

# COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA BRIEFING

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**Meeting Date:** June 25, 2026

**Agenda Number:** 8

**Presenter:** Stewart Liley

**Corroborator:** N/A

**Agenda Title:** Subsequent discussion on deer rule (19.31.13 NMAC) for the 2027 – 2030 hunting seasons.

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## 1. Summary of Agenda Item

The Department will present proposed changes to the Deer Rule (19.31.13 NMAC) based on survey information, management goals, and public comment. The Department has analyzed and evaluated data to help inform the rule development process and is still in the process of collecting public comments on the proposed rules. The Department will present the current proposal for the 2027-2030 hunting seasons.

Preliminary Proposed changes include:

### Region Specific Proposed Changes

#### Northwest

- 1) Reduce deer licenses in GMU 2B based on input received during current rule cycle.
- 2) Based on input received during the current rule cycle, the Department analyzed the total number of license reductions required to move GMU 2B to a Quality Hunt unit. Moving GMU 2B to a Quality Hunt unit would require a reduction of 885 deer licenses across public and private land.
- 3) Create a public muzzleloader deer hunt on Wildlife Management Areas in GMU 4 to coincide with the private land hunt (10 licenses).

#### Southwest

- 1) Structure the January hunt on White Sands Missile Range (GMU 19 WSMR only) as a youth hunt.
- 2) Create a December rifle hunt for Coues white-tailed deer in GMUs 16 and 22 (20 licenses in each GMU) to be consistent with Coues white-tailed deer hunts in the southwest.
- 3) Create a separate hunt code for the Silver City Management Area antlerless archery hunt (50 licenses). With this hunt code, archery hunters that hold a license in GMU 23 and 24 who do not harvest a deer during their archery hunt will not be permitted to hunt the Silver City Management Area antlerless hunt.
- 4) Change youth rifle hunts in GMUs 13 and 17 to youth muzzleloader hunts to match elk weapon type for the same time.
- 5) Move January archery hunts for FAWTD in GMUs 23, 24, and 27 from January 16-31 back to January 1-15.
- 6) No longer include Fort Bayard as a special management area. Hunters drawing a tag for GMU 24 can hunt any legally accessible land in GMU 24, including Fort Bayard management area.

#### Southeast

- 1) Remove the REG antlerless hunt in GMU 32 Roswell and Fort Sumner Hunt Areas
- 2) Remove the antlerless hunt on the Huey WMA; change the ES hunt to FAD bag limit

## Northeast

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

## General Statewide Proposed Changes

- 1) Adjust license numbers to meet management strategies and reflect changes in deer herd dynamics.
- 2) Adjust season dates where necessary.
  - a. Adjust season dates to ensure harvest is biologically sustainable.
  - b. Shift start dates to maintain hunts beginning on Saturday or adjusting to calendar day starts for consistency.
  - c. When possible, adjust season dates for hunt structure consistency across the state.
  - d. Adjust season dates to avoid overlapping hunts with mixed-weapon types.
- 3) Designate the premium statewide deer hunt as a Quality Hunt.
- 4) Require the purchase of a license at least a day prior to the start of the hunt. For hunts where published season dates are less than 6 days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.
- 5) Create "ranch registration" process for OTC private-land deer licenses, similar to the current registration process used for private land elk hunting in Secondary Management Zones.
- 6) Caps on private-land licenses OTC licenses for deer.

## **2. Background Information**

The deer rule (19.31.13 NMAC) is re-evaluated every 4 years and changed based on population data, harvest data, management goals, and public feedback. The Department will begin reaching out to the public for input.

The Department balances providing hunting opportunity with maintaining the potential for larger antlered bucks through two management approaches: Opportunity Hunt Units and Quality Hunt Units.

Opportunity Hunt Units are designed to maximize hunter access by offering more licenses and higher drawing odds, while maintaining overall population health. This typically results in more hunters afield at the same time.

Quality Hunt Units are designed to enhance the hunting experience by limiting hunter numbers and offering benefits such as lower hunter density, higher success rates, broader legal animal selection, and/or more favorable season timing and length. These units are designated by the State Game Commission and have more restrictive license allocations.

Except for in a few very specific instances to address nuisance issues, the Department allows male harvest only. Population trajectories are driven by adult female and fawn survival; both adult female and fawn survival rates need to be adequate for stable populations. Weather, disease, predation and human induced mortality can all impact adult female and fawn survival; however, availability of quality forbs, shrubs, and concealment cover can lessen or intensify the effect of these individual factors. Deer have a polygamous breeding strategy where a single male will breed many females within a season. Because of this breeding strategy, almost all (>95%) breeding age

females become pregnant each year even though there are generally fewer males than females in a population. Studies have shown that when the number of bucks stays above 10 bucks per 100 does, pregnancy rates are consistent and high. As such, buck mortality, including mortality from harvest, does not negatively impact population growth because females carry pregnancies and almost all of them are pregnant each year.

**3. Strategic Plan References and Possible Impacts of Agenda Item**

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

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

None

**5. Description and Summary of Public Involvement Process and Results**

The Department held 2 hybrid in-person/virtual public meetings on March 11 in Albuquerque and March 12 in Las Cruces. We have also received comments via email. Public comments will be summarized and presented during the meeting. Proposed changes to the Deer rule have been posted on the Department's website.

**Suggested Motion**

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