



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

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

Friday, Jan. 10, 2025

**New Mexico State Library
1209 Camino Carlos Rey
Santa Fe, NM 87509**

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/U1AEktxeiEE>

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1: Meeting Called to Order

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

Called to order by Chairman Richard Stump.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2: Roll Call

09:01:02 a.m. (00:00:09/00:00:24)

Present in person: Chairman Stump, Vice-chairwoman Salazar Hickey, Commissioner Clemente, Commissioner Lopez and Commissioner Pack.

Present virtually: Commissioner Fulfer.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3: Pledge of Allegiance

09:01:43 a.m. (00:00:50/00:01:05)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4: Introduction of Guests

09:02:22 a.m. (00:01:29/00:01:43)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5: Approval of Agenda (Action Item)

09:09:21 a.m. (00:08:28/00:08:43)

Motion: To approve the agenda for the Jan. 10, 2025, meeting modified to remove Agenda Item #8 Annual Financial Audit, due to delay in review of the audit by the state auditor.

Motion by: Chairman Stump.

Seconded by: Commissioner Clemente.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairwoman Salazar Hickey, Commissioner Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Lopez and Commissioner Pack.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6: Election of Chair and Vice Chair (Action Item)

09:10:18 a.m. (00:09:25/00:09:40)

Motion: To elect Chair Richard Stump as the next chair of the Commission and to elect Vice Chair Sharon Salazar Hickey as the next vice-chair of the Commission.

Motion by: Commissioner Fulfer.

Seconded by: Commissioner Clemente.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairwoman Salazar Hickey, Commissioner Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Lopez and Commissioner Pack.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7: Consent Agenda (Action Item)

09:12:58 a.m. (00:12:05/00:12:20)

Motion: To approve the minutes from the Nov. 8, 2024, meeting and revocations as presented by the Department, and to adopt the Open Meetings Act Resolution for 2025.

Motion by: Commissioner Clemente.

Seconded by: Vice-chairwoman Salazar Hickey.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairwoman Salazar Hickey, Commissioner Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Lopez and Commissioner Pack.

The Department notified the Commission that the Department suspended 212 individuals for non-compliance with the Parental Responsibility Act (40-5A-1 NMSA 1978). The Department also notified the Commission that it suspended 49 individuals for failure to pay a penalty assessment and six individuals who were assessed a Civil Judgment.

The Department presented the 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:

- Ten individuals accrued 20 or more points in a three-year period. They were mailed a notice of contemplated action and requested a hearing. One exception was filed.
- Fifteen individuals accrued 20 or more points in a three-year period. They were mailed a notice of contemplated action and did not request a hearing.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8: Annual Financial Audit (Removed)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 9: Aquatic Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) Initiatives

09:16:14 a.m. (00:15:21/00:15:36)

The Department is engaged in several conservation initiatives for aquatic Species of Greatest Conservation Need in partnership with Federal, State, and Local governments and Non-Governmental Organizations. The Department provided overviews of longstanding initiatives for the benefit of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout, Rio Grande Chub, Rio Grande Sucker and Pecos Pupfish.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10: Migratory Bird Rule 19.31.6 NMAC

09:36:29 a.m. (00:35:36/00:35:51)

The Department presented proposed changes to the Migratory Game Bird Rule (19.31.6 NMAC) based on public comment, the latest information from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), recent survey information, and management goals. Season selections and bag limits are determined in conjunction with the USFWS working through the Central and Pacific Flyway Councils. The Department is currently analyzing data and reaching out to migratory bird hunters to evaluate alternatives, and to help inform the rule development process.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 11: Habitat Stamp Project Overview

09:42:21 a.m. (00:41:28/00:41:43)

The Department presented an update on the Habitat Stamp Program (HSP) with a summary of accomplishments since the reauthorization of the Public Land User Stamp Rule (19.34.6 NMAC) in January 2021 by the Commission. Comments were provided informally by federal-agency partners with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management as well as HSP Citizen Advisory Committee members in attendance at the meeting.

The Commission took a break at 10:28:03 a.m. and returned at 10:47:34 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 12: Pronghorn License Changes for the 2025-2026 License Year

10:47:44 a.m. (01:46:51/01:27:39)

The Department provided the Commission with information regarding a decrease in pronghorn licenses in some Game Management Units (GMUs) in the Northeast for the 2025-2026 license year.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 13: Wildlife Corridors

11:23:15 a.m. (02:22:22/02:03:11)

The Department and New Mexico Department of Transportation presented an update on cooperative wildlife corridor efforts in New Mexico.

The Commission took a lunch break at 12:06:33 p.m. and returned at 12:57:23 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 14: Proposed 2025 Meeting Schedule

12:57:26 p.m. (03:56:33/02:46:35)

The State Game Commission discussed and established a meeting schedule for the 2025 calendar year and for January 2026. Scheduling conflicts led to the April 11 meeting being rescheduled for April 25 and the Oct. 24 meeting being rescheduled for Nov. 7. Commissioners discussed the relocation of the meeting originally scheduled for Aug. 22 in Socorro, with Deming, Silver City, Lordsburg and Reserve discussed as potential alternative locations. The meeting was rescheduled for Aug. 15 because of the Catron County Fair. Final meeting dates and locations are:

- April 25, 2025 (Friday) – Roswell
- June 13, 2025 (Friday) – Red River
- Aug. 15, 2025 (Friday) – Reserve
- Nov. 7, 2025 (Friday) – Los Alamos

• Jan. 9, 2026 (Friday) – Santa Fe

AGENDA ITEM NO. 15: General Public Comment

01:23:32 p.m. (04:22:39/03:12:42)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 16: Commissioner Comments

01:27:32 p.m. (04:26:39/03:16:42)

Commissioner Lopez thanked Department officers for their enforcement efforts in District 1. He will be attending a regional livestock meeting on Jan. 11 to hear constituent concerns. Chair Stump echoed appreciation for OHV enforcement efforts in the northwestern areas of the state. Commissioner Pack commended Habitat Stamp Program representatives and other organizations for their input during today's meeting. Commissioner Salazar Hickey seconded her appreciation of the public's input.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 17: Executive Session

01:31:32 p.m. (04:30:39/03:20:42)

Motion: Move to adjourn into executive session, closed to the public, pursuant to Section 10-15-1(H)(8) NMSA 1978, to discuss purchase, acquisition or disposal; Section 10-15-1(H)(7), attorney-client privilege, litigation update; and Section 10-15-1(H)(2) NMSA 1978, limited personnel matters (director's performance evaluation).

Motion by: Commissioner Salazar Hickey.

Seconded by: Commissioner Lopez.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairwoman Salazar Hickey, Commissioner Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Lopez and Commissioner Pack.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 18: Action(s) from Executive Session

02:31:05 p.m. (05:30:12/03:22:04)

Motion: Move to approve the terms the draft terms of the state land easement agreement and authorize the chair of the New Mexico State Commission to execute the agreement for hunter and angler access to state lands.

Motion by: Commissioner Lopez.

Seconded by: Commissioner Clemente.

Approved: Unanimous - Chairman Stump, Vice-chairwoman Salazar Hickey, Commissioner Clemente, Commissioner Fulfer, Commissioner Lopez and Commissioner Pack.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 19: Adjourn

02:34:19 p.m. (05:33:26/03:25:17)

Chair Richard Stump: Thanks for joining us today. Calling the meeting of the New Mexico State Game Commission to order.

[pause 00:00:22]

Commissioner Fernando Clemente: Here.

Director Michael Sloane: Vice-Chair Hickey?

Vice-Chair Sharon Salazar Hickey: Present.

Director Sloane: Chair Stump?

Chair Stump: Present.

Director Sloane: You have a quorum.

Chair Stump: How about we stand, and do the Pledge of Allegiance?

[Pledge of Allegiance recitation]

Speakers: I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Commissioner Gregg Fulfer: Can you hear me okay now?

Chair Stump: Yes. Thank you. As is our custom, I'd like to take a few minutes to introduce everybody here. I'll start with the commissioners and then go to the audience. Gregg, can you still hear me?

Commissioner Fulfer: Yes. Can you hear me okay?

Chair Stump: Yes. Why don't we start with you?

Commissioner Fulfer: I'm Gregg Fulfer. I'm sorry I can't be there today. There's a lot of issues going on down here, business, but it's all good in Lea County. From District 1, I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year.

Commissioner Clemente: Fernando Clemente, I am a Commissioner at-large from Sunland Park, New Mexico. Happy New Year, and thank you for being here.

Commissioner Lopez: Tirzio Lopez, Commissioner, District 3 from the great county of Rio Arriba. Happy New Year, everybody.

Chair Stump: I'm Richard Stump. I'm the Chair of the Commission, from Santa Fe, at-large. Happy New Year, and I hope we all have a great year this year.

Commissioner Pack: This is Sabrina Pack from District 2. That's the Southwest corner of our state. I reside in Silver City. It's good to be here, and happy New Year to you all.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Good morning. My name is Sharon Salazar Hickey. I'm from Santa Fe, New Mexico. I am your Commissioner from District 4, and I'm very honored to be here. I'm happy to see all of you present, and hopefully, I'll get to see more of you online. It's a beautiful day in New Mexico. Thank you.

Director Sloane: Good morning, everyone. Mike Sloane, the director of the Department of Game and Fish.

[unintelligible 00:03:34]

Tom Paterson: Good morning. This is Tom Paterson, a cattle rancher from Catron County, New Mexico.

I serve as the [unintelligible 00:03:45] of New Mexico. It's always a privilege to be here, even if every fire is driving us pretty [unintelligible 00:03:53]

Joe Miano: Good morning, commissioners, members of the public. My name is Joe Miano, and I'm the Budget Director for the Department of Game and Fish. Thank you.

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

Jeremy Martin: Good morning, commissioners, members of the public. I'm Jeremy Martin. I'm the department's general counsel.

Jackie Hall: Good morning, commissioners. Jackie Hall with the Carroll Petrie Foundation, based in Santa Fe.

Nicole Tatman: Good morning. Nicole Tatman, Big Game Program Manager for Game and Fish.

Tony Opatz: I'm Tony Opatz, Pronghorn Biologist for the Department of Game and Fish.

Robert Trujillo: Good morning. Robert Trujillo, Director of Wildlife, Fish, Rare Plants, and Range Management for the Southwestern region US Forest Service out of Albuquerque.

Yvette Paroz: Good morning, commissioners. I'm Yvette Paroz. I'm the Regional Fisheries Program Leader for the US Forest Service in Albuquerque.

Kirk Patten: Good morning, everyone. I'm Kirk Patten, Chief of Fisheries for the Department of Game and Fish.

Anthony Bates: Good morning, everybody. I'm Anthony Bates. I'm the Branch Chief for Life and Physical Sciences for the Bureau of Land Management Office here in Santa Fe.

Stephanie Herbert: Good morning, commissioners and everybody. I'm the Wildlife Program lead for BLM New Mexico.

Colin Duff: Good morning, everybody. My name is Colin Duff. I'm a Southern Major for the Department of Game and Fish.

Shawn Carrell: Good morning. I'm Shawn Carrell, the Lieutenant over revocations.

Dan Sutcliffe: Good morning, Dan Sutcliffe. I'm just an interested observer.

Dave Pack: Hello, everybody. My name is Dave Pack, I'm just a concerned citizen for wildlife.

Tania Veleta: Good morning. My name is Tania Veleta. I am Paralegal for Department of Game and Fish.

Reina Espinoza: Good morning, Reina Espinoza, HR Administrator.

Rebecca Archuleta: Good morning, commissioners and members of the public. My name's Rebecca Archuleta, HR Director for the Department of Game and Fish.

[silence]

Valente Meza: Valente Meza, app developer for New Mexico Game and Fish.

Wheeler Brunschmid: Okay, sorry, I skipped my turn. Good morning, Wheeler Brunschmid. I'm a Digital Media Producer for the Game and Fish.

Ryan Darr: Good morning, commissioners and members of the public. My name is Ryan Darr. I'm the Assistant Chief of Information for the Department of Game and Fish. Welcome everyone to Santa Fe.

Darren Vaughan: Good morning, commissioners, members of the public. I'm Darren Vaughan. I'm the Communications Director for the Department of Game and Fish.

Tim Cimbali: Good morning. I'm Tim Cimbali. I'm the Colonel for Field Operations with Game and Fish.

Tristanna Carrell: Good morning, everyone. I'm Tristanna Carrell. I'm the Assistant Chief of Education for the department, and we currently have 10 people joining online, but nobody has raised their hands yet to introduce themselves. I take that back. We do have one person who has raised their hand. [chuckles] Mark Mattaini, you are unmuted.

Mark Mattaini: Good morning, commissioners, and members of the public. My name is Mark Mattaini, Pagate Village, Laguna Pueblo. My wife is a tribal member. I'm a board member of the New Mexico chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and a member of the Citizen's Advisory Committee for the Habitat Stamp program, which will be presented today, I understand.

T. Carrell: Thank you, Mark. Next up, we have Jeff Arterburn.

Jeff Arterburn: Good morning, everyone [sound cut]

T. Carrell: Jeff, are you there?

Chair Stump: Looks like he might have self-muted.

Jeff: Sorry. [chuckles] Morning everyone. Jeff Arterburn here in Las Cruces. I'm also a member of the Citizen Advisory Committee for the Habitat Stamp Program, and an active member of Trout Unlimited.

T. Carrell: Next up, we have Marietta. Marietta, you can unmute yourself.

Marietta Eaton: Unmute. Okay. I'm Marietta Eaton. Hello to all the commissioners, and all the people that are visiting today. Happy New Year. I am a board member of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, and my first time to hear your meeting, and learn about your organization. Thank you.

T. Carrell: That is all the hands we have raised this morning.

Chair Stump: Right. Thank you, everybody. Item number five is the agenda. Unfortunately, I hope everyone had a chance to review it. Unfortunately, the state auditors have been behind on releasing state agency audit results. As a result of that, we are not able to move forward with our presentation, which is item number 8 today. I would [unintelligible 00:09:08] motion to approve the agenda as amended.

Commissioner Clemente: I will second the motion.

Chair Stump: Is there any discussion. Everybody say, "Aye".

Commissioner Fulfer: Aye.

Commissioner Pack: Aye.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Aye.

Chair Stump: Any opposed? Item number 6 is election of chair and vice chair. This is an action item. I'd like to take a minute, is to thank my fellow commissioners, the department, Director Sloane, Director Liley, and Chief Patten for all your time and efforts, and your dedication to the department. These are demanding positions and require so much of our time you have [inaudible 00:10:06], and I'm honored to have the opportunity to work with you [inaudible 00:10:11]. With that [unintelligible 00:10:15] like to make a nominated motion.

Commissioner Lopez: [unintelligible 00:10:22] you Mike?

Director Sloane: I know.

[laughter]

[unintelligible 00:10:27] a lot.

[laughter]

Chair Stump: What did I do?

Commissioner Lopez: [unintelligible 00:10:27] the secretary.

Commissioner Fulfer: This Chair-- Your microphone's cutting out really bad, everybody else I can hear really well, but--

Commissioner Clemente: He gets nervous every now and then.

[laughter]

Director Sloane: I think the discussion has been that as secretary, I'm supposed to handle the motion practice related to chair and vice chair. Is there a motion that a commissioner would like to make related to chair, vice chair? Commissioner Fulfer.

Commissioner Fulfer: I'd like to make a move to nominate Richard Stump as the Chair of the State Game Commission and Sharon Salazar as the Vice-Chair.

Secretary: Thank you. Is there a second?

Commissioner Clemente: I will second that motion.

Secretary: Thank you. Motion and a second, is there a discussion?

Vice-Chair Hickey: Well, I was hoping to jump in on a discussion. I want to say thank you to you, Chair Stump. I also want to say thank you to all of the commissioners, because I think the commission, the department and members of the public have seen, I think a nice improvement, a robust change in our commission. I think that there's a lot more engagement and activity. Again, I just want to say thank you to you, Chair Stump and of course to the department because we can't do this by ourselves, and that was the discussion that I wanted to have before we took a vote. Thank you.

Secretary: I'll call the roll then on motion. Commissioner Pack.

Commissioner Pack: Yes.

Secretary: Commissioner Lopez?

Commissioner Lopez: Yes.

Secretary: Commissioner Fulfer?

Commissioner Fulfer: Yes.

Secretary: Commissioner Clemente?

Commissioner Clemente: Yes.

Secretary: Vice-Chair Hickey?

Vice-Chair Hickey: Yes.

Secretary: Chair Stump? Motion passes unanimously. Mr. Chairman, you have been reelected as has the Vice-Chair.

Chair Stump: I'm looking forward to a very robust, productive year, with all of you guys. Director Sloane, can you please provide a brief summary of the consented agenda items, please?

Director Sloane: Mr. Chair, as you should have in your packets the minutes from the November 8th, 2024 meeting. Hopefully, they are accurate, and don't need any changes. Relative to revocations, we suspended 212 individuals under the Parental Responsibility Act. 49 individuals for failure to pay penalty assessments, and 6 for civil assessments.

We have 25 revocations, 10 individuals who accrued 20 or more points in a three-year period, mailed the notice of contemplated action, and requested a hearing. One individual filed their written exception, and

then another 15 individuals that accrued 20 or more points in a three-year period, they were mailed a notice of contemplated action, and did not request a hearing.

Finally, the Annual Open Meetings Act, it's exactly the same as last year's Open Meeting Act, other than changing the dates. That's pretty much it, if there are any questions, we have folks that can answer questions on revocations or anything else?

Chair Stump: Commissioner Hickey, we have a question.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Thank you Commissioner or Chair. Do we have an attorney from the Attorney General's office that the commission can contact a point of contact?

Director Sloane: Mr. Chair, commissioner, I believe Kristen Hovey is still associated with the commission, though I have not heard from the AG's office, or the Office of the Attorney General in quite some time.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Thank you.

Chair Stump: Any other questions? Commissioners? Is there a motion to approve the consented agenda as presented?

Commissioner Clemente: I so move to make the motion to accept the consented agenda as presented.

Chair Stump: is there a second?

Vice-Chair Hickey: I'll second.

Chair Stump: No more discussion. All right, all in favor say, "Aye."

Commissioner Fulfer: Aye.

Commissioner Lopez: Aye.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Aye.

Chair Stump: Any opposed? Motion passes. We remove item number 8 from the agenda, so we'll move on number 9, which is presented by Chief Kirk Patten. It's an aquatic species and greatest conservation need initiatives.

[pause 00:15:44]

Chief Kirk Patten: Good morning, Mr. Chair and commissioners. As you stated, I'm here today to present an update on some of the initiatives by the department related to aquatic species of greatest conservation need. As you have heard before, the department is in the process of updating our State Wildlife Action Plan. In talking with Director Sloan, he wanted to provide some information about ongoing within the department, some of which is supported by the funds that come through the State Wildlife Action Plan, and State Wildlife Grant.

I want to stress early on in this presentation that, what I'm presenting today is funded with a variety of different means through the department, whether it's Game Protection Fund shared with wildlife funds, State Wildlife Grant, so on and so forth. This is not just limited to state wildlife grant funds that we received through the SWAP.

I also want to stress that our efforts are a collaborative efforts, set of efforts through federal and state organizations or agencies, the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, State Land Office, so on and so forth. I'm going to present what we are focusing on with the agency, but there is much more going on, and is in partnership with those organizations.

We are currently operating under the 2016 State Wildlife Action Plan. Specific to the aquatic side of things, there are 29 species of greatest conservation needed fish, or fish that are species of greatest conservation need. There's also 30 crustaceans, as well as the mollusks that are included in that State Wildlife Action Plan. There are, I believe, 19 of those that are aquatic obligate species.

The four that I'm going to cover today, you probably have heard a little bit in the news this fall, because there have been federal listing decisions. They're a timely topic that I'm going to cover. First of those is the Pecos pupfish there on the top, then Rio Grande sucker, Rio Grande chub, and Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Rio Grande cutthroat trout are not currently a species of greatest conservation need, under this action plan, but I'll explain why to you that I'm going to cover them in this topic, later on in the presentation.

The first one that I want to cover is Pecos pupfish. It is a native species to the lower Pecos in Southeast New Mexico, all the way down into Texas. It is adapted to warm waters, but also hyper-saline. They can tolerate salinities greater than saltwater. Pretty specialized species. Back in the 1980s, the department

started to recognize that they had declined. In particular, sheepshead minnow had been introduced into the lower Pecos, and they hybridized with Pecos pupfish. Pecos pupfish gets listed under the Wildlife Conservation Act by the Game Commission in 1988.

Now, about a decade later, the Fish and Wildlife Service proposed that they should be listed under the Endangered Species Act, as endangered. Shortly after that, the department and other partners developed a conservation agreement. Which was adopted in 1999, and I'll provide some particulars on that in a minute, and this past fall, the Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed Pecos pupfish as threatened. We started working with the various partners doing contracts for surveys, so on and so forth, back in the early '80s-- Late '80s. Excuse me. This is just an excerpt, and I don't know if you can really read that all that well, from the various iterations of our conservation agreement over time, and I've included this to demonstrate an evolution of our activities through the years, depending upon what we knew of the species.

In 1999, our commitments as a department were to recommend to the Game Commission to change bait fish regulations to restrict them, or to reduce the likelihood that sheepshead minnow would be introduced upstream of Brantley Reservoir through angling activities, and so on and so forth, moving down to the point where now we are engaged in annual monitoring, we are engaged in conservation actions, and including looking for refuge areas to expand the range of Pecos pupfish in New Mexico.

Some of the activities that we've done through the years, we do annual monitoring. It took a significant amount of work to come up with a monitoring plan with our partners, because Pecos pupfish populations are just naturally very-- Their populations vary significantly from year-to-year. We adopted a change to that. It's sometimes hard to give up a historic data set from the way you've been doing it.

We provided some changes to that in the not-too-distant past, to try and remove some of that statistical noise. Years ago, we also worked with our partners down the Bureau of Land-- In the Roswell area on Bureau of Land Management property to install fish barriers, to preclude the likelihood that if sheepshead minnow were introduced upstream of Brantley Reservoir, they could then-- They wouldn't get into the more critical habitats in this Bureau of Land Management area.

Some other examples of conservation actions that we've been doing for years is research into just the basic life history of Pecos pupfish. For years, we didn't really know what was going on, how they would respond to different conditions, so we funded research into the life history. We looked into significant, or we provided significant resources into estimating the level of hybridization across the range of the species.

Most recently, the Share of Wildlife Program funded a study where we looked at genetic structure across populations of Pecos pupfish, but it also gave us the ability to look at how recently it, or if at all, some of those populations had gone through genetic bottlenecks. In fact, one of the populations has gone through a recent bottleneck, which would somewhat be expected, given their boom and bust type population dynamics.

The next two species that I'm going to discuss with you are species of greatest conservation need is Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker. I want to stress that these are two separate species. They have different life histories, different habitat requirements, but there's a fair amount of historical overlap in their distribution historically and currently. Just from a matter of convenience, we lumped them together from a fish community standpoint.

Back in 2006, both species were considered a species of greatest conservation need under our Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. It was the precursor to our SWAP. They were petitioned for federal protection back in 2013, 2014. We developed a conservation strategy with our federal and state partners in 2018, and this past fall, the Fish and Wildlife Service, based upon the conservation efforts by the department and our partners, including Colorado and Texas, concluded that neither species were in need of federal protection under the Endangered Species Act.

We began-- Well, let's back up. Back in 1990, a *Fishes of New Mexico* book was published, and at that time, the authors of that book indicated that Rio Grande sucker were, or excuse me, Rio Grande chub were stable, and there was no mention about the conservation status of Rio Grande suckers. Over time, we started to monitor the status of these populations.

Coincidentally, mostly with our trout surveys that we completed across the state, but we also noticed that there was a need to start to track these species better, and probably to proactively do some conservation efforts. There's been a progression over time of what the department, and our partners have done, in order to proactively address the needs of these two species.

These are just a couple distribution maps of our current understanding of the historic distribution of Rio Grande sucker and chub versus their current distribution. They do overlap quite a bit. We're still trying to tease out whether Rio Grande chub are native to the upper Canadian basin. There is some genetic information that indicates that Rio Grande sucker are native to the Mimbres Basin in the southern part of the state, as well as the Gila.

A lot of this information we wouldn't have, if we weren't tracking these species starting back in the early 2000s, up through the current day. Again, I want to stress the importance of these conservation agreements, and the resulting conservation strategies that we've used through the years. We adopted this in 2018, and the idea is that the conservation agreement essentially says, we're all going to work together for the conservation of a species, and then we use a strategy to identify needs, whether it's near-term that top panel is some of the near-term monitoring needs that we have for Rio Grande chub. Then, we also plan out some of the longer-term restoration activities, whether it's habitat restoration, population expansion, protecting certain areas from encroachment from non-native species.

This is just an example of some of our research that we've done that top panel is looking at the genetic relatedness among populations of Rio Grande chub across the range of including Colorado. In that case, again, we're trying to figure out whether or not Rio Grande chub are native to the Canadian basin, as well as if we were to start moving these fish around to expand their current range, what would be the best strategy for doing so? Same thing with that bottom panel, it's just a few populations of Rio Grande sucker here in New Mexico.

The Share with Wildlife Program also funded a study by some researchers out of Albuquerque, a private consulting firm, looking at the habitat and fish community associations of Rio Grande sucker and chub. Again, this is a way of expanding our level of knowledge about what the risks are to those species, so we can proactively work to secure them, and expand their range.

We have also worked with the Forest Service to expand our understanding of the range of Rio Grande chub and sucker with the use of eDNA technology. Basically, you can take a water sample, filter it, send it off to a genetics lab, and they can tell you what species, it's where, given a certain proximity where the sample is taken. This has really been significant in our understanding in the distribution of both of these species and others.

We are beginning to do more and more habitat restoration for these species. You will see this picture later on when I talk about Rio Grande cutthroat trout. This is the Rio Costilla Basin, where we've done significant native fish restoration from a community standpoint, and Rio Grande chub and sucker were the beneficiaries of this working on Carson National Forest.

We've also begun to, and work in the fish passage area. This is an area by Lisboa Springs Hatchery, where we had to-- Essentially, there was a historic diversion structure for the hatchery, as well as for a private landowner that we worked with, and we could have just built a regular old diversion that would have backed up the water, and delivered water. Alternatively, we incorporated fish passage components into this, and it's just a longer, more gradual, I guess, way of moving water, but it also helps Rio Grande chub move through this area along the way.

We've been working with others to try and replicate this type of work in other areas in the state. We've also expanded on our species restoration efforts for Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker. Two or three years ago, we worked with Bandelier National Monument to put Rio Grande chub and sucker into Frijoles Creek.

We also incorporated back starting in 2005, we incorporated both of those species into our cutthroat restoration plans in the Costilla Basin, and both Rio Grande chub and sucker reproduced in the Costilla Basin. We documented that for the first time this past year, so that's a pretty significant accomplishment for us and our partners.

Beginning in 20 or 2003, and it extended up until around 2007, the department funded the construction of an aquatic conservation facility at the Biopark, and since that time, the Biopark has reared a handful of

other species of greatest conservation need for conservation purposes. This year we reengage with the Biopark to fund the ability to house temporarily, Rio Grande sucker and Rio Grande chub for quarantine purposes, as we begin to move them into different areas.

We're also working with them to expand the rearing capacity at the Biopark, so they can actually permanently house those for us, and rear them, and increase the numbers that we have available for restoration purposes. I said earlier in this presentation that included Rio Grande cutthroat trout, they're not currently a species of greatest conservation need, but they were back when we were adopted the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy in 2006.

They are proposed to be added back to the SWAP species of greatest conservation list in this newer iteration. Considering the long history we have of Rio Grande cutthroat trout restoration efforts in New Mexico, I wanted to include them here again, because they're part of the fish community with Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker. There's a long history related to ESA petitions and litigation related to Rio Grande cutthroat trout that I'm not going to go into.

We have various iterations of conservation agreements, and again, conservation strategies which line out what we're going to do for that species in conjunction with our partners. Most recently, and I think it was in December of 2024, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced that they concluded that Rio Grande cutthroat trout were not in need of federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. Again, this is just an example from the conservation strategy, where we outline the goals that we want to hit as far as expanding their range, securing their populations, how many populations we want to monitor over, say a 10-year period.

We do a significant amount of population monitoring each year, whether it's genetics, investigating the genetic status of a population. That bottom panel is significant to me. I want to draw attention to those. It would be the third from the bottom, and the second of the percent of historic distribution, the mean patched length. Essentially, with our partners each year, we track the status of the population, we can say, we've lost habitat, occupied, we've gained habitat.

Since 2006, up until our latest accounting of this in 2022, we've improved the historic distribution of Rio Grande cutthroat trout in New Mexico by about 16%, as well as increase the mean patch length for Rio Grande cutthroat trout by about 15%. Significant, in my opinion, improvements considering the daunting challenge in front of us. Again, habitat restoration we do for Rio Grande cutthroat trout. You're going to hear later on about the Habitat Stamp program.

There is funds going towards forest service projects with Rio Grande cutthroat trout streams that are the beneficiary. We've done a significant amount of work of installing fish barriers to preclude a non-native species re-invasion of these areas through the years. There's been a large evolution of the size and the complexity of the structures. We all know too well about the risks posed by wildfires the past several years.

I wish I could say that we didn't need to be good at rescuing fish from fires, but we've become pretty efficient at it through the years. Whether it's Gila trout, or Rio Grande cutthroat trout, we have a pretty good plan in place to work with our partners to get into these areas to make sure that we can conserve as much of their habitat as we can.

We have a long history, a mature history of rearing Rio Grande cutthroat trout at Seven Springs Hatchery. Essentially, this is a broodstock facility where we take eggs into them, to the hatchery. They rear them up, and then they go, and they spawn their own fish, and rear them in the hatchery setting where we end up backpacking them in on a cold, snowy day into a remote canyon to start a new population, or in another case, we'd love to have the public come out and help us stock Rio Grande cutthroat trout into restoration areas.

That's a small stream on the bottom right where the Trout Unlimited volunteers came up and helped us stock Rio Grande cuts into Willow Creek. Actually, it flows through one of our wildlife management areas. Since my time with the hatchery, or with the hatchery-- With the department, we have done a significant amount of work, whether it's funding ourselves, or being a part of the original research, and contributing to the scientific understanding of Rio Grande cutthroat trout, or just the general native cutthroat trout understanding across the west.

This is my final slide. I just wanted to come back to the purpose of State Wildlife Grant funds. It's intended to be a proactive type funding for species of greatest conservation need that may already be listed under state or federal law, or aren't listed under federal state law. It's money intended to conserve those species proactively. I just wanted to run through again, these four species that we've covered, or that I've covered today.

First of those is Pecos pupfish. Earlier in my presentation, I mentioned that the Fish and Wildlife Service had proposed them as endangered back in 1999. I don't necessarily agree with the proposed threatened status, or proposed threatened rule this year. Nonetheless, in some 25 years or so, we've gone from an endangered need to a threatened need with a 4(d) rule, which gives the state of New Mexico and the state of Texas a little more flexibility in our management ability.

I think that's a positive for the work we've done along the way. With Rio Grande chub, sucker and cutthroat because of our conservation efforts, again, with our partners, states of Colorado Forest Service, BLM, so on and so forth, we have, in my opinion, made a positive step there, where it could have been a warranted status, but now we are where it's going to stay under state control, and listing under ESA is not warranted.

With that, I will finish with a nice picture of some Pecos pupfish habitat down in the southern part of the state, and take any questions. Thank you.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Chief Patten. That was a great presentation, and that's really good news. We don't want anything listed, right? Good job up there. Do we have any public comments, or questions? Commissioners? All righty then. This is an action item, so no motion is necessary. Item number 10. Thank you, Kirk. We appreciate that. Chief Stewart Liley will make a presentation on the Migratory Bird Rule.

Chief Stewart Liley: Good morning, commissioners. As stated, we'll be presenting on the Migratory Game Bird Rule. This happens every year. It's an annual rule working in conjunction with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the flyways to develop hunting seasons for migratory game birds. We always adjust our season dates and possession, and bag limits according to the federal frameworks.

Those federal frameworks will be proposed here pretty soon, and then final frameworks come out typically around August, right before the hunting season starts on September 1st for doves. That's when the main migratory game bird season starts. One thing to note, though, which will be a big change for all the flyways, but especially New Mexico, is there is a new federal framework package for pintails.

Historically, pintails, we've seen a lot of variability in the bag limits from all the way down to one, up to three, to two, to one, and that changes on an annual basis. A new package was developed in conjunction with the states and the federal government to understand a better population adjustment for pintails to determine harvest. What you'll see in this next season is going to be a bag limit of three birds for pintails. For New Mexico, especially along the middle Rio Grande, we winter a lot of pintails, and I think we'll see a lot less frustration from some of our hunters on that change not occurring as frequently. The projections are from that, if the population stays status quo will be at a three-bird bag limit 90% of the years. Luckily, I think that framework that was adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Service last year will really help.

We'll adjust Sandhill crane, especially for the Rocky Mountain population. Again, New Mexico, winter is the largest portion of the Rocky Mountain population, the greater Sandhill crane population along the middle Rio Grande, all the way down to the southwest and into Mexico, but we winter the majority of those birds. That population continues to increase.

Last year was our largest allocation ever. We'll get our allocation mid-April, typically, is about when we'll know what our allocation is for the next year. We'll adjust, draw permits specifically based on what the allocation we receive from the Fish and Wildlife Service. We'll hold a public hybrid meeting in March or April to discuss proposed changes once we get a little more details from the Fish and Wildlife Service. Come back to you all in the April meeting, assuming that's the schedule that we're looking at right now to discuss what the department's recommendations are based off of our frameworks, and any allocations we receive. Right now, our proposals in terms of season dates-- I guess it's not in presentation mode, I apologize.

Our season length is already getting known. It's a liberal season, seasons like we've had the last few years. We're proposing in the northern zone of the Central Flyway opening a little bit earlier, given the

freeze-out conditions we do see typically in January in the north, and then the south zone running to the end of what's allowable in the federal frameworks, and then backing out the days. That's why you see the south zone opening a little bit later. We only have 97 exposure days. Then, for geese, you'll see the different dates that we're proposing for both light and dark geese. In the Central Pacific Flyway, we have a little bit longer of a season. We get 107 days of exposure. You'll see that we go all the way to the 31st, all the way in the north and south zone, and back it up into opening October 19th. That just allows for birds migrating in, et cetera. Scaup seasons are a little bit shorter, just the way the federal frameworks work on that. With that, I'll take any questions on the migratory bird.

Chair Stump: Any questions from the audience, commissioners?

Vice-Chair Hickey: Mr. Chair, yes. Division chief, I do have one question for you. You said possibly having a public meeting in April. Do you think you could be as ready by April 4th, the first weekend in April?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Salazar Hickey, absolutely. It might be as soon as March when we have that public meeting. It really depends on what information we get from the Fish and Wildlife Service, so we want to be able to have our public meeting that guides as much information as possible. I think the one thing that might not come in in time is what our allocation on Sandhill crane permit is going to be.

It would maybe be at that public meeting just discussing options, assuming we have an allocation similar to last year on how many hunts we want, how many draw permits, what our bag limits would be. That would be the only thing where we won't have potentially complete information from the Fish and Wildlife Service before the public meeting.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Of course, we would still have at least three other commission meetings, where we could proceed with the rulemaking hearing.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Salazar Hickey, absolutely. Yes, we could have another-- [crosstalk]

Vice-Chair Hickey: That's my only question. Thank you.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Stewart. This is not an action item, so no motion is needed on this one. Item number 11, presented by Chief Liley, again is a Habitat Stamp Project overview. [silence]

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, members of the commission, yes, so a few of you are newer to the commission since we've had an update on the Habitat Stamp program. I think it's important to-- There's multiple programs that the department initiates for habitat improvements around the state. One of the larger ones is our Habitat Stamp program, or also known as the Sikes Act program, that works to improve habitat on federal land.

We have other programs. On habitat enhancement, we use our big game enhancement fund to improve habitat across the state. They're complimentary to the program, but we're going to just talk specifically about this one program, the Habitat Stamp program, or known as Sikes Act program. It was initiated on an experimental basis in 1986 in the state of New Mexico. It went more or less programmatic through a commission rule in 1991.

It's been in place, obviously, a long time. It's a longstanding program that's seen great benefits across the state of New Mexico for habitat and species that depend upon it. Anyone that does hunt, or fish on federal lands, it's required that they purchase a Habitat Stamp prior to fishing on, or hunting on those lands. The revenue of that is used exactly to conserve those habitats.

There is a citizen advisory committee, and we'll get a little bit more into it. Again, it's funded by sports people of New Mexico, both fishing, hunting and, and it's really used to improve those habitats on US Forest Service and BLM lands, and guided by a citizen advisory committee made up of nine members. We'll get to some of the changes. We had some big changes that occurred.

Some of you all were on the commission when those changes occurred in 2021. Really the big changes that occurred then is the stamp used to cost \$5. It cost \$5 basically since inception until we changed it in 2021. We moved the stamp. The commission elected to increase the state stamp cost to \$10. That obviously doubled our annual budget from about \$750,000 to \$1.5 to \$2 million.

Some years we have a little bit more just because projects didn't get completed in the previous year, and account balances in the that fund allowed us to do more. We'll get into some of those project fundings on an annual basis here in a second. The biggest change that I think we saw, was we had five regional CAC, Citizen Advisory Committees, or the state was broken down into five regions, where we split that pool of money, that \$750,000 to \$1 million across five different semi-branches, if you will, across the state. If you could think about it, \$750,000 split five ways really creates for not a lot of money per project in one region. What we were seeing was not the ability to do landscape-scale habitat improvements, the inability to really focus on large, meaningful projects. That's why we went, and the commission and the department's recommendation was to go to one statewide citizen advisory committee, and our statewide approach working at the most meaningful benefits for habitat improvements on federal lands that have the biggest bang for the buck, and being able to do landscape-scale restoration projects at this point. Previous to that, again, \$20,000 in a project wasn't able to get you-- When it's costing almost \$2,000 an acre to masticate something, obviously, you're not getting much done on the landscape at the scale that we were doing it. The other really big change that came into play, the commission implemented in 2021, was every five years, we have to spend at least 50% of the money on fish-related projects. Part of that is a recognition that about half the stamp buyers are those that are fishermen, so there was a more emphasis placed on fish projects than previously. We'll get into some of the projects that we've done over the last few years since 2021. Those were the two biggest changes that occurred. Really how it works is, project ideas can be from anywhere, from the federal land management agencies, it could be from the public, it can come from the CAC, but projects are developed either over years in the making, or sometimes short, but they come to the CAC in the summer typically, is how our schedule works now. Projects are presented to the citizen advisory committee at their annual summer meeting to discuss project proposals, to discuss the benefits of them, where they are, how they were developed, et cetera. I'll keep referring to it, CAC. It's an advisory committee, ranks those projects on an annual basis, going forth on which ones should happen, which ones they feel are the most beneficial for spending across there. Just a picture of how that cycle works. We'll start July. That's the same as our fiscal year. Another big thing that we've done over the years is we used to work on an annual operating budget that was approved by the legislature. We would have-- Our fiscal year runs July 1 through June 30th. If the money was not spent during that timeframe, it reverted back to the funds, and we'd have to get reapproved from the legislature. We've moved the majority of our Habitat Stamp funding to capital improvement projects. The legislature looks at habitat restoration as a capital improvement as well. What that does is, when we get a capital appropriation approved from the legislature, we have four years to spend it. It'll start at the start of the fiscal year, but we have four years, so on a year when we might have forest closures due to dry conditions, or forest fires, and we can't get a project implemented, it allows us now to keep that money in that pot, wait till that next fiscal year, and go do that project. It's a big improvement over previous where it reverts back, the project would basically be canceled, and we'd have to wait for the legislature to reapprove the appropriation. What you'll see is, most of our money is done in capital appropriations. Now, the only money that we really look for out of approval from the legislature on an annual basis is the funding of our Habitat Stamp program coordinator, and a little bit of money on some maintenance of projects, et cetera. Getting back to the slide here. In July, we have a public meeting. All the citizen advisory committee meetings, our public meetings, they're hybrid meetings now. We've moved to that approach since COVID on all of these. We present projects to the CAC, show what the projects are, the proposals to both the CAC and the public. The CAC takes those projects back to under consideration for about a month, month and a half, and then at the middle to end of August, they prioritize which projects they feel are the best projects to move forward with in the next fiscal year. During that fall, winter time period, there's a project implementation going on. That's always happening. Now, with that new cycle of capital money, we could have project implementation happening at any time of the year crossing over fiscal years, et cetera. We have ongoing project implementation, typically, from the last previous year of approval. Then, in January, if necessary, we do get new CAC members.

Every so often, we have a onboarding orientation meeting for CAC members, and then just an annual report following what happened in the previous year. February, March, that annual update on it, and an implementation report. Why February or March? We wait to discuss financials until the final audit, the whole state audit of the department is done, because it does also-- That audit that you all would have seen today, typically, approves also its audited the Habitat Stamp fund.

Once we get those all audited, approved, we then present back out funding what project updates are in that February, March. Again, project implementation is happening throughout the spring as well. Then, in June, new projects are being presented back to the CAC, prepped ready to go in front of that July meeting. Real briefly, here's the list of the current CAC members. I noticed there was a couple members online this morning, that both Mr. Arterburn and Mr. Mattaini, our two current CAC members. You'll notice here that four of the nine members do have terms expiring in a year.

We'll be coming back to you all next spring-- Early, I guess late winter, early spring, for approval of probably four new members. You'll see the nine members there. The commission, when they did reform from five CAC members to one, they increased the size of each CAC, if you will, to nine members. They follow the same districts. If you're commissioned as well, you'll notice that the five districts, but there's the four at-large positions.

There's some at-large positions that are just truly at-large. Don't have any specific ties to it, but there are two at-large positions that also follow the commission kind of structure on positions. Since 2021, I want to go through what we've done. We've implemented 41 projects, and completed 41 projects, spent almost \$6 million on projects across the state. That's almost 11,000 acres of forest restoration.

I think it's important to note that's 11,000 acres actually manipulated. That 11,000 acres means a lot more for the totality of the forest outside of the actual acres cut or burned, or something like that. You are having a bigger landscape scale on that. We've converted 52 miles of fence for wildlife connectivity, and we'll get into some of the specifics on those projects.

5.5 acres of wetlands protected. Some of that is trying to ensure less degradation along the wetlands. 62 acres of stream and lake rehabilitation and 5 water renovations. Real quick, just looking at the funding breakout between fisheries-specific projects and wildlife projects, you'll notice that there were over 50%. Part of that was about three years ago, there was a capital appropriation specifically for fish, \$2.5 million for fish. We've expended the majority of that capital appropriation.

We were getting the headstart on some of the fish projects. After this year's prioritization, the CAC did prioritize new projects will be roughly-- Excuse me, 54% fish and 46% wildlife. A lot more wildlife projects. This year's prioritization would put it at about \$4.1 million in wildlife projects and \$4.7 or almost \$4.8 million in fisheries-based projects. This graphic is looking at the scale at which we've ramped up expenditures, but also by projects.

The gray bar, if you will, corresponds to the annual appropriation that we've allocated towards fish, or excuse me, towards projects. You'll see up to that 2021 change, we are allocating up to about a million dollars each year. You'll see the peak in fiscal year 2021 at a million. Whereas each year since that change, we've ramped up how much we've been able to allocate, up to this last year, where we allocate \$3 million, or committed up to \$3 million on an annual basis on habitat projects for the Habitat Stamp. Most likely, that's going to plateau. We're not going to see a lot more, because we were spending some of the fund balance. We'll probably see that cap out around 3 at the highest, maybe a little bit less of the 2.5 on an annual basis. That green line is the average amount of money we spend on an individual project. I think that was the goal of the 2021 change was to have more meaningful projects, if you will, have money spent at a bigger scale, landscape scale.

You'll see it really ramps up in fiscal year 2023, where we're averaging over a \$100,000 per project, up to this year, where we're over \$400,000 per project. Really again, the goal of the changes were to try to increase the capacity of each individual project, and have a more meaningful benefit on the landscape. Here, since the 2021 change, these are the specific projects that we've implemented or committed in 2025. You'll notice again, it's widespread.

Going back, this money has to be spent on federal land, so either BLM or state land. You'll notice there's some gaps in there in the northeast. That's specifically because there is not very many federal lands out there. There are some of the Kiowa Grasslands, that's the only federal land, but it is specific to federal

BLM or Forest Service lands. Some of these projects are large-scale in terms of multiple forest ranger districts. That dot might just be in portions of that federal ranger district. It may encompass a much larger scale than the dot actually shows. It's just where the main ranger district is.

Just going through a few of the highlights of projects that have been completed since 2021. This one is a pretty large landscape-scale forest restoration. It's on the Cibola National Forest, Black Mesa. It also borders the L Bar, the Land Acquisition Marquez L Bar, that you all did a few years ago. The L Bar is that blue area. You'll notice to the north of that, there's the Forest Service in green and the BLM in the yellow. We're doing a landscape-scale connectivity of habitat projects throughout there. That is an old historic, densely grown Ponderosa pine forest. We're opening up canopy, prepping for fire and fire return interval. A lot of what we're doing in these treatments is prepping sites for natural fire return to come back in. Hopefully, not as much catastrophic fire as what we're seeing in some of these other closed canopy areas that the state has been witnessing. We've seen in some of these areas where we've done habitat work before, those catastrophic fires don't start. It stays in the ground and doesn't get up in the canopy. You'll notice that Habitat Stamp has funded almost \$300,000 of thinning in there. Then, in this last fiscal year, the CAC prioritized another \$350,000 in thinning.

Habitat Stamp plays one role in that, but the partners, BLM, Forest Service, and also our other dollars like Big Game Enhancement, has enhanced over 100,000 acres in this landscape. You could see landscape there. A lot of it, again, is forest thinning and prep for either prescribed burn or natural fire starts that they're able to manage and not have to extinguish it because of fears for catastrophic fire.

Another project, a fish project. Kirk kind of mentioned some of this, this is not one of the Rio Grande ones, but this is for heli trout and fish restoration projects. Again, 50% of the money was supposed to be coming through on fish-related projects. This project was in Willow Creek helping reduce erosion and sedimentation, creating fish habitat and reducing potential stream temperatures, and reducing the impacts of these high temperatures that are seen throughout the summer, hoping to improve just the overall fish habitat, which improves fish health and the population of heli trout.

You'll see some of the different projects that were implemented by the Habitat Stamp program. You'll see the dollars there, a little over \$1.3 million that was done on work in that Willow Creek since 2001 rule change, so a significant amount of work in that Willow Creek area. Again, all of these projects are part of a greater effort to collaborative effort. Habitat Stamp is not the sole funders or the sole partners in there, but it's a larger partnership through a lot of entities, both governmental entities and non-governmental entities that help to restore some of these habitats or both fisheries and wildlife habitats.

A big one, too, that we've been working on is connectivity. We're going to get to another connectivity presentation here in a minute on corridors, but one of these is on pronghorn connectivity. Pronghorn really have the ability to be fragmented, and suffer from fragmentation, and being able to utilize the landscape, specifically fences and historic net wire fencing that was put up for sheep. What we've been working with on the BLM, both on the Taos Plateau and the Roswell Field Office, is working to look at connectivity to allow passage of pronghorn throughout the landscape. Now, pronghorn was specifically targeted, but connectivity and fence connectivity helps with a lot of other species, whether it be deer, elk, et cetera. You'll see here on the Taos Plateau, that's an area where we have worked on lay-down fence. I don't know if some of you have seen that or not, but basically, that fence is able to be put up when there's grazing occurring, and taken and laid flat while grazing is not occurring. What you'll see is a big corridor that-- and we'll get to some of the collar data in the next presentation where we see animals really utilizing those areas where we've targeted some of the fence modifications and also some of the radio collar data that we've been able to pinpoint where those modifications can happen. Habitat Stamp has funded quite a bit of this, along with other partner monies as well.

Another project, and Kirk mentioned some of this project in his presentation on Rio Grande sucker, Rio Grande chub, and also Rio Grande cutthroat. It's a bigger project, not only in the watershed, but up the watershed as well, in the Valle Vidal is restoring some of that stream and meadow complex in there.

These were typically wet meadows. Some of them were drained. You'll see some of the before and after pictures where we have more water retention within the wetlands in there now.

Post habitat enhancement, a little over \$1.2 million of Habitat Stamp funding has been done since 2001 on the Valle Vidal. Again, it's trying to enhance overall wetland function, improve fish and riparian habitat.

Improving that riparian habitat has a multitude of impacts from both terrestrial and aquatic species, and in avian species, really that depend upon those riparian habitats. You'll see the project was in a 27,000-acre watershed, and it's been a long-term project.

Again, when we talk about collaborators, this one's unique in that we had Coca-Cola being a big collaborator on it. Coca-Cola was trying to get at a net-zero water use, and so they take into credit, and they gave quite a bit of money of matching funds into trying to increase the water capacity within the Valle Vidal to look at their impacts on water use within their bottling facilities to try to get at net zero.

Working with the array of partners, our staff work to try to work with some of these other unique partners, whether it be sometimes oil and gas companies, wind companies, to even Coca-Cola. What I'm just showing dollar-wise it's just the Habitat Stamp money, but you could easily say on almost all these projects, it's three to four times greater in the total project expenditures just because of all the partner money that comes in from federal land management agencies or others.

I think one of the new projects that's exciting that's coming up is the Rio de las Vacas in the Jemez Mountains. Again, it's getting that stream resiliency, riparian, just seeing some of the importance of these riparian areas for all suites of species, whether it be SGCN to elk, to deer, to fish to whatever it be, these riparian areas are extremely valuable for wildlife. This project aims to, again, increase the resiliency within there. It also looks to abate some of the flood damages that we've seen in some of these post-floodings. We've seen some of these riparian restoration projects. When we do have any post-fire flooding, they help secure some of that water. We don't see as much of a flood damage later.

You'll also see it in these where we don't have fire come through there as much when fire does happen. It's working on multitudes of aspects in there to improve just that riparian area. Then, Whitewater Creek is another one that we're working on. Another heli trout fishery working to improve that fishery, and the health around Whitewater Creek kind of similar to Willow Creek on improving just the habitats for that species.

Then one of the bigger projects in the north that's been ongoing and will continue to go in the future is working on using prescribed fire to reduce the potential impacts of large catastrophic wildfires. We're working with the Carson, Santa Fe, and the Cibola across all the forest to increase the prescribed fire capacity across all of them to work on, again, creating more resilient forests, reducing the impacts of catastrophic wildfire, or hoping to prevent catastrophic wildfire [unintelligible 01:05:51]. I think again 2021 is when this came into play, a lot of stuff has happened in the last four years.

A lot of stuff within the department have worked pretty hard on this. Our Habitat Stamp partner, Caitlin Ruhl, and previous to that, Danny Lusk, and our federal partners have been really key to this in making sure that we see success. I think the goal to get more landscape-scale project going has been accomplished. I could have shown you previous maps of where we would've had a lot more projects, and a lot more points on there, but they would have been \$2,000, \$4,000 projects that probably weren't having as meaningful wildlife impacts. I think, again, the goals that the commission looked for in 2021 are starting to be achieved.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Chief Liley. Do we have any questions from the audience?

Chief Stewart Liley: I do believe we have a few of our federal partners here as well too. I don't know if they wish to speak. [silence]

Robert Trujillo: [inaudible 01:07:00]. New update at Habitat Stamp program [unintelligible 01:07:11] which have worked well to facilitate [unintelligible 01:07:13] between the department and the Forest Service. The forests are also in support of the focus of half of the funding being directed to projects that improve fisheries and aquatic habitats. High-quality aquatic habitat is essential for all wildlife species in the state of New Mexico. Riparian restoration projects also are key for improving the resiliency of watersheds that supply water for the communities of New Mexico.

Healthy riparian and wet metal systems may also provide natural barriers to wildfire movement. In the last few years, the focus of habitat stem funding focusing on a variety of large-scale, upland, and aquatic restoration projects has made an impact on improving habitat for a variety of wildlife species. The Habitat Stamp funds and projects have also complemented it, worked in partnership of with many of the other federal funding programs available to us such as the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Projects such the Willow Creek on Gila National Forest, Rio San Antonio, and the Carson National Forest, and the Cibola National Forest Black Mesa Restoration project are prime examples of cooperative projects that are aiming to improve wildlife and fisheries habitats by optimizing vegetation density, fire resiliency, natural water storage, and retention through healthy watersheds, riparian, and wetland areas. Thank you.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Trujillo.

Stephanie Herbert: Good morning, my name is Stephanie Herbert, I'm the wildlife program lead for BLM New Mexico. I appreciate everyone's time today. I'd like to just a couple of words in support of the Habitat Stamp program as well. I worked closely with Donald and Danny, who Stewart mentioned before, in developing and putting forth projects, and the collaborative nature is really something that's been helpful, I think not only to myself, but the state level, but also to our field office biologists throughout the state. We just had a meeting last week with one of our field officers for new project proposals for this year, and we have another one upcoming next week, so I can say that the system is fully flowing for this year already. BLM has multiple directives that the Habitat Stamp program supports. We have a recent 2023 **[unintelligible 00:09:29]** Wildlife Habitat Connectivity, and of course, Secretarial Order 3362. Both of which these funds support implementing on the landscape. BLM really just appreciates the opportunity to put forth projects, and also the consistent opportunity, year after year, to find meaningful resources for project funds to improve wildlife habitat on the landscape. Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

Chair Stump: Thank you. Commissioners, any of you have any questions?

Commissioner Lopez: Mr. Chair.

Chair Stump: Commissioner Lopez.

Commissioner Lopez: Mr. Liley and a couple of the federal partners, Dr. **[unintelligible 01:10:13]**, and BLM, and I can't remember your name, ma'am, with the fisheries, thank you so much for being here. I do have a couple of questions regarding the habitat program that will incorporate the first part of the question, and the second part to the Bureau. Let me start with the Forest Service and the department. I've seen a lot of projects here that involve the Carson National Forest, which encompasses most of northern New Mexico, borders of Rio Grande, North of Colorado.

This might go to the Habitat Stamp committee. Have any of these projects or any projects been given priority to some are recreation areas, aquatic species areas in northern New Mexico, which would include, the Canjilon lakes, the Rio Nutrias aquatic area, the trout lakes that would be beneficial for these habitat funds to be applied? These are very high popular recreation areas with the public, and they're going downhill pretty fast. Some of the dams are about to burst in a couple of these areas.

There's been some thinning projects that have affected, well, of course-- the death of the aspen trees up there that affected a couple of the lakes and stuff in Canjilon, and, of course, the Rio Nutrias, which is a big **[unintelligible 01:11:34]**. I think there's a little bit of Rio Grande cutthroat up there. I don't know if Director Patten's up here in the Canjilon. I don't know if that's been looked at soon, maybe.

Chief Stewart Liley: Chair, Commissioner Lopez, to answer your question, yes, there's been projects that have been implemented. Like you said, the death of the aspen and some of the thinning that occurred. I think the biggest challenge that we face from a habitat enhancement management standpoint is all the NEPA compliance that has to happen before a project sees implementation. Sometimes that NEPA can cost even more than the project implementation. I think what we've done is work with the Forest Service and the BLM and our federal partners on trying to figure out NEPA landscapes that we want to work on, so we can get into these areas and do implementation.

I think one of the biggest NEPA wins that we've seen in the last 5 to 10 years is a kind of a riparian NEPA programmatic agreement that we worked with the Forest Service on the northern forest Rio Grande, or excuse me, the Carson, as you mentioned the Santa Fe, the Cibola to work in these riparian areas. That's allowing some of this Rio de las Vacas and would allow some of the other riparian areas that you mentioned.

There is other fundings that have gone into some of those landscape scale projects that you're mentioning, but specific, like a lake dredging or something like that that's outside the scope of a specific NEPA would have to go into a NEPA project. I think that's kind of a discussion that the CAC has had, and

I think the CAC is moving towards funding some of those, those planning, the engineering, those kind of designs, knowing that in order to see the completion of that project, we're going to have to fund that. Those discussions have come through the Citizen Advisory Committee.

I think there's more openness to understanding the complexities of NEPA, and without NEPA, it's never going to happen, even though we'd like to, we know that that needs to be, for example, maybe try a lake dredge or something like that, but in order to get that action done, we might be years in the making on NEPA. Yes, I would say that they are being looked at and getting prioritized in some of the NEPA planning, especially like in the fisheries world, that NEPA even gets more complex.

Commissioner Lopez: That's good to know. Thank you so much that the discussion happened. Second part of the question goes to the department and the Bureau. Nice work for the Bureau years and years and years ago in Las Cruces, years ago. Regarding the grazing allotment, I look to President-Elect Tom Paterson, a couple of allotments in the northern part of the Rio Chama wilderness area study area. I don't know if they need lay-down fences or possibly done in that area, but there's a lot of cattle producers that use that grazing allotment through BLM. Of course, that borders the Jicarilla, I believe the Carson, borders the Santa Fe that's heavily traveled by elk, which is raising is good, but cattle's good as well. I don't know if any of those projects have been looked at to see if lay-down fences can be put out there as a project. Any ideas, or what would be the process for CAC to look at that?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Lopez, absolutely, it can be looked at. I think a lot of times those lay-down fences occur when, for example, in the Taos Plateau, they were doing highway construction, and so a lot of times highway construction comes with a fence modification, or redoing that right of way fence. A lot of that lay-down fence on there came as working with the grazing permittee, and also the Taos Plateau on lay-down fencing.

I think anytime that there's going to be a fence modification, whether it's a permittee that's building new fence, working with the permittee, the BLM, Forest Service, whatever it be, we absolutely could look at the options of lay-down fencing, especially in migratory herds where damage to fencing is both pretty big when you have these big herds that come through and also can be impactful with wildlife. Absolutely, we're always looking at opportunities for that. I think in the next presentation on corridors, you're going to see some of these bigger corridors that we've detected, that maybe pinpoints where we should focus and work with them.

Again, Habitat Stamp is one funding avenue. Our fencing that we've done in terms of fence modifications across the state, I would say that the Habitat Stamp represents less than 10% of our funding. A lot more has come from our big game enhancement, but absolutely can kick in too, and contribute. I think it really is a function of is there not funding available for that, and where we could put that.

Commissioner Lopez: Thank you, Chief. You took the words out of my mouth. I was doing a lead into the wildlife corridors up and coming in the discussions that happened the last few years with the legislature and the areas that have been selected throughout the state. I just wanted to highlight those couple of areas that reside in District 3 that I get questions about from leaseholders, grazing allotments, as well as stakeholders for the [unintelligible 01:16:57] Forest Service properties. These are really, really important areas that all of our natural resources are and throughout the state.

As our stakeholders, we get phone calls and stuff. We want to let them know that they do have a voice, that we are bringing their concern to the Bureau and the service, and the department to see what they can start and how the process is going to work. I think with all of us working at the table as we all always do, it seems to be working pretty well. Thank you, Chief. Thank you, Bureau and the Forest Service. Thanks so much. That's all I had, [unintelligible 01:17:31] Chair.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Commissioner. Any other questions from my commissioners?

Commissioner Pack: Yes. Thank you for your presentation. When I first came on as commissioner back in March, I had quite a few people ask me about how the Habitat Stamp program was going. I appreciate your presentation because now I can refer them to that because you gave a very good overview. Since we do have two of the nine members of the Habitat Stamp Committee online, I wondered if they would like to provide any insight of how they see things going, but I will say I've had a lot of people comment about this, and I appreciate the work being done all over the state, but of course, they're asking about District 2. Is it possible to hear from our two representatives that are there?

T. Carrell: Chairman Stump, Commissioner Pack, we do have both of the members with their hands raised, and I'm sure they would love to speak.

Commissioner Pack: Oh, good.

T. Carrell: If you're ready, I can unmute them? Okay. Mark Mattaini, you are unmuted.

Mark Mattaini: All right. Thank you. Commissioners and members of the public, I have just a brief statement that I have outlined. The Citizens' Advisory Committee, the term citizen, I think, really does matter here. It's not like Stewart Liley decides where all the money goes. He has plenty of money that he can send here and there, but in this case, the process that is used-- actually, I was surprised at how adequate it really was. We get provision, the original from the major, the Forest Service, from BLM, and from the Department. They come and they make presentations, and they try to sell what they think are their best ideas, which is exactly what one does when you're trying to do something like this.

When it comes down to how do we allocate the money, I was surprised, for example, that when the committee meets, they don't just take a vote and identify item number one and then item number two. We spend a considerable amount of time with each person making the case or arguing the case. What we have learned, several of us go around and actually look around some areas of the state before making a final decision, particularly around the proposals that are there. Then we work together until we can all sign off on a listing of what we think at this moment in time would be the most useful opportunities given that there's much more we could do.

That's, of course, what you all have been saying. I've been really pleased. I've finished my first year, essentially, and I'm glad that this is a five-year kind of a hook. I'm really pleased with how the department has handled it, with how people from BLM and the Forest Service have participated, and that citizens make a real difference in making these decisions. I think that's about all I have to say at the moment.

Chair Stump: Thank you. We have one more?

T. Carrell: Yes. Jeff, you are muted. Jeff, can you unmute your microphone on your end?

Jeff Arterburn: Sorry, I'm having mute problems. Really appreciate the opportunity to talk a little bit about the Citizens Advisory Committee. I thought the presentation that Stewart gave was wonderful. My appointment began with the transition, as the transition was being made. Just to reiterate some of the points that Mark made, as he's seen now this process working, I think we've really come to have a very, very efficient process. The department staff have been fantastic working with the committee to get the process into the state it is.

I think the capacity to do large-scale projects has been transformative. I think that the process has now better engagement with the agencies and the staff. The point that was made from the BLM field operative about having the continual opportunity, I think, all of that has fed into this really, really working well. The committee, definitely, is open to dealing with the design, engineering, and compliance issues that can be a roadblock to a project getting off the ground. I think it's a very deliberative body trying to do the best. I think the committee is working very, very well together, and with the support of the department staff, it's really-- I'm proud to be part of this program. Thanks for letting me talk.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Arterburn. Anybody else, Sharon?

Vice-chair Hickey: No. Actually, I was hoping to hear from someone on the CAC, so Sabrina took my question. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair Stump: I do have a question, Stewart, and great work. Thank you all for doing all these wonderful projects. Money, money. Someone brought to my attention to ask if we're leveraging state funds in any way to obtain more private investment or federal funds.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, absolutely. I think that's the key. There's two portions that I think bring in other money. I think the biggest one is getting the compliance done and getting something ready for implementation. I think that's been the most challenging thing that we've come to realize. Now, maybe the Habitat Stamp didn't put forth the money on getting compliance done.

I'll give you an example. South Sacramento Restoration area in the Cloudcroft County area, we've been looking at that as a huge prioritization area, a landscape that we want to work in, but the NEPA compliance wasn't done. We used state and federal funds, some of our Pittman-Robertson money, to do the compliance. The compliance was just signed this last record of decision in November. It opens up almost 300,000 acres of implementation.

What I think we'll see is we're going to have projects brought to the CAC for implementation in that project area now. Again, funding came from outside of the Habitat Stamp to get that project going. When the Habitat Stamp will put money in, I think you'll see the federal government, like they said in their Inflation Reduction Act, when they have funds available, then they'll start partnering up, and the snowball effect will start happening.

When we have a partner like Coca-Cola private funds, for example, that were on the Valle Vidal, they look to us, federal agencies, state agencies on, "Where are your priorities? Where are you putting money? Where can we help you to leverage and grow those projects?" I think just getting one project started, especially when there's these larger landscape-scale projects, a lot more money is brought to the table. The Habitat Stamp program, like I said, might be one-fourth or one-tenth of the actual funding of the project, but it might be that kickstarter that allows that money to go in and grow the size and scale of those projects.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Stewart. Fernando.

Commissioner Clemente: Yes, it is just a comment more than questions. First, thank you for the presentation, as Commissioner Pack said, it answers a lot of questions that the public had, that I had received as well. Thank you for that, and thank you for the department and all the partners, obviously, that are on the state making this program a success. I would like to thank who funds these programs. Obviously, it's all the citizens that buy the Habitat Stamp, hunters, anglers, and those donors that make it possible, as you mentioned, Coca-Cola. With that being said, just to put it on your radar, you mentioned about fences, changing fences for migration. Otero Mesa, I was there a few years ago, not even a year ago, and all the southern part border with Texas, which sits in New Mexico, it has still a sheep fence, and I actually have video of 13 antelope not being able to cross into New Mexico because of that fence, so if something could be done over there for the migration.

Another thing is, I would like to see some more projects if it's possible within the southern area of New Mexico. One of the things we protected 497,000 acres Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, and if you look in the declaration, he says, habitat, wildlife habitat and wildlife, populations. That was the reason of the protection of those areas, 500,000 acres, so with that being said, I would like to see if something, a big landscape project to benefit pronghorn and deer populations, that would be great. Thank you.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Clemente. Commissioner Pack has requested a 10-minute break, so how about a 10-minute break? Thank you.

Chair Stump: [inaudible 01:27:31] on [inaudible 01:27:34]. Project overview, item number 12, given by [inaudible 01:27:42]. Something going on with the microphone again? Is the pronghorn license changes for 2025, 2026 license year.

Chief Stewart Liley: Yes. Mr. Chairman, member of the commission, this was an [unintelligible 01:27:59] we did make the change just so you all are aware with the rule, the department can make a recommendation to a change in the approved licenses that the commission approved the last four-year cycle based upon if we see big changes in the population. We put forth that proposed change, and it gets concurrence from the chair, that did happen. We wanted to make sure it happened before the rules and information booklet came out, before we published it, we saw the data, but what we're doing here today is informing you of why the change occurred and what the change is, so everyone's informed.

It's a fairly big change, and I think it's a necessary change given some of the population trends that we've been seeing in pronghorn, specifically pronghorn in the northeast. We'll go through a little bit of the pronghorn biology first, so we get at where we came from and then go into the proposed changes. Real quick on pronghorn biology, they are the fastest growing ungulate into maturity in North America. Males can achieve their maximum horn size by three years old, so it's not like an elk where you're looking at 10 years, almost 12 years old before maximum horn or antler size or deer where it's eight, and those. Again, pronghorn achieve maturity extremely fast, three years old, and females have a high pregnancy rate, and by one point about a year and a half, they could start twinning, at their second birthday. Which results in quick rebounds, which is good from a standpoint of where we are, and we'll get into that a little bit right now. There is the potential with favorable conditions that this population could rebound really quick, but we are seeing a decline in the pronghorn population, especially in the northeast. Again,

because of **[inaudible 01:29:56]** can be harvested at a much higher rate, populations like deer or elk and still maintain that trophy quality.

New Mexico has the world record in pronghorn. It was killed around Socorro, and that animal was not that old of an animal, and it's just they start actually declining in horn size after four, five years old. They're not a long-lived species either. The other big important part about this, and it's important to realize our strategy in pronghorn management across the **[inaudible 01:30:28]** the portion of the population that really drives population growth or population declines, it's really female survival and fawn survival. We'll get to the fawn survival. It's probably what's driving our population declines in recent history.

Doe survival, we don't have any real empirical data where we've radio-collared it a lot to get this, but some other data that is surrounding states where they radio-collar, and some of our data that doesn't suggest we had huge doe mortality, but probably driven by fawn mortality and just not having fawn survive to become adults that replace these animals that have, again, not really as long-lived species as other ungulates. Buck harvest, in general, does not impact population dynamics unless we get to a point where we have so few bucks to breed the does that are out there.

That's really in buck-to-doe ratios that we see in the teens, low-teens to 10 per 100 does. We want to make sure that we have at least 15 bucks per 100 does or more. Right here is some of our demographic data from aerial surveys. You'll see in the top graphic there, our buck-to-doe ratio is well above what we would see or would think to see where buck-to-doe ratios are impacting a reproductive issue.

We don't think we're there, but we are going in and proposed the decline because we're worried that if we don't do something soon, if the decline continues to occur, we might put buck-to-doe ratios in a place where it's unsustainable from a breeding situation. Again, we are a male-dominated harvest in here, and we'll get to the harvest in a second on this population in the northeast, but really, what we're trying to do is include the need to do drastic cuts at a later time frame and go a gradual right now to ensure that we have the high buck-to-doe ratios that we would need.

What you'll see on the bottom graph is our fawn-to-doe ratios in aerial surveys. I think it's important to note, these fawn-to-doe ratios are collected in July, and so they are not very long after those fawns are born, and yet we're already starting to see ratios that are unsustainable from a population stabilization. Population stabilization, we'd like to see those ratios be minimum of 30, probably more in the 40s. We're nowhere near that. You'll see in the 2020, 2021, '23, we're in the teens to low, very 20.

We've seen a little bit of an uptick, but with the variability on observer error, on what you see, we're really thinking we're in the low 20s to teens, which is just you're not going to see a population growth for sure during that time period. You're probably not going to see a stabilization, but you're going to see a decline just because the fawn-to-doe ratios are so low. Again, by the time they hit one years old, we're going to lose some more of those fawns that we saw in August. That's an absolute maximum that we saw in July, but it's going down from there.

Again, our models, we use a combination of things to look at population status to determine licenses and harvest strategies. One model, it's kind of a distance sampling model, that we use our aerial data that we collect **[unintelligible 01:34:05]** fly July into very early August, maybe, but we use that kind of distance sampling to determine maybe what densities are. The models are suggesting declines. The models are suggesting some decent declines, especially in the northeast.

We're not seeing those declines around the rest of this, but in the northeast, we've seen that densities and **[inaudible 01:34:28]** sizes have been declining as well over the last few years. Again, the fawn-to-doe ratios that we just went over are really showing probably indicative of the population decline. We're also **[inaudible 01:34:39]** what the population should have been to see the harvest that we collect.

As you all know, we have mandatory hunter harvest. We use that information to reconstruct what does your population have to be to see those kind of harvest rates, and what we see on the ground right now. We were able to look at some of that data to suggest, okay, how many animals had to be out there to see these kind of harvest? Where are we going to go if that was that harvest? If we continue that harvest, what trends would we see? That's how we came up with our proposal.

One of the things I have mentioned real briefly is our neighboring state of Oklahoma. This is in the Oklahoma panhandle on the Texas, New Mexico, Colorado border up around the dry Cimarron, if you will. They have been radio collaring some pronghorn in there and looking at cow-specific mortality as well.

What you'll see there, adult female and adult male survival, while adult female, again, we'll look at more of the numbers, excluding hunting in their population. Nothing there is real indicative of something huge concerning in adult survival issues.

We'd like to probably see that adult survival a little higher, 85% to 90% in the females, but nothing to suggest that it's adult survival driving population declines or the population demographics. What is important to look at is that last bullet of fawn survival in those two years in 2022 and '23 from marked animals is 11% and 12%. Really, I think that we're seeing the similar patterns move into the New Mexico side and those same years, and that's most likely what's driving our population in the northeast.

Survival of fawns definitely has many factors that influence it. Predation being one of the largest ones you'll see there on there. I think there's important things to note about predation when it comes to it. There's the direct impacts of the predator, coyote, whatever it be, killing it. There's also the strategy of pronghorn that's really important of in those first few days of life, those fawns are hiding in cover, hopefully being hiding in cover. When you don't have as much residual growth from, let's say, a monsoon season that came too late and grass didn't grow real high, coming into that May, June pre-monsoon season, if there wasn't snow, there's not growth to hide those new fawns, and that probably increases their predation risk as well.

Yes, predators definitely have a big impact, but it's a combination probably of the conditions we've seen, climatic conditions we've seen on grass growth, hide and cover, but also on maternal condition too. Maternal condition really drives some of that. You'll see there is in that abandonment Brinks in there. They were actually able to detect a full abandonment where the doe had the fawn walked away, just doesn't have the nutritional capacity to lactate, and the lactation demands are not sufficient enough to raise that fawn.

[pause 01:37:38]

Chief Stewart Liley: I think drought has a fairly big impact on pronghorn, especially. This is just in Union County, New Mexico, the drought monitored and the severity of droughts, you'll see it is, we had a period in that 2015 to '18 where things were a little bit better, but we went back into a pretty severe drought and really in that 2020 through 2024 severity was almost through there the whole time.

Rainfall is when it occurs is so important. I think that's the really important aspect is rain. We've seen some of these big rains that are occurring in September and October in these areas, but that's post-growing season, and especially up in the north, it really doesn't have as much of a benefit from a nutritional capacity of any of the grazing on yields. Coming into the winter, snow has been pretty sparse, and we really see these dry springs **[unintelligible 01:38:48]** pronghorn or fawn.

Real quick, I want to point out, so these are the GMUs that's all in the northeast that we are proposing for the reductions. 41, 42, 47, 56, 57, 58, 59. Basically, east of I-25, north of I-40 is where these are. A few of those GMUs are not in there, but more or less it's Las Vegas to the Texas border, north to the Colorado border to and carry that area. Again, it's important to note here is we are very high driven in male harvest and not very much in the female. The female harvest is in the bottom are female licenses. You'll notice there is not very many licenses in the female-immature hunts, public hunts.

We were at 150 female-immature licenses in these populations on an annual basis. Private lands, you'll notice we're averaging about high 70s on an annual basis. What's in the parentheses is the number of licenses that were youth-only tied to the-- Let me back up a little bit. Private land licenses are over the counter, and so it's restricted to the deeded private land. On female immature, we do not allow over-the-counter private land licenses. I think that's really important to note. There's been some misconceptions about that, that this population was driven by harvest.

We do not believe by any means that the population dynamics were driven by harvest. We believe it was more driven by climatic conditions, predation on fawns, fawn survival is what's driving this. You'll note there on the private land female and mature, the asterisk ones are those that are the only over-the-counter female-mature hunts. They have to be youth hunters that coincide with the same hunts that we have for youth hunts on public ground. There's very few of those less than 20 on an annual basis is what we've seen.

The other ones are where we went in and did a ranch-by-ranch negotiation and said, "Yes, some female-immature hunts could occur." Some of those definitely occurred on agricultural crop lands where we had

high-density pronghorn in there as well. Moving back up to the top table, that is our male harvest. License sales on the public have been 870 roughly under this rule cycle, last part of the previous estimated harvest in that 550 to 500 range, and that private land, those are the private land buck over the counter tags. You'll see there we've ranged from a low of 1,390, about 1,400, to a high of 1,583 over the time period.

Harvest success rates are a little bit higher. We see that in general on private land hunts in general as they're higher success than the public land hunts. Again, to point out, this is really to show that it's not the female harvest that's driving population dynamics. We're in less than 150 females being harvested in the entire northeast region on an annual basis. What we did, and you'll see it in the new rules and information booklet, our proposal was to eliminate any and all female-immature hunts, just save that female segment. Again, we don't think it's driving it, but we want to make sure we have females that can build back the population. We proposed and as approved on the elimination of all draw hunts for female immature, and then no longer that would cap private land that they can't have youth female-immature hunts as well. We've worked with landowners to no longer put out female-immature hunts.

We actually took a proactive approach with the private landowners this previous season in 2024. Those that were getting female-immature hunts before we've started seeing the data, we asked them to withhold and not harvest female immature this last season, so we did not issue any female-immature hunts to private landowners outside of those few 11 youth hunts this last year.

Here's our proposed and approved license adjustments you'll see by the GMU and where the reductions have occurred. You'll see there overall it's a proposal of 174. It's 20% reduction, is what this accounts for. The important thing to note is we are putting a cap on private land over-the-counter license sales. What will happen is these will come at a first-come, first-served basis starting at July 1, when we release approximately July 1, we'll put out a press release when those will come out, and once they're sold, they're done.

What we did is we took the last two-year average of license sales, took that number and reduced it by 20%, and put a cap on that. That's how we determine on the private land. I think it's important to note this is the first time we put a private land cap on pronghorn licenses across a large geographic basis. We have one other hunt where we do have a cap, and that's in that 452 up in that high country pronghorn area on a **[unintelligible 01:44:06]** hunt 15 cap.

This is a pretty substantial area that we're looking at, and GMUs where we're putting the cap. That is what was approved, that is what's in the proclamation that's online right now, and that's what we will try to message. I think the biggest is working with some of our partners in the private land realm that do sell a lot of these hunts, is let them have them understand what it will be. These numbers are in the RIB. It does discuss the cap, but ensure the messaging is out there, so there's not an expectation come August or October when they go to buy their license that they're going to be able to buy it over the counter because most likely they'll all be sold by that time. With that, I would take any questions.

Chair Stump: You have a question?

Commissioner Lopez: Mr. Chair, I do have a question. Chief Liley, and looking at last year's rib, most of these are going to be youth hunts, correct? I thought I saw ANT-1-242, are those youth hunts going to be removed completely, or are they going to be given any other dates for each?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Lopez, all the female immature draw hunts were youth hunts. Those were going down to zero. There will not be a female immature youth hunting.

Commissioner Lopez: Like in unit 56, there's only going to be one youth hunt instead of the two?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Lopez, there'll be no youth hunts for female immature-- let me back up. I believe there's a youth either sex hunt that will still occur at a 20% reduction, but the female immature hunts specific for youth will no longer happen.

Commissioner Lopez: No question **[unintelligible 01:45:47]**.

Chair Stump: Okay. Anybody else?

Commissioner Clemente: Thank you for this presentation, and thank you for taking into consideration this. I have studied pronghorn with my father in Mexico, and we know pronghorn is endangered species in Mexico. I'm going to say a little story that I always say. When I was eight years old, I have a picture flying with a helicopter, counting antelope pronghorn in the San Luis Potosi plateau, which is part of the

Chihuahuan desert. I have one picture that it shows a hundred individuals in one group. Not in a population, one group.

Today, we're seeing less than a hundred in this cold state of Chihuahua. Pronghorn, you're right, it fluctuates big time. Drought is very hard into pronghorn populations, especially when predation, when coyote population increases. Obviously coyote population increases to be able to hunt more successfully, which pronghorn I have seen that they actually stop reproduction sometimes because of that pressure and things like that.

Thank you for taking this into consideration. I said this for the commission to really take this into consideration as the reduction of tax. One of my questions is on the south part. I understand this is just for the northern part, I-40 and north. On the southern part, southwestern part of the state, how is the population doing on the pronghorn?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Clemente, I think it's not doing great necessarily anywhere. Southeast has seen some rains that have been more timed better, southwest, not as much. I think the big reason why you're not seeing those proposed reductions in those areas is we hunt very conservatively in other areas of the state. Northeast is where we have the majority of our tags, where the majority of pronghorn happens. We've always been very conservative.

From a hunting standpoint, again, we were as concerned there. From a wildlife connectivity standpoint in the southwest, we're probably more concerned in terms of with the spotty monsoons that we're seeing is making sure there's permeability for pronghorn across the landscape. I think is what we're looking at. We have started in collaboration with the BLM and New Mexico State University.

We've radio-marked some pronghorn in the south of I-10 in the boot hill, trying to look at what is distribution, what is survival on some of those collars, and how are they using the landscape, and are there barriers that can improve it? I think that's why we've really undertaken some of these fence modifications, working in cooperation with federal land management agencies, grazing permittees to try to get more permeability across so they can capture resources.

I think pronghorn, more so than others, are restricted and need to be able to get at that, and I think that has bigger impacts at drought. I've been in Bayas Centrales in Mexico and seen the fragmentation from all the center pivots in there and fences in there that construct it or constrain pronghorn movement. Long way to answer your question is, I think it could turn. I don't think we're probably stable. We're not seeing huge declines right now, but we're not seeing growth.

Commissioner Clemente: One of the things to put on the radar, maybe dates down in south, changing, moving dates to a little bit farther up, like used to be, because they were moved to August, September?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Clemente, yes, there's a hunt date in August, a hunt date in September, and then one in October. From a rule-setting cycle, so you all know we will be starting that process next year. I think we'll consider all those ideas as we go forth. Absolutely can be part of the consideration as we come into the rule-setting cycle, that will be for the 2027 season starting, but we will start that process about a year from now.

Commissioner Clemente: Perfect. Thank you.

Commissioner Pack: Thank you for your presentation again. I think Commissioner Clemente and I both have had a lot of people talking to us about their concerns in the Southwest or Southern, but me for Southwest. On the slide that was the Don – the fawn ratio, I think it was maybe three or four slide, was that statistics from the entire state? What is that?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Pack, that was specific to the Northeast area.

Commissioner Pack: Do you have data so we could relieve some of the concerns of our people on our area?

Chief Stewart Liley: Yes. Commissioner Stump, Commissioner Pack, I think the big thing to note is, yes, we do have that data. Fawn data is not excellent down there. The biggest thing to note is the harvest of males. We were worried about potentially driving the harvest of males down to low buck-to-doe ratios. In the Southwest, I don't think we're there because we're not harvesting even almost an order of magnitude less than what we are in the Northeast. The only reason we went into this proposal was to make sure we don't get close to that male-to-female ratio getting low.

We absolutely can provide that information, will provide that information, but why would the other parts of the state? We're not seeing the impacts. We're also not seeing in our models that the population is declining in there. It's probably more of a stabilization. Even though, and it's hard to explain why, but I do think the Northeast is 70%, probably, I'm guessing off the top of my head, or more of the entire state of pronghorn population lives in the Northeast Quadrant of the state.

Commissioner Pack: They're concerned down there that they're not seeing as many as they had been by any means. Your study in Oklahoma, do you have a study for that here?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Pack, we currently don't have-- the only radio-marked pronghorn we have right now are ones that we translocated to the L Bar, and the ones that we have in the Southwest that I mentioned. We don't have a specific mortality study specifically, especially in the Northeast. We could look at it, working with private landowners to determine if that's something we want to do. Obviously, some of it comes with funding limitations, and so we're trying to prioritize that.

Commissioner Pack: Thank you.

Commissioner Stump: Thank you, Chief Liley. That's a great presentation. Important stuff. I hope everyone around the state understands how important this is, and it's a problem. Pray for rain.

Commissioner Lopez: [unintelligible 01:52:26].

Commissioner Stump: Go ahead.

Commissioner Lopez: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Chief Stewart, you touched on the licenses in units 50 to 52, I believe. What's to date? Is there any new data on the population in that neck of the woods in unit 4, including?

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Lopez, we fly that almost, not necessarily on an annual basis. It comes into our rotation. In this next presentation, we're going to actually look at some radio-collar data that came from that area. That's a migratory herd. I do think that pronghorn population is able to capture resources a lot better than some of these others because they go up above 10,000 feet elevation, almost 11,000 feet elevation. Winter at 6,500 to 7,000 feet. They're able to go up, even on a drought year, maybe out in the plains, they're still up above.

Once the snow clears, they're almost right in the [unintelligible 01:53:26] and the San Antonio wilderness, and they're still green in those areas versus some of these others. I guess my point to that being, I think they're able to better withstand some of those. Our big focus on that herd is making sure movement has been able to do-- that they can do that, so they can withstand. Nothing that we've seen in the data suggests a crash or anything like that.

Commissioner Lopez: That's still the highest population in our state, the highest elevation population?

Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, Commissioner Lopez, it'd be in the world. That is the highest elevation pronghorn population.

Commissioner Stump: It's a beautiful population. It's a gift that we have that. We need to take care of all that. Okay, thank you for that presentation, Stewart. Item number 13.

T. Carrell: Chairman Stump, I apologize for interfering. We have two people online with their hand raised that would like to speak on this topic.

Commissioner Stump: Okay, thank you.

T. Carrell: First will be Jonathan Skiles. You are allowed to talk.

Jonathan Skiles: I just wanted to give my two cents really quickly. I've hunted 56 and 58 primarily with my children in the last 15 or so years, and I'm very much in favor of this change, reducing the license numbers. Just anecdotally, I've seen the population drop significantly. When I do hunt with my children, I like to have a really high-quality experience where they have lots of opportunity to see lots of animals. I've seen the population decline pretty significantly over the last 15 years or so of hunting this area. I'm very much in favor of this. Just throwing two cents for that.

We did do the female immature hunt one year, and it was a very frustrating hunt. All the antelope were very frightened. They'd been chased around for several seasons. It was a frustrating hunt for my children anyway. I'm glad that one went away for population purposes. Also, the quality of the experience was pretty low. I didn't want to take a ton of time. I just wanted to anecdotally say that I'm very much in favor of this. I've seen a pretty significant decline just in the number of herds I would see, particularly in 56 and 58. Thank you for making this change. I really appreciate that.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Skiles.

T. Carrell: Thank you. Our other person has lowered his hand, so that is all at this time.

Chair Stump: That's it? Okay. Thank you. Item number 13. Let's move on to wildlife corridors.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Excuse me.

Chair Stump: Yes, ma'am.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess what I'm concerned about, Chief Liley, is that we take public opinion very seriously. We had earlier, just as an example, the CAC, Citizens Advisory Committee, and we take their input. What I'm hearing right now is that we have input from a commissioner or two about the decline of population as seen by the public. We appreciate your focus. Today's focus is in the north.

I guess what I'm trying to ask you with the commissioners and the members of the public is an acknowledgment maybe from you as to how you and the department-- and maybe I'm going to look to you, Director Sloane-- a way for you to acknowledge what you are hearing. Maybe taking that piece of information, this feedback, if you will, rather than just say, "Today's our focus on the north." We appreciate that, but can you explain to us maybe how you are acknowledging what you're hearing from the South, and how you want to acknowledge that and maybe move forward?

Chief Stewart Liley: Absolutely. Maybe I could take a try real quick, and Director Sloane can go after. Mr. Chair, Commissioner Salazar Hickey, we always hear public comment across everything from-- in fact, we hear almost sometimes the complete opposites on the same subject. I think what we first do, and most importantly, is we look at the biological information that we collect. We're collecting a lot of biological information on all kinds of herds and especially when we're in the harvest.

This one triggered a response from us. The rule has the provision and rule is if we see some kind of population-level change that we're concerned about, that we need to adjust a rural mid-cycle that we have the ability to do this. That's why that came about. It's not that we ignored the southwest, southeast, northwest. We have concerns about pronghorn across the state. Drought impacts pronghorn. What we were seeing is our harvest that we had planned out for the next season was maybe not sustainable for the long term. That is not the case in the southwest, southeast, northwest.

The male harvest was probably not sustainable in the northeast rest of the state. That concern doesn't exist. That's not to say public input isn't important. What we do, as you know, from when we go through big game rule regulation cycles, and we'll start that next year, that public input will come in. We'll put forth the biological data as well at that time too, and say, "Here's what we see from a biological standpoint. Here's where our recommendation is. Here's what public comment is as well." That's, I think, a really important time.

We are collecting that public comment that comes in right now that will be part of that package that you're going to see in a year from now. What we've heard in the last four years is part of what we will present next year as well. Again, we're not trying to make a whole set. The only time we do a mid-cycle rule change is if we see something biological in that population that we think is going to be unsustainable at that time. The only herd in the state, the main segment of herd was the northeast. That's why we brought that change right now.

We had to do what we felt like before we bring the full-rule change. We will make sure when the rule comes open next year, all that comes about, we will give-- as some of you have never been on a commission, when we do rule changes, we'll go through all the biological information on each herd across the state. At the time that we present the rules, we'll also present, "Here's what we're hearing from public comment." We'll have multiple public meetings, up to four public meetings across the state, to then gather input on all those rules.

Sometimes it's eight, 10, it depends on how controversial it is, and we'll bring that forth back to the commission to say, "Here's what our recommendation is. Here's what we're hearing from the public. It's in support of our change. It's not in support and here's why." That will come to you, commission, so you could decide on some of those other issues you're hearing from your constituents, from the public, on what they would like to see.

There's some aspects of harvest that's sustainable, but it may not be for older-age-class males. Do we want to switch that to older-age-class males, which means reduce licenses, or do we want to have more

opportunity? Those all come about at those bigger rule change cycles rather than this immediate like we need to put, not a band-aid on this. We need to stop it now before we come to another four-year rule cycle.

Director Sloane: Mr. Chair, Commissioner, I think Stewart summarized it well. We really are listening to the public and looking at the data. The data in the Northeast tells us we need to address something, the data in the rest of the state says everything looks okay. We understand what people are hearing, but we think we can get to that rule cycle and have a little more data and a little more understanding. Work any changes that need to be made during the rule cycle as opposed to a mid-cycle rule change based on biological data that's telling us we need to change.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Did that help you, Commissioners Pack and Clemente?

Commissioner Pack: They do.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Okay, thank you very much.

Chair Stump: Those are great [unintelligible 02:02:08]. My wife would have been pleased with those. [chuckles] Anyway, let's move on to item 13.

T. Carrell: Chairman Stump.

Chair Stump: Yes, ma'am.

T. Carrell: We do have-- one person that had lowered his hand has re-raised his hand.

Chair Stump: Okay.

T. Carrell: Michael Flowers, you are allowed to talk. Michael, if you could unmute your mic, please. Michael, can you unmute your mic on your end? We may be having some technical difficulties. Maybe, Michael, can we have you speak on the general comment that's coming up in a few agenda items? Chairman Stump, would that work for you?

Chair Stump: Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

T. Carrell: Thanks.

Chair Stump: Moving on to item number 13. Wildlife Corridors. Did Trent Botkin show up?

Director Sloane: He's on. I saw him flash on the screen a few minutes ago.

Chief Stewart Liley: Mr. Chair, members of the commission. I have a joint presentation with the Department of Transportation. There is the Wildlife Corridors Act that was passed by the legislature that really directs some discussions about wildlife corridors and relationship to vehicular and human safety and passage across highways, et cetera. Mr. Botkin from DOT is going to speak to that. We wanted to use this opportunity, the department, to discuss some of what we've been doing in terms of research on big game migration corridors.

It's a two-part agenda. He will go after. I'm not going to focus on the Wildlife Corridors Act and the transportation, I'm going to focus more on just some of the research that we've undertaken, some of the corridors we've actually detected, and some of the pathways where we're moving forward. I'm sure you all have heard, and there's this bigger focus impetus on wildlife corridors across the West. Really, a lot of it stem from Secretary of Interior. Back when Zinke was Secretary of Interior, kind of had an executive order that looked at, "Hey, let's look at these wildlife corridors across the West. Let's preserve it."

It really came out of a really amazing story from pronghorn deer migrations out of Wyoming through the Red Desert. These animals moving almost hundreds of miles from winter range to summer range found not by-- purposeful looking at the corridor, but found by auxiliary research on marking animals and saying, "Holy cow, those are the same animals that showed up down here that we marked up here in the summer." In the advent of satellite radio GPS data has allowed us to see, okay, how do animals move across the landscape.

This discussion's focused on big game, but corridors or permeability across the landscape's important for all wildlife, whether that be birds, the biggest migrants of anything, migratory corridors for birds is absolutely critical. Every species needs to move some way across the landscape to get its resources to survive. I think corridors has been focused on some of these big game animals. We focus some on it. I think some of our focus has been, "Yes, let's try to figure out where there are corridors."

New Mexico's in a unique position, or it's not always going to be corridors, because there isn't distinct summer range, winter range, but there is the need for animals to move across the landscape to get resources. We'll go into some of that. The USGS, US Geological Survey, has started this mapping

exercise of mapping these corridors that have been detected across North America. Working in consultation also with tribal nations tribes we've been able-- and west, they've printed four volumes of ungulate migrations of the west.

We have data from Navajo Nation, Santa Ana, Tesuque on different corridors. In terms of the USGS mapped corridor herds, we have 10 deer herds in the state, seven elk, and one pronghorn herd that we have mapped. Some of the work that we've undertaken and some of the kind of interesting work that we've done, this is-- and going back to Commissioner Lopez, some of your discussions about lay down fencing and where we might be able to do it in that region. This is a Rio Chama mule deer corridor that we were able to detect.

These deer were captured on the Rio Chama Wildlife Management area, roughly on there and just south of there, and there is direct corridors. What you'll see there is in the deeper the color, where it gets purple, that is the highest used portion where those animals move from summer range to winter range. Then, as you get into that orange, it's still highly used. Gray is used, but again, that purple is key. The majority of that herd is passing through those corridors to get from summer range to winter range.

It helps inform us from a perspective of where are there actions that we would like to be able to work on, lay down fencing, or ensure that maybe fragmentation on that corridor doesn't happen. That doesn't mean that animals won't change a corridor if something happens. This is the corridor that we detected at the time when we radio-marked those animals. Mule deer especially have high site fidelity, so they'll use that corridor year after year after year, and we can actually detect that.

What was interesting from our perspective on this herd was we found two different summer ranges, one winter range. One summer range in Colorado, one summer range in high up above the Brazos. Those deer come together on winter range around the Rio Chama, but split up in the spring and moved to two different summer ranges. That was one that we were able to detect. It also is able to predict what they call stopover. There are times where those deer will be on their migration pathway, stop first portion of the time, they stop there, capture resources, move back down to either winter range or up to summer range. It's important, it gives us those pathways of which are important. Moving on to the north central pronghorn, the herd that we just talked about, Taos Plateau up to past San Antonio Mountain up into the high mountains up in GMU 52, San Antonio up into four. The depiction on the left is you'll see the pathways and corridors they take. There's quite a few pathways corridors they take, but it's not a lot in terms of the total landmass. What really this data allowed us, if you look to the right, that's all the fences that were mapped out across BLM Forest Service, and what were high barrier ones.

Those red fences had low permeability, and the purple means they were able to pass through, red means they were unable to pass through. It allowed us to look at those fences. Can we work with the permittee? Work with the land management agency to create some kind of fence modifications, or some way to lay down fencing. Especially with pronghorn raising the lower wire, or if there's net wire, what caused that actual permeability and barrier.

It has helped us in a lot of that habitat stamp money I discussed on Taos Plateau, went directly into changings and modifying some of these fences within this area, and to open up permeability across the landscape. Here's a kind of an interesting one from Mt. Taylor elk herd. This herd has a summer range at the top, basically Mt. Taylor and Winters, now on what is the L Bar range? WMA, our wildlife management area, almost wholly winters on that wildlife management area.

You'll see that it does go onto some of Laguna Pueblo and North to the BLM lands, but it is a migration corridor, elevational migration corridor that goes from Mt. Taylor down to lower elevation on the plains of what's now the L Bar. I think it's important to note that all herds are not migratory. This is from the Gila elk herd, we had almost a thousand radio collars on elk that had satellite collars on there. Only 3% of that herd migrated, and that herd does not migrate, it is resident herd, we don't see large migrations.

The only migrants really came out of highest elevation, where they were going up to the highest peaks in the Gila in summertime, and then came down. For the most part, it's an un-migratory herd. It's very stationary resin herd, but it does still help us look at is their landscape permeability issues. I think that's where the glory focus has been on these large 100 mile plus movements. From our perspective and use, it helps us looking at is there barriers in the landscape that we can work to improve permeability, that improves potential resource utilization by some of these animals.

Again, as I mentioned, we're focusing more in the future on some of these arid regions. We captured some of these where we knew we had migratory herds. We're wanting to get more information on these seasonal movements, trying to understand, especially as we see larger drought impacts through time, is there ways that we could reduce drought? Is there barriers to movement that we could help improve working cooperation with private landowners, federal agencies.

To improve how animals move across the landscape, to be able to withstand some of these drought impacts that we're seeing. We do have two northern ones. We are looking at this winter capturing deer in the southern end of the Pecos where the wildfire was, where Hermit's Peak was to look at how deer are responding to that and how they're utilizing that, that large wildfire. Then Mt. Taylor deer, again, if you remember some of it, our habitat stamp work.

Other work we've been doing a lot of ponderosa pine restoration North of Mt. Taylor and we want to see how deer are responding to it. Help us to also understand how we could manipulate treatments in the future, so how deer respond, how they use it, can help guide how we design projects in the future. In terms of other, we have pronghorn, we are starting some pronghorn movements. We do have some radio collars already on pronghorn in the Bootheel, looking at barriers and movements.

We're looking at the southeast part of the state as well to look at some barrier movements. Then, pronghorn in the Northwest more of a partnership, but in the San Juan area looking at potential impacts near some solar development that's going on that might be barriers too. Then there's a big sand conveyor belt that's coming from Texas across New Mexico for fracking sand that we're looking at and working with the developer of the Kermit sand conveyor.

To look at if that sand conveyor will become a barrier for movement, splitting it off, and where animals move, and how we could figure out passage through that sand conveyor. Again, I think the big thing to take away is all animals don't migrate, and that's fine. They don't all create corridors, but that doesn't mean that movement isn't occurring, and movement is important. That looking at permeability on landscape is really important.

The other thing I think is an important aspect to look at is when we put those radio collars on, we maybe found a corridor at that time step, and what those animals did. That doesn't mean that because an area on the map isn't marked, it's not important. It's just we didn't mark the animals that went through there, or that animals don't shift their patterns through time. Just because something is really highlighted doesn't mean it's the absolute most important and everything else isn't, or vice versa, that's the only important part, and so forth.

I think that's an important to keep into perspective. The other thing is this is a massive collaboration across tribal governments, federal governments, NGOs. Again, there's been a lot of funding and impetus in corridor work, all the way from the federal level to the NGO work. With the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies we secured a grant on America the Beautiful grant. New Mexico will receive about \$205,000 just to purchase radio collars that we're going to start deploying this winter on different herds.

I think there's avenues to partner with other people on this because it's interesting and people really look at it. I don't see this work stopping anytime. I think the other important takeaway is, yes, this was focused on big game, but there is a lot of other species that were from species of greatest conservation need, where corridors are absolutely important, and we're still working in that realm too. With that, I think before I take questions, I don't know if Trent is online still. He was going to talk specifically to the Corridors Act.

Trent Botkin: Great. Are you going to bring up the presentation?

Chief Stewart Liley: I absolutely can if you would like.

Trent Botkin: Might be easier. Members of the commission, I apologize for not being there in person. I just returned yesterday from Washington, D.C., from the Transportation Research Board annual conference, advocating for funding for the New Mexico Wildlife Corridors projects. Other states have already placed staffing and emphasis on this, and with wildlife crossing projects. At the DOT, we are trying to catch up and have in-person attendance at all the major events nationally as much as possible, so I was slated with the one for Washington, D.C. Then our wildlife coordinator, Jim Hirsch, has got the lucky straw and will be attending the one in Palm Springs later this month.

This project here is near Raton Pass on I-25. We are currently reconstructing I-25. This is a dedicated wildlife underpass, meaning that this underpass structure is not required for drainage purposes. This is

specifically due to our identification working with New Mexico Game and Fish of the necessity of having a wildlife underpass at this location. This is already in use while under construction by deer, bear, and small mammals, and elk herds have cruise by on both sides of the structure and are taking a look through. They usually take a little bit longer before they begin using it.

Next slide. In the past, many of our wildlife crossing projects used existing large culverts or bridges, and in which case, we would add eight foot eight-foot-tall woven wire fence to be able to funnel the animals to where they would use these structures. The current, I'd say, evolution in our thinking behind this right now is that we are looking at actually investing state funds in building dedicated structures specifically for the animal. Like the Raton Pass, looking at larger underpasses larger than the drainage requires, and also wildlife overpasses as well.

Next slide. How did this come about? The beginning of this was due to emphasis by Senator Mimi Stewart from Albuquerque. What this resulted in was Senate Bill 228, the Wildlife Corridors Act. It directed the NMDOT, New Mexico Game and Fish to develop a Statewide Wildlife Corridors Action Plan. The Corridors Action Plan did not apply to private property or private landowners unless they voluntarily choose to participate. No funding was directed directly towards it, although \$500,000 was put into the NMDOT state budget for the creation of the plan.

We used that to hire a consultant. Then, myself and our Wildlife Corridors staff at the time, Matt Haverland, worked on that; it took about two years to produce. This is the Wildlife Corridors Action Plan. To our knowledge, it was the first statewide plan that was created throughout the country, while other states have already made more significant investments within wildlife crossing infrastructure. This plan was the first one that did a statewide study using all available data to identify safety hotspots.

T. Carrell: We have lost you on the audio. Can you mute and unmute?

Trent Botkin: Is it back?

T. Carrell: Still can't hear you. Give us one minute as we work through it. Trent, if you want to go ahead, we will go with the backup plan.

Trent Botkin: Can you hear me?

T. Carrell: Just a minute.

[pause 02:21:11]

Trent, can you try again now, and we'll see if this has fixed our problem.

Trent Botkin: Okay. Sound check.

T. Carