that year.

It wasn't a function of licenses. Those peaks that you see in cow harvest in 2018, 2020 was because of structured population management hunts that we were targeting, trying to increase cow harvest. Overall, fairly consistent harvest through time in those populations.

Looking at some of the data that we've collected in this herd in terms of movement, it's interesting. We always thought that there was maybe more movement into Colorado out of this herd, and it really isn't. What we're seeing as a east west movement more than anything, really winter range off the high country. You'll see those corridors where they're using it, and then they drop off into the flats basically off San Antonio Mountain, or they'll drop off on the west side, Mesa de los Viejos. They're coming off both sides, summering in the center. We don't see a huge migration length. We do get up to 51 miles. Those are those animals that are moving up into Colorado and actually wintering in Colorado. They're wintering just outside of, if you're familiar with it, south of Mogote, that area. Most of our animals are contained actually within New Mexico and not much migration up into the high country in the summer that come from there. You'll also see the timing of migration, average days. Spring migration takes longer. They're following greenup, whereas winter migration is probably driven by snow, and elk if it's a higher snow it's a quicker migration.

Moving on to the Jemez herd, you'll see there we've had pretty low recruitment in the Jemez herd. That one result in 2024 that calf-to-cow ratio, I don't think that's just a spurious result. I think it was observers stuff in there, but we're looking more in that 20 to 100, so not a potential decreasing herd. We're looking at potentially reducing antlerless licenses in this herd unit, most likely looking at where we have the highest success rate. What we do is we look at, if we're going to reduce antlerless licenses, we want to reduce as few as possible. We look at the highest success hunts and target those ones. If it's a 50% success rate hunt, we only have to cut two licenses to save one elk, versus if it's a 25% success rate hunt, we have to cut four licenses to save that same elk, so we still want to give that opportunity. Just on harvest in that herd, you'll see it's been fairly stable, but we have been increasing cow harvest through time. That was because that herd was growing. I think we increased some harvest over this last rule cycle and licenses over the last rule cycle. Again, we saw lower calf ratios, though in this last rule cycle, to where I think we've just gone a little bit too much. We want to stabilize it. We're not talking big decreases, probably in the 10% or less decrease in antlerless licenses.

Real quick on the Jemez herd, that herd does not move very much. Core of that herd's on bias Valles Caldera National Preserve moves off the preserve when there's higher snow. Winters more down into the Coyote Canyon, Dome Wilderness, Bandelier, and then a little bit of wintering to the north and also to the west off towards Cuba. You'll see the majority of that summer range is all on Valles Caldera. Really short migration when they do migration, either spring and fall, it's just a couple of days, and migration length is very small. It's just an elevational migration. It's not a distance for resources. It's just moving off the top of the mountain to get to resources.

Moving on to the Southwest, really what we're looking at for these three herd units Fence Lake, Datil, and San Mateo, is really no changes. Fairly stable. You'll see the asterisk on those numbers on the ratios. It's to say use that with a little bit of caution because the number of animals observed on an annual basis was less than 250, so they're high intervals. We didn't put confidence intervals around those, but if we put the confidence intervals around those they'd be fairly high confidence intervals in there. Just a change in those units, but one of the one herds that we are looking at, probably a decent change in terms of reduction in license is the Greater elk Gila herd. We are seeing a decreasing population now that the Gila elk herd. You'll see we're also our calf-to-cow ratios below what would be sustainable.

I'll get into the next few slides on one of the largest elk research projects we've ever undertaken was in this elk herd, and the results of some of that. We're seeing a decrease in this herd. This is a herd that we've always had as our quality elk management. Gila has been known as our trophy elk herd, but we're starting to see some concerns. We did reduce bull licenses in this herd, the last rule cycle, to try to get back at some better bull quality, but we're still at a decreasing herd. You'll see here just harvest through time. It's been on a slight decline in there on the bull harvest. Cow harvest has been increasing a little bit. Again, I think we're going to have to look at reducing that.

In terms of bulls, one of the things we really want to look at, especially in where we have these quality hunt management, like the Gila, the proportion of bulls that we classify as mature bulls versus raghorn bulls. When we say a raghorn bull is probably a bull that's under the age of five, maybe under six. A mature bull is five and a half, six and a half plus bull. You'll see there is a slight decrease through time in this proportion that we're classifying as mature bull. During the last rule cycle was a reduction in bull

licenses. Also, these units have a lot of muzzle-loaded only hunts, and so we're pulling scopes off of muzzleloaders-- I'll get to that in the next slide, was to reduce some of the success.

I don't think we're going to look at a big reduction in bull licenses right now. This will take time. To build back the mature bull portion because we're looking at a five and a half year old bull, we wouldn't have even seen it yet this rule cycle, where it's going to take some time to build back that portion just because we have to let those bulls get a little bit older. We think that reduction in the bull harvest last year, with maybe an overall reduction in cow harvest that theoretically leads to more calf survival, should help improve the bull population.

Looking at success rates on muzzleloader hunts in there, you will see the pattern on all those where the success rates are slightly lower on those muzzleloader hunts without scopes versus with scopes. That was our proposal at the last rule cycle. I think it's what we expected. It is what we were hoping for. Again, if you go back to our general proposals across the primary management zone, some of these other hunts, 16A, 16B, 16C, and 16D, there's not a muzzleloader **[unintelligible 02:10:28]** there's a rifle hunt starting in that first October period. We would propose making that first time a muzzleloader hunt, where we'll see probably success rates drop on the bulls a little bit in just that alone, to where we'll probably have less bull harvest overall.

I want to touch on some of the research that we did in that unit. We, in cooperation with Arizona Game and Fish, radio collared almost 900 cow elk and about 500 calves to look at mortality and survival. A lot of it was looking at, as some of you are familiar with, this is where the Mexican gray wolf population is. We've heard a lot of concerns about the impacts of Mexican gray wolf population on our elk herd, et cetera. What you'll see here is our annual cow survival is 76%. We were previously estimating that at 81% approximately. We're less than optimal in terms of what we would want to see on our cow survival. In that graphic to the right, upper graphic, cow survival is being driven by human harvest. Anthropogenic mortality is human-caused mortality. If you exclude human mortality, human harvest mortality, our survival rates are about 90% on our radio collared animals. When you include that human harvest, we're down at that 76% average. Harvest is driving the cow survival in this, and that's why we're going to be proposing reducing cow licenses. That population is declining. Half survival was really low, too, is the other thing. If you look at that bottom graphic, that's calf survival, looked at between seasons, and it's really low summer survival. Basically, they're born, die. They're not surviving the summer period. Those that do survive the summer period they'll have fairly high over-winter survival. Above 75% over winter survival, which is good from the perspective of it, but just we are not getting them past that early survival.

In terms of what is the leading cause of mortality, this is about adult female radio collars. Again, anthropogenic, that's our first one, ANT. Human harvest is our leading cause of mortality, followed by other, which is everything from roadkill to disease to malnutrition, then mountain lion. PUP is predation unknown, so as an unknown predator, they couldn't really determine what it is because it'd been fed on so long that they couldn't have determined the exact predator. Then wolf is that last one. Again, on our adult cows, human harvest was our leading cause. If we pull that adult harvest, or excuse me, human-caused harvest out and look at what's going on in terms of our other causes of mortality, really, mountain lions, others, so again, malnutrition, vehicle strikes, et cetera, are higher. Then, wolf predation is next to mountain lion predation. Overlapping intervals, obviously, but it is the second-highest predation.

Looking at calf mortality, again, a little bit different story. You start with our summer survival, is where it was really low. If you recall from that first graphic, we had really low survival in there. Summer mortality was driven by a lot of factors. It's not one single factor, as you can see there. The anthropogenic that's very low. Summer, we include into September, seasonality. Summer goes all the way into September. We do have a slight human harvest to calves in September on the archery hunts, and that's probably what that is, but also road strikes. Followed by bear, that's what the next one is. Coyote **[unintelligible 02:14:37]** is both mountain lion and bobcat predation. Other is just a combination of disease, malnutrition, et cetera. Predation unknown cause calves, if you don't get to them right away, it's hard to determine cause of mortality, and then wolf.

Then, if you look at the bottom, that's just the same. The leading causes of mortality in the wintertime shift to predation unknown, and it's just general predation in there. I think what's interesting this graphic in the right is stratified by wolf exposure. If they were in the high-density wolf areas versus the low-density wolf

areas, and what you'll see there is in our higher-density wolf areas higher wolf exposure, we definitely saw higher predation on calves in the summertime than in our low wolf areas. You actually saw some of those other causes of mortality be higher in the no wolf areas. For example, coyote predation was higher in no-wolf areas than wolf areas, and that's to be expected, wolves excluding coyotes. Overall, predation didn't really change if it was high wolf or low wolf, but we just had a switch in what the main predator type was within our high wolf, low wolf areas.

Again, our population we look at it in terms of the growth rate, and it's called lambda. A lambda of one is a stable population. If we're at one, everything's moving along stable, you're not growing, you're not decreasing. Our projected lambdas on this was about 0.9. We're seeing almost a 10% decrease in this population on an annual basis. That's why we're looking at a recommendation to decrease cow licenses in this population. Again because we're not going to be able to really drive the calf survival. Calf survival a lot was driven, wolf wasn't leading mortality as other, et cetera. That's probably more malnutrition, drought-related, maybe some additive predation as well, but calf survival was really low, other being a lot of that causes that. Where we can drive the population dynamics is in cow harvest and reducing cow harvest. That's what you'll see our recommendations coming out for the Gila herd is a reduced cow harvest in that herd.

Again, I talked about aligning those muzzleloader hunts to be the first and then rifle. Then we do have one hybrid unit in there in 16 to maybe start the hunt dates at the same primary and secondary. The lesser Gila herds, so these are the herds that fall off the **[unintelligible 02:17:21]** a little bit. 21AB, 23, 24, fairly stable in those herds. We don't harvest very high in those herds. We're recommending no changes at this time. Probably increase a little bit more survey efforts in these units, too, outside the Greater Gila, we've seen through time, especially the last 15 to 20 years, more elk start to populate some of these **[unintelligible 02:17:46]**.

The Sacramento elk herds, so just to the west of us here, GMU 34, and then the Ruidoso herd 36. These herds are highly productive, for the most part. They've been above 35 to 100 and high bull-to-cow ratios you'll see there as well. We might consider some increases in licenses there. We're looking at it right now. We've increased GMU 34 licenses and 36 over multiple rule cycles. We're going to get probably to a point where we keep increasing, to where success rates drop because hunter densities get so high that we might actually harvest fewer as we put more hunters on the ground. We're looking to see if we're at that balance right now, if increasing is appropriate or not.

We also are working with Mescalero. This herd has both. The Ruidoso herd to the north is separated-- It's more or less one herd, I should say. Really, 34, 36 is separated by Mescalero Apache in the center of that herd. We're collaborating with them right now. We're getting ready to deploy a bunch of GPS collars on Mescalero next month to look at how movements occur across Mescalero to the north and the south, but also look at some of our anecdotal harvest. As we put more pressure on, we think we see more of a refugia on the Mescalero. We should be able to determine if we're seeing that refugia thing happen where elk are getting smart, avoiding harvest by moving on to Mescalero, et cetera.

Then in the Northeast, all these herds, we're not recommending any changes, fairly stable on all these populations. The Ute, Midnight, and San Cristobal herd we have low harvest. That's why you're seeing no changes, even though we have low calf to cow ratios and really low number of elk observed. That ratio has high confidence intervals around it as well.

Real quick, just in the San Cristobal herd, if you recall the **[unintelligible 02:19:55]** deer herd. This is the same we caught on **[unintelligible 02:20:00]** on the elk herd, too. They follow similar patterns as the deer. They just go up and down a gradient. They're going up into the Latirs and the Calabacillas in the summertime, coming back down towards the **[unintelligible 02:20:13]** in the winter. Really-

Chief Stewart Liley: -small migration, it's just an elevational change is what you're seeing, really quick migration time frame. Then the Valle Vidal, this herd, it's our only once in a lifetime elk hunt. We are seeing decreasing calf ratios in this population, and we've seen increase, decrease through time. It's historically been more suppressed. We're looking at potential reductions again in cow licenses. There's not a lot, but it definitely is a population that we're concerned about calf ratios. It's up a little bit in the most recent years, but you'll see 21/22 was really low. With that, I would take questions.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Commissioners. Commissioner Witt, you have a question?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Thanks for the presentation, Chief [unintelligible 02:21:17]. Start with maybe an easier one. Why do you think Mount Taylor has such highly variable recruitment relative to the Zuni's just on the other side of the 40 there?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt, I think they're driven more on-- That herd goes and utilizes winter range off to the east, towards Albuquerque, what's now the El Bar, and then when drought hits, it's pretty hard on them. It's definitely a lower rainfall zone in that shadow off Mount Taylor to the east, moving towards Black Mesa, and I think they're being impacted more by that. I also think they got into what I'll call a predator pit. That population went so low back in about 10 years ago. We thought it was probably less than a 1000 to 1500 animals, and I think you just didn't have a period to where-- Elk strategy from a calving, they're really highly synchronized birthing, and they swamp their main predators, and there it was coyotes, and they over swamp the coyotes. Coyotes could really kill out calves for the first 10, 20 days to be effective, and then once you get past that, the coyote predation kicks way down. What we saw, we radio-marked a lot of calves, close to 400 calves, is coyote predation was really high. I think we got past where the population has gotten to a threshold where they're starting to swamp coyote predation and coming back. Zuni's has never been in that either predator pit kind of a thing, and it also has habitat to the south that probably isn't as affected by drought conditions as the Mount Taylor herd.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Okay, second question I have is about the reduction in cow harvest that you referred to in the Gila, which sounds fully justified with those lambdas being around 0.9. It makes a lot of sense. I just wanted to ask if you could expound on how you might go about that. The department's thought about whether they'll either eliminate some cow hunts or reduce the number of tags in those hunts, or potentially take either-sex archery hunts and convert them to bull only.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt. The first look that we'll do is look at cow hunts that were the most successful. What we see in general for elk is the later the cow hunt is, once you get past about November 15 and later, we see higher success. Then we'll have to look at those to say, "Do we eliminate those late-season cow hunts? Do we move those cow hunts to earlier to where we still have some opportunity, but it's going to be a lot lower success rate?" We'll look at the highest success rate cow harvest. Whatever hunt has the highest cow harvest in it, that's the first one we're going to target, whether it's for a full reduction or elimination. We're going to go through that analysis and processing that in the next couple of months once harvest reports are in for this year.

I think the one thing that I would throw out there too, that we're going to have to really look at, we do have some youth encouragement hunts in the Greater Gila Elk Herd. Youth encouragement hunts happen over Thanksgiving weekend and the weekend following Christmas. High success rates on those hunts. We're probably going to have to look at reducing or getting rid of some of those youth encouragement hunts or moving those to a different time frame, just because they're not going to be sustainable in order for us to continue to have those.

Again, when we're looking at some of these cow hunts, success rates in the 60% to 70%, those are the ones we are going to need to target. Those are some of those hunts, and it's not sustainable. Whether we move that to a different time frame where we know that, yes, if we move that it might move to a 30% success rate hunt so we don't have to go on a full elimination of the hunt. Still offer some opportunity, but it's not going to be as high success. We're in the process of trying to go through what hunts we would potentially eliminate and/or move.

Historically, when we've looked at youth encouragement hunts and reducing or eliminating, we try to look at other places in the state where, if we're going to increase, for example, 51 licenses. We used to harvest cow elk in a youth encouragement hunt in GMU 50. 50 didn't have as much depredation concerns. We had huge high success rates. It probably wasn't sustainable. We moved those licenses to a youth encouragement hunt in 51. We would look at trying to doing some of that, trying not to necessarily cut youth opportunities, but looking at how we can move those hunts in different places. We still have that opportunity, but not having the population level impacts on there.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Good. I'm glad the department's thought through how to limit youth discouragement, that's good. Another question I had is about the discrepancy between private and public hunters. For example, where on the same GMU, public draw hunters will be limited to a five-day period, but private land hunters have the flexibility to choose their five-day period. Can you address that and

whether you think it might be possible to eliminate that discrepancy between public and private opportunity that occurs?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt. On the public draw side, a lot of times where we have the specific five days is to try to prevent overcrowding on public lands. If we said, "Pick any five days from October X to December Y," a lot of people might try to go hunt the very first period. On private land, we only allow the selection of any five days within that season on private deeded land only. It's only on those deeded properties, so they're not hunting on public land. It's not a density, like an overcrowding issue, that we're worried about on the public draw hunts or over the counter, where everyone would overcrowd. You see this in some of the states where you have over-the-counter elk licenses or high number of elk licenses on public, to where you see elk movement. Elk are probably a little bit wiser to harvest pressure than some of the other species, where they shift distribution, and they'll go to refuges real quick. Harvest success rates drop. Colorado has the largest elk population in the nation, yet they're at about 15% to 12% average success rate. They offer 3000 plus licenses in their state, but we're at about 30%, 35% success. We're trying to balance hunter density with higher success on the public side with that. Again, private land, where it's any five days, it is selecting on your private deeded land. If you're going to hunt, like in the EPLUS allowance on unit-wide in our primary management zone, you have to hunt in a corresponding public hunt date. You don't get to choose any five days outside of that.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: How does that window get assigned in those cases?

Chief Stewart Liley: On the unit-wide tags, you have to follow the public hunt period. If you want to hunt in the unit-wide authorization, you have to select a public hunt that timeframe. You would say, "I'm going to hunt this hunt," and not any five days from October one or whatever, the October date to December 31.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: They select it, rather than being assigned, they could select the first one every time, or?

Chief Stewart Liley: Chairman Stump, excuse me. Commissioner Witt, that is correct.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: I would like you to help me to understand the system that you explained, where based on the fraction of public land and private land within a primary management unit in a GMU, the tags are allocated into two pools, to private and public. That's correct, right? Is that accurate?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt, that is correct, yes.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Within the private fraction, only some fraction of that private land is actually registered with the EPLUS program, right?

Chief Stewart Liley: That's correct.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: The other fraction of private allocated tags are essentially allocated into the private bin because of deeded land that's not registered in EPLUS and might not be contributing to elk habitat. Is that correct?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Witt, yes, there's two in there so it could be a couple-

Chief Stewart Liley: -of things. What you're referring to is what we call unenrolled deeded acreage.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Unenrolled deeded, right. Thank you for that [unintelligible 02:30:23].

Chief Stewart Liley: We'll use a hypothetical, make up GMU. We might have a GMU that's 100,000 acres, and you have 50,000 acres enrolled and 50,000 acres unenrolled. We never have that much of a discrepancy. I'm just doing this from a math perspective, that's easier. If we had that scenario and we said there was 100 bull tags or 100 tags going to the private, 50 of those licenses are going to the enrolled properties based off of the way the enroll goes. Our unenrolled deeded goes into a pool to be redistributed across the rest of the private landowners. It goes to the smallest private landowners first that qualify, and then goes back through up to the largest.

When you own an acreage of a property, we determine your allocation in the primary based off of the percent of the private you own in there. If I own 50% of the landmass in this hypothetical GMU, I'm going to get 50 bull tags. If I own any portion of the GMU where it equates to a fraction of an elk tag, so I might be 0.9 or 0.98 or 0.99, we do not round up on fractions, I get put in a pool that's called the small contributing ranch pool. We all the small contributors, compete for the fractional tags together. We then

run through the unenrolled deeded back through the small landowners first that have qualified and been put in.

Some of those are going to be a lot of our smaller hay fields, for example. A lot of the smaller hay fields or wet meadows, Aragon Valley, those things. There's fractional lands, and we take that unenrolled deeded and run it through. The other aspect of the unenrolled deeded is it changes on an annual basis. How it changes is it's either you have ranches that sell or don't even want to come in-- It might be habitat that is high-quality habitat, but the previous or current owners don't want to enroll in EPLUS. They don't want to hunt for some reason, but they're providing a lot of elk habitat.

A land sale happens that a new landowner buys it, enrolls it, and our unenrolled deeded changes right away that next year. That changes that way.

The other way unenrolled deeded changes on an annual basis is when we say your property doesn't qualify, for example. In the primary management zone, you have to make certain qualifications. If your property doesn't qualify because maybe you don't have water on your property, and you have other habitat attributes, we encourage those landowners to partner with other landowners within that GMU to enroll and combine properties together.

What we see is when it doesn't qualify, they might co-op, form a co-op of land together, and those all of a sudden enroll the next year so that unenrolled deeded does change on an annual basis. Increases are rare. It's more decreases on an annual basis.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: That's a good explanation, and I think that's a really good system of allocating those tags to the small landowners who are enrolled. I understand it changes year to year, but what I don't understand is why all the tags, those allocated to the unenrolled deeded fraction, why a portion of those wouldn't go to the public draw instead of having the whole fraction go into the private pool. Does that make sense?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair and Commissioner Witt, yes. You're basically saying take some fraction or proportion of the unenrolled deeded licenses and put it into the draw. It's just that the way the commission has determined that in the past, and then the rulemaking process has not put it into the public pool. A lot of it comes back down to right-- A lot of the discussions we've heard is a supply and demand issue, right? Who gets to harvest, who gets to hunt, resident versus non-resident. You hear it across species, private versus public, right? There's just not the supply for everything, and that's been the system that's been evolved through time, through different commission rule, commission changes. We used to work all the way from a ranch-by-ranch negotiation, not on a public-private split type of a thing. It's come through changes through time to where it is right now, and that's the last overhaul put it in that system that it is right now.

[phone beeps]

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Commissioner Witt, those are some great questions. Thank you. Any other commissioners? Commissioner Clemente.

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Thank you. [unintelligible 02:35:16], thank you for the presentation, very good information. A lot of research done on elk. I think we should do the same thing for deer. That would be great. This is great information. I was not going to ask questions because Commissioner Witt, he had asked really good questions, but I am going to follow up in his last comment. In that portion of not-designated tags to the deeded land, all of them get utilized, or some of them get lost or not used?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Clemente, there are some that we call our two-year unconverted rate. Landowners receive an authorization to purchase a license, and we determine what our license number should be. If we have unconverted authorizations in a GMU, we take that two-year unconverted rate and put those back in through the allocation process. The unconverted rate does change some, so they don't all get utilized. Not all authorizations do. We then put those back out. What we did at the big rule change on the EPLUS rule is we put the unconverted authorizations through small landowners first.

It used to be going through large landowners first, and so what we saw was that unconverted rate getting compounded. If a large landowner wasn't using the lot of their authorizations, but they own 50% of the landmass, you're never going to up that converted rate. We went through, and it moved to small

landowners first. We're seeing those unconverted rates get smaller on an annual basis since that last rule cycle. Yes, there are some GMUs that have a 0% unconverted rate, there's some that have larger unconverted rates.

Commissioner Clemente: I am going to agree with Commissioner Witt. It is a natural resource, and I understand the landmass, and I understand the percentages, and that is great and nothing against that, but if those tags they're not utilized we're supposed to provide opportunity. I believe it should be a system where if they're not utilized, they should go back into the public. I agree with that. I believe that we had discussion before on this, and I would like to see these moves to try to resolve that because we're supposed to provide opportunity as well. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Clemente. Commissioner Fulfer.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Just to try to get it a little more clear in my head about what they're talking about. The private landowner provides a lot of the habitat, water, and things that help the population.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair and Commissioner Fulfer, yes. I think one of the other things I didn't get a chance to mention. The unconverted rate and the two-year unconverted goes into this pool of licenses. We also have a program within the EPLUS that's called the incentive program. We're trying to incentivize people to do larger-scale habitat projects. Those incentive authorizations come from that pool of licenses, too. Cutting that will cut incentives out as well.

Again, it's not a function of should we or should we not. I think that's what we're talking about a little bit here, but the way it works is that unconverted, unenrolled deeded, first cut goes to-- If we have incentive applications in the GMU, we look at that. If we give out incentives, those go to those landowners on incentives first. If we have any leftover, they go back out to landowners. What would come out immediately if it went that way would be all incentive authorizations on there. Why I mentioned it back to your comment, Commissioner Fulfer, is a lot of the incentive applications are for habitat projects on private land, large-scale habitat projects. Or if there's something in the private land that, for example, I'll use like Aragon Valley. They have a lot of off-water development that's not necessary for cattle, that they're using it for elk, and it's a critical area for calving, et cetera. That's where some of that incentive applications might go to. It might be on for large-scale habitat projects.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: That's what I was picturing, where the incentives are coming from and how are they awarded, and if this department is giving incentives, is there a request back for the public to be able to go in to the private area?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair and Commissioner Fulfer, maybe I'll try to answer this, and I apologize if I didn't get it right. There definitely are members of the public that would like to go on to private for sure. There is no forceful public going on to private, currently, how it operates right now. There is some potential in incentives, and we've discussed this with some, like there might be properties that have landlocked public land behind them. If they enroll as unit-wide, it creates access to that public land behind them. That might be a way to go into an incentive.

It might be a small piece of property. It might be something where you have properties-- We look at this from their scoring to see if they qualify or not. It might be a property that's along a highway where, right there, it's all private along the highway, but behind them, a 1/4 of a mile is the forest service, but to get to that forest service might take a day of driving around the forest. If they enroll a unit-wide, it might be a bonus or an incentive for them to come in to get public access.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Yes, I could see where that'd work. I could see it'd be a disincentive for the landowner to require them if they have all deeded. If there was some public in the middle of it, I could see that would definitely be an incentive to be able to reach that. How many license applications are there for the deer and for the elk separately, total applications requested?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Fulfer, in elk, in the Primary Management Zone, we have about 1,500 landowners enrolled in the system.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: No, I'm just talking about in general, the whole state.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Fulfer, in terms of number of landowners enrolled or licenses--

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: No, the number of application hunters, not the number of hunter applications.

Chief Stewart Liley: For private?

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: For the whole state, public, private. I'm just curious.

Chief Stewart Liley: Okay. Mr. Chair, Commissioner Fulfer, we receive, in the draws, roughly 300,000 applications, resident, non-resident. For elk, there's approximately 22,000 licenses in the draw. We're over 100,000 applications for the 22,000. There's a lot more demand than there is supply for sure. Deer, that proportion is a little bit different. Our highest demand ratio is bighorn sheep to number of applicants. It varies by species in terms of applicants compared to licenses.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: About 300,000 per deer and--

Chief Stewart Liley: Yes, deer, elk, bighorn, every species is about 300,000.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Fulfer. I'd like to circle back to the calf recruitment and Gila. Is that attributed mostly to drought?

Chief Stewart Liley: Yes. Mr. Chair, I could go back to-- If you look at this graphic in the summer, if you remember on the first graph, summer mortality was way higher than winter, winter mortality was much lower. When you look at the other, other is where you look at drought, it's really body condition, we found malnourished calves. You'll see there, it has the highest absolute mean standard. Definitely some overlapping intervals there, but it is the leading cause that we saw there. Even when you go into that graphic on the right, and you include wolf exposure, it starts to drop down as maybe not quite the leading, but it's still up there next to wolf predation.

We definitely see wolf being a little bit higher summer driver in the high wolf density areas. Again, that's high wolf density, the highest. If you exclude that and you just go overall, the whole Gila, that's what the graphic on the left is, drought's really the driver on what's going on.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: What about [unintelligible 02:45:37]

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, we ran a five-year research project capturing over 500 calves in there, and bear predation was the leading cause of mortality.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Okay. All commissioners, thank you all for your questions. They're all really good. I'm going to move to the public. Let's start with Christina Mann.

Christina Mann: It is about Unit 30. Why did Game and Fish put Mexican gray wolves out there? They never were native to Eddy County, and actually, the red wolf was here beginning the last century, but they're biologically extinct in the wild because their numbers got so low, they hybridized with coyotes. They're no longer here, but Mexican gray wolves never were until about five or six years ago. John Ballard's ranch is just south of Washington Ranch, and he talked about black SUVs and a trailer coming out there one night. He used to mow the alfalfa fields beside the Black River they use for recreation areas. Two years ago, I saw two wolves running down a cow and a calf. They were gray wolves. Unfortunately, John had a massive stroke last year, so he won't be mowing that alfalfa fields by Black River anymore, but I have tried and tried to get cameras out there. You see trucks out there, suspicious-looking four-wheelers. I've never caught the wolves on camera, but I did see them. I know they're there.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Christina. Art Arias?

Art Arias: Good afternoon again. Hey, we were talking about the different elk herds throughout the state. Do you guys ever discuss or have a discussion on the Guadalupe herd? Because we have elk up there. We've got elk that are on the north end all the way to south end. They've come off of the Guadalupe's, they're south of White City. They're in our Black River management area. We counted 35 of them on there the other day, and our cave people, we got that Parks Ranch Cave that's on the east side of 62/180, the elk now are on the other side of the highway up there. I'm just curious if we ever consider a-- because there is a hunt. I think there's 60 tags that are allocated for the Guadalupe. I was just curious why the Guadalupe chain wasn't mentioned with your presentation. I guess that's the question. Thank you.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, I could address that. Yes, we absolutely have a population of elk in the Guadalupe. I only went through the herd management areas that are in the Primary Management Zone. There are a lot of other elk populations throughout the state. If it's in the Secondary Management Zone, I didn't call those herds out. I should have said that there are public hunts on a lot of our Secondary Management Zones, like the Guadalupe Mountains. We're not trying to establish larger herds in there. We've been trying to reduce the Guadalupe herd.

We will, during this rule cycle, look at, if there's more opportunities for public draw hunts in the Secondary Management Zone, if there's new herds that are establishing in Secondary that would offer public hunts too, to potentially increase or start new hunts in there. It's not a function of us not knowing about it. It's just a herd that we're not trying to manage in the Primary Management Zone, where we're setting specific hunt goals to it. We absolutely know of herds that are moving even to the East, out towards the plains, more off of the Sacramento Mountains, et cetera. Definitely looking at and will, during this rule cycle, look at public opportunities for draw in those Secondary Management Zone units as well.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Chief Liley. Chuck Tripp?

[pause 02:50:22]

Chuck Tripp: Chair, commissioners, my comments were on Unit 30 also. The last decade, I've ran a ton of cameras down there in 30. I would say if you're trying to reduce that population, you're doing a good job as I've seen a significant reduction in the last three years down there. I've also noticed that it's a Secondary Management Unit. I see more than 20 hunters in an archery hunt down there on public land, which I think's a little suspicious for 20 tags. That's all my comments today. Thanks.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Chuck. Brandon Wynn?

Brandon Wynn: Thank you, Mr. Chair, commissioners. First, I want to thank Commissioner Clemente, and Commissioner Witt, and Commissioner Fulfer for asking questions related to incentives for public hunting and how are these tags are divided. I really appreciate that you asked those questions. To that, I can answer. I've looked at this public land, private land, or public-private tag split. I've looked at that quite a bit. What's interesting about that is that one-to-one unweighted land-based ratio is not in code, it's not in statute, it's not anywhere. It's just a internal figure that somehow was created 20 years ago or something. I think there was some commission discussion, so it's not even law or it's never been discussed or voted. It's probably been discussed. It's never been voted on. It's just Game and Fish uses that.

The only time you see it is you see the outcome of that formula being applied by Game and Fish. In the Elk world, when you see the tables that show the breakdown of public and private, you can back calculate how much private and public land there is in the unit by how they divide the tags a unit. To get your answer of how this-- I've done the calculations on what the supercharging of private tags that exist for the amount of actually enrolled private land in the unit. I would guess the average is about 30%. The private land that is actually enrolled in the units I've looked at has ranged from 30% to 40% more private tags go to the land area that's enrolled, that would be if the formula was enrolled EPLUS versus the rest of the land in the unit, instead of all private and all public.

It's about a 30% boost of the privatization of tags. That's what you're looking at. I would ask that question from Game and Fish, Commissioner Witt. I would say, tell me how much the percentage of private land in each GMU that's enrolled in EPLUS, and the percentage of total tags that are given to the enrolled ranches. That's going to give you the supercharge factor for the private thing. They're getting about 30%, sometimes 40% more tags than the land area would dictate. Again, no code, no law, no rule. I think at least you should look at that.

I've asked the commission to at least nibble at privatization, and this unweighted land-based formula that juices the actual tags that go to private, I think, would be a good way that you could, in a controlled manner. Stewart and his team are unbelievably talented at being able to run these numbers and say, "This is what you're going to do for the transfer of the tags." They can hit it nail on the head. They're their geniuses at it. They can give you those answers. You can know what you would cause. Thank you. Sorry, I went over a little.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: That's all right. Thank you. Bill Williams?

Bill Williams: Mr. Chairman, commissioners, Mr. Director, thank y'all for having your meeting here in Roswell. We really appreciate your interest in our community. My name's Bill Williams. I'm the Chaves County Manager, so I want to welcome you to Chaves County, but today I'm speaking on behalf of New Mexico Cattle Growers. New Mexico cattlemen and women steward millions of acres, working range land across the state. We depend on healthy land, not only for livestock production but for wildlife habitat, watersheds, and the needs of our local rural communities. We appreciate the recent meeting we had with Chief Liley. However, our core concern remains.

The proposed elk rule doesn't adequately concern the needs of the carrying capacity of the lands or the other uses upon those lands. Forage and water in New Mexico's ranges are finite and increasingly stressed by prolonged drought, wildfire, and invasive species. In certain areas, populations exceed what the land can sustain year-round, leading to heavy utilization of grasses and brows, damaged riparian areas, soil exposure, and growing conflicts and other land uses, including areas that you mentioned in Unit 15. Those areas are overutilized and have suffered drought for over three years.

Under these conditions, elk and other wildlife populations will continue to struggle and show this malnourishment that you described yourself. The department develops four year rule without consideration of those factors. It lacks any range staff to evaluate these conditions on the ground, and does not consistently coordinate with federal or state land managers who monitor habitat capacity. Managing elk without regard to habitat limits risk degrading the varied landscapes that sustain elk livestock and rural livelihoods alike. New Mexicans deserve wildlife management that reflects stewardship of the whole landscape, not just single species management and isolation.

We therefore urge the commission to revise the rules for purpose and objectives to explicitly incorporate the carrying capacity of the lands, foragability, water resources, habitat condition, and multiple uses of both public and private lands, and to instruct the department to develop a rule consistent with such a revised purpose statement. Healthy land is the foundation of healthy wildlife populations. Sure, thank you all again for coming to Chaves County. We appreciate all you guys do.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Bill. Logan McGarrah?

[pause 02:57:20]

Logan McGarrah: Mr. Chair, Commissioners, Director Sloane, Chief Liley, thank you for the opportunity to comment today. I would like to publicly thank the department, specifically Chief Liley. We did have a meeting with our chapter and go over several of our concerns with all of the open rules, this go around with all the different species. We feel like it was very productive, and we were heard, so we do appreciate that time. Overall, all of the proposed changes that the department is proposing so far, we feel are very rooted in science and we're very happy to see that. We're quite in favor of all the proposed changes so far, with the one caveat that we'd like to see some hard numbers on the antlerless license number increases in our Sacramento and Ruidoso herds.

We understand moving some of the youth licenses here could be an option, and we just don't want to be the victim of the rest of the state, as it were. Other than that, with the rest of my time, I would like to say it got brought up about EPLUS. We would like to say that EPLUS is a storied program, obviously, and in the past, maybe it's had some problems, but where it stands today, we're very in favor of EPLUS. We believe it is a very positive program for our state, for the hunters of our state, for the elk of our state, for the landowners of our state. We would not propose any big changes to that. Wouldn't like to see any big changes to that. We do think that there's a lot of benefit that comes from that program.

As far as the unenrolled deeded acreage tags being authorized back with incentives, if there was talk as far as the program goes there, we might be open to some of that, but I would like to point out that the most of those tags are incentivizing good behavior on a lot of these enrolled ranches. We would not like that to go unnoticed, so thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Logan. Jesse Deubel?

Jesse Deubel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, commissioners. The New Mexico Wildlife Federation submitted a formal written comment. You should have all received it on your email. I'm going to do my best, in the spirit of transparency, and just so the public can hear what we submitted, to read this within the time allotted. The New Mexico Wildlife Federation requests that the Game Commission address inequitable standards that exist within the elk rule for hunters who hunt on public land through the draw permit system versus those who hunt on private land. The New Mexico Wildlife Federation has worked in recent years to increase public awareness of New Mexico's fundamentally unfair system of elk management.

As you know, the Commission's Elk Private Lands Use System hands over more than 1/3 of all elk licenses to landowners who are free to sell them to the highest bidder. New Mexico is the only state in the West that enforces such a privatization scheme. Of the licenses that do remain in the public draw, New Mexico state law earmarks 10% of the tags to hunters who can afford to retain a private outfitter. Again,

New Mexico is the only state in the West with such an egregious and unnecessary welfare system for its outfitting industry. Between EPLUS and the outfitter set-aside, well over 40% of New Mexico's total elk licenses are privatized every year.

Bottom line, hunters with money can hunt elk in New Mexico every year regardless of residency. Many resident hunters, meanwhile, go years without drawing a tag through the state's public draw. This reality places New Mexico as an outlier among other states in the West, which commonly limit non-resident hunters to 10% of hunting licenses issued. The elk rule gives private land hunters far more flexibility to schedule hunts than it affords hunters who get permits through the state draw. In addition, the elk rule allows landowners in the Secondary Management Zone to issue unlimited elk tags, while the rule simultaneously imposes strict limits on tags in the public draw for the same units.

For example, the current elk rule affords only 10 mature bull tags in the public draw in Unit 56, east of Raton. The rule affords an unlimited number of tags to landowners in that same unit. The 10 hunters who draw mature bull tags through the public draw in Unit 56 get 5 set days for their hunt, October 1st through the 5th. The elk rule, however, allows private land hunters to choose any five days between October 1st through December 31st to hunt the same unit. The same scheduling disparity exists in the elk rule for public versus private lands in the entire Primary Management Zone.

The rule gives hunters who can afford to hunt on private land several months in which to schedule a hunt, while hunters who draw a tag are given a set five days. There's no legitimate government interest that justifies this disparity of treatment. It's merely the end result of the Game Commission, continuing over recent decades, to abdicate its responsibility to manage New Mexico's wildlife for the benefit of state residents in favor of giving special treatment to landowners and those hunters, mainly non-residents, who can afford to pay to hunt private land.

For anyone that wants to read the rest of the comment, we'll post it on our website. You've all received it already, and I think people get the idea of where we're going with that. Thank you all very much, commissioners. I appreciate the opportunity.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Jesse. Do we have anyone online, Tristanna?

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Mr. Chairman, we do. We will start with Kerrie Romero.

Kerrie Romero: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Kerrie Romero, on behalf of the New Mexico Council of Outfitters and Guides. First, I just wanted to say that Chief Liley did such an excellent job explaining the private land segment of the system. I really appreciate that. Just one thing I wanted to add for context, it's important to remember that first and foremost, we are dividing elk licenses on a GMU basis based on the percentage of public to private land. When we're talking about private land elk licenses, it's easy to say, "Oh, well, we need to give some of these to the public land hunter," but we've already divided the GMU between private land ownership and public land ownership. It's not quite as simple as just giving the private land tags to the public land hunters. It really wouldn't work from a management standpoint. That's really important to just remember basically. Then, also to Commissioner Fulfer's point, I think it's important to just do a quick refresher of the basics. The public land system and the private land system are two separate systems. They're not meant to be convoluted together, and they're intended to operate separately, and it's best if you talk about them separately. On the public land side, we have a quota. 84% of those tags, off the bat, go to residents only. There's a 10% outfitter pool. It's important to remember that that is resident and non-resident, and there are residents that apply in the outfitter pool, and there's a percentage of those tags that go to resident hunters. Then you have the 6% non-resident do-it-yourself. 100% of the cow elk tags in the public land side go to resident only. 100% of all the Wildlife Management Area tags go to residents only. Residents are getting a lot of opportunity. Then it's also important to remember that on the private land side, those tags are equal opportunity. Anyone can purchase those tags, and there are plenty of New Mexico residents that do purchase those tags. When we're talking about opportunity, it's really best to remember that they're two separate systems and that residents are getting benefit from the EPLUS system. Thank you.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Thank you, Kerrie. Mr. Chair, that is the only hand that's raised.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Tristanna. Chief Liley, thank you for all your discussion and great presentations. Really well done. We look forward to the continued discussion and final adoption of these rules in the coming months. Should we break for lunch, or should we just get

through it? Oh, we have some more for general public. Let's just keep going. You guys good with that? Go on, keep going. Item number 10 is a public comment on any topic. Comments will be limited to three minutes. Let's start with Bronson Corn.

[silence]

Bronson Corn: Mr. Chair, fellow committee members. I appreciate you guys being here in Roswell. There's been a lot of discussion about private property today, and there's something that you need to understand. There's two states in the western states that are different than all the rest, and that's New Mexico and Arizona. New Mexico and Arizona are not land-based states. We are water-based states, meaning that you have to have the water to go on these allotments. That's what provides-- There would be no wildlife, especially here in the southeastern part of New Mexico, without water.

There's no live water. We got the Pecos. Whoopie freaking do. There's not enough water over there to shake a stick at. I myself have over 200 miles of pipeline. I supply water to all the wildlife and a pretty large portion of Unit 32 and 37. Without private property, you have no wildlife. The way that the system works, whenever you have 50% of a GMU in private, 50% in the public land, the reason why the private property landowner is able to sell those tags is to be able to recuperate the cost of managing wildlife. We manage the wildlife, we supply the water, we supply the supplement, we supply the salt, we supply feed, yet we're the bad guys on every turn.

Whenever you're talking about having the ranch identification numbers, I understand that there is a small group on both sides of the fence. There's a small group of landowners that do abuse the system. There's also a small group of hunters that abuse the system. Whenever you have a small group of individuals, you wind up getting thrown under the bus on the entire opposite side, even though you're not doing anything wrong. I understand what you're trying to do with it, but I'll rebuttal that at the same point.

The landowner is being told, "What you're doing is wrong, and we're going to pull all your permits, and you can't sell any over-the-counter tags," that every hunter in the state has to have an app on their phone telling them whether they're on private property or public property because the amount of damage that my property suffers because of people saying, "No, I can go over here," "No, you're on private property, you got to be over here," it's the same thing whenever you're talking to a hunter speaking about private property, "You guys are doing this, and that's wrong." No, it's not. There's a small group here, and there's a small group here, and they're the ones that are causing all the damn problems.

Remember on New Mexico and Arizona, those are the two states in the United States that are different, that have public land, land-based states, water-based states, two totally different things. That's how we can manage wildlife differently in the state than what they do in Utah, Nevada, California. It's because it's totally separate. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Bronson. Thank you. Chuck Tripp?

[silence]

Chuck Tripp: Afternoon, Mr. Chair, commissioners. Chuck Tripp. I had a couple of comments. One's on the exotics rule. On the exotics rule, there's a hunt for 70-plus-year-olds. I think that needs to be removed. It got put in last rule cycle. It's a specialty thing that one person pushed for, doesn't help anybody. It's giving the people who had 25 years of their life to hunt everything over-the-counter a jump in front of everybody in the draw. I think that needs to be ended. Couple of other things were, I agree there's people on both sides of the fence, do good on the private and the public. There's ones that do terrible on both. That's all I got today. Thanks.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Chuck. Christina?

Christina Mann: Interesting comment. It dovetails with mine. Four years ago I turned 65 and this commission just deleted the senior enrichment hunts. I'm going to be 69 this year. It's a national hunting holiday, opening day of dove season, but I've never drawn an elk tag in my life. I have to pay. I managed to buy a EPLUS tag for \$800 in 2022. Knowing me, I shot the lead cow, then I had to go find someone to help me get it out of the canyon. They were hunting on a used tag. The kid was in the backseat playing video games, and the father and grandfather had the rifle sticking out the window.

Furthermore, I talked to people. The youth is the hunter, and the youth was in camp, and the dad was out hunting on his tag. 1975 to 2025, 50 years last year as a big game hunter. I've got a passion for it. Shame on you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Christina. Brandon?

Brandon Wynn: Thank you, Chair Stump, Commissioners. I'm glad that the gentleman brought up-- this isn't about you. This is not personal, but New Mexico and Arizona. I'll tell you a few things about New Mexico and Arizona. Arizona and New Mexico both have within about the mid 40% of the states are huntable public land, so backing out national parks, you can't hunt and stuff. We got about the same ratio of public land in the two states. Arizona has zero private tags. No outfitter set aside. In Arizona, as a result of that, the landowners are incentive to work with the state to have open gate programs because they can't just sell the tags. If they want to get hunters on the property, they got to negotiate with the state and they have really good programs.

That incentivizes the state to create good programs for landowners to allow public hunting on private land. Arizona has 4 million acres of open gate because they don't have private tags. New Mexico has 35,000 acres of open gate because we have private tags. That 4 million acres of open gate in Arizona opens up a lot of landlocked public and private land. The two tag systems and the two tag philosophies of the two states heavily disincentivize public hunting on private land, voluntary to the landowner always. As a result of Arizona's public model, keeping the wildlife public, 92% of every big game species in Arizona, 92% of all the tags for all the big game species in Arizona are awarded by a purely public process to a Arizona resident.

For New Mexico, only 55% of our elk are public resident tags. Compare that to 92%. For pronghorn, only 33% of New Mexico pronghorn tags are awarded to a New Mexico resident by public process. Again, Arizona, 92%. These are the outcomes. I'm not asking you to make New Mexico into Arizona. I'm asking you to make, I don't care, 10% of all the private tags public, 5%, 1%. For the decades I've been coming in here, not once has the Commission, on purpose, moved one single tag from the private side of the ledger to the public side of the ledger. Not once have you passed one rule with the intention. Not one time has the commission said, "We are going to make some more tags public instead of private." It's never happened.

It's 2026. Maybe this will be the year we can get-- I am not asking for much. I'm asking for a nibble, just to try it, just to do something. There's a lot of things you can do. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Brandon. Logan McGarrah?

Logan McGarrah: Thank you, Mr. Chair, Commissioners, Director Sloane. First of all, I'd like to say thank you so much for your time. I know this is a huge time commitment for all of you commissioners to be here and serve us as a public hunter, and we really appreciate that as an organization, so thank you for that. My general comment today, and I understand this is a very, very busy year with all of the open rules, but I'd like to plant the seed in the public's head and the commission's head that moving forward, our organization is very interested in having a manner and method discussion, specifically in regards to some of this new technology with the thermals.

We've seen the department has the ability with some of this new thermal imaging. Hunters also have the ability to purchase some of that technology, and that's being used, also some of this new long range hunting equipment that's just far more accurate than what we historically would've had. If we think about ways to maintain hunting opportunity when potentially hunter success has been increased by some of these methods, a manner of method discussion in the future would be warranted. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Logan. Jesse Deubel?

Jesse Deubel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and commissioners. I just wanted to appreciate the department staff, Tristanna Bickford and her team, the public information staff, the education staff, all of the conservation officers who participated in the the outdoor hunting and fishing show which just concluded last weekend. It was a three-day show, happens every year, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. It was a fantastic event. I know it was a lot of time and a lot of energy from a lot of staff of the agency, but it provides the public an opportunity to come and socialize and get to know the organizations, the groups, the companies the outfitters, all the service providers in this outdoor hunting and fishing space, and they really did a fantastic job with that as they do every single year.

Wanted to make sure they were properly appreciated for that. Also, make an announcement that the New Mexico Wildlife Federation will be hosting an outdoor festival and skills competition on April 4th, out at Legacy Ranch. Everybody's invited to come out. They can go to our website for more information on that.

It sounds like the department is going to be a strong partner in that event, and we're going to have a bunch of educational opportunities and things like that available for the public at that event as well. Huge thanks to the staff of the New Mexico Department of Wildlife. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Jesse. Let's move on to item number 11, which is Commissioner comments.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Mr. Chairman, I apologize. We do have a hand raised online [inaudible 03:18:37] comment.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: I apologize. I forgot to ask. Thank you.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Kerrie Romero, you are ready to speak.

Kerrie Romero: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really wasn't going to comment during this section, but I just couldn't let Brandon's comment go unaddressed. It's simply untrue that more resident opportunity has never been given by the commission. That's just false. The L Bar Ranch was a ranch that was in private ownership. I think it's like 50,000 acres. It went into a Wildlife Management Area ownership like two years ago. 100% of all of those tags are resident only. Not one single non-resident has access to any of the tags on the L bar, and that benefited residents entirely, so Brandon's comments are just not factual. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Kerrie. [chuckles]

Brandon Wynn: [inaudible 03:19:43]

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Brandon. Thank you. Okay. Commissioner comments. No more, right? Online.

Chief Tristanna Carrell: Correct.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you. Any commissioners that would like to say anything? Commissioner Clemente?

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: After hearing the presentation that Chief Steward Liley presented today, which they were really good-- a while back I had proposed, or I brought forward an idea. The state of New Mexico has three universities that creates a lot of wildlife biologists. This has to do with the sign-up, with the ranch sign-up, with the deer program, deer hunting tags. The state of New Mexico has three universities that creates a lot of wildlife biologists. I'm proudly a graduate from one of those universities. Constantly, every year, a lot of wildlife biologists come out. A lot of them leave the state because limited jobs, obviously, in the state.

I have brought this forward. Why we don't create a program where, if landowners want to hunt deer, and they believe they have a certain amount of deer that they can harvest, why the department doesn't ask for the data or the proof that they have that population within their private property? The landowner will have to come up with that. There is a lot of wildlife biologists out there that would love to work doing surveys, collecting data, research. I'm saying this because I work with landowners, and I do that. They are the ones that they provide that information to the Department of Game and Fish. There is somebody that has come up with all that information and provided.

The department doesn't have to send officers or send people, biologists, to every ranch to verify this information, but somebody can sign behind that information. I don't know if something that it can be done. I seen it done in different countries, I seen it done. It's very, very positive. It provides jobs, it provides information, research, and it's research that the department doesn't have to spend money on. Thank you.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Clemente. Any other commissioners like to say anything? Yes, Commissioner Witt?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Thanks. I just want to say, first of all, that I'm very supportive of and excited by the idea that Commissioner Clemente just articulated, and look forward to discussing that with him. I want to say that the department is doing an excellent job of balancing diverse interests in this process, in the rulemaking process. Some of those strong sentiments have been expressed by the commenters. I think it's clear that the management plan that Chief Liley has articulated is hearing these sentiments on different sides of the issues. Some of the things that the department is planning for this round, like the landowner registration for the deer hunt and the shifting to quality management on GMU 2B, for example, seem really well-supported by the data and the community. I'm very happy about that.

I was also happy that Chief Liley was able to help me understand this issue of the unenrolled deeded fraction of elk licenses in each of the primary elk zones. I think that, that is something that we need to discuss more because the justification for allocating those entirely to the private tag pool is not very well established in my view. I think it should be open to discussion. I look forward to investigating with Chief Liley's help exactly how that incentive pool is used and how the department ensures that it's getting the most out of those incentive tags that it allocates.

I hear the arguments that those are essential for elk management on private lands by private landowners. I understand that, and I want to know more about that, and I want to think about whether it would be the right thing to do to also have some fraction of those undeeded and unenrolled pool of tags go into the public draw. If so, what would need to be done to potentially mitigate the impact of that on the incentive pool? I'll stop there. Thanks.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Witt. I guess that's everybody. I'd like to thank everyone here today for all your input. It's been really important to hear all that. I'd like to thank the staff for all the good work you do. Our law enforcement, Chief Liley, for those great presentations. Thank you so much. On that note, I'm going to move into executive session, which would be closed to the public. Is there a motion to enter into executive session?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: So moved.

Director Mike Sloane: Mr. Chairman, I think Commissioner Fulfer has a formal motion.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: The motion to go into closed executive session. Motion to adjourn into closed executive session. Move to adjourn into executive session closed to the public pursuant to Section 10-15-1(H)(7) NMSA 78 to discuss attorney-client privilege litigation update.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Is there a second?

Commissioner Witt: Second.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Director Sloane, please call the roll.

Director Mike Sloane: Commissioner Witt?

Commissioner Christopher Witt: Aye.

Director Mike Sloane: Commissioner Lopez is excused. Commissioner Harwood?

Commissioner Kyle Harwood: Yes.

Director Mike Sloane: Commissioner Fulfer?

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Yes.

Director Mike Sloane: Vice-chairman Clemente?

Vice-chairman Fernando Clemente: Yes.

Director Mike Sloane: Chair Stump?

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Yes.

Director Mike Sloane: Motion passes.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: We are now adjourning to executive session. Session closed to the public. During the executive session, the commission discussed only those matters specified in this motion to adjourn, and it took no action as to any matter. Is there a motion to adjourn? Please say it a little louder so they can hear.

Commissioner Christopher Witt: So moved.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Is there a second, please? Need a second.

Director Mike Sloane: Second by Commissioner Fulfer.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: All in favor.

All: Aye.

Commission Chairman Richard Stump: Motion passes.

[03:27:32] [END OF AUDIO]

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES
NEW MEXICO STATE GAME COMMISSION**

February 20, 2026

***New Mexico Game and Fish Roswell, New Mexico
1615 W College Blvd, Roswell, NM 88201***



Michael B. Sloane, Director

3/20/2026

Date



Richard Stump, Chair

New Mexico State Game Commission

3/20/2026

Date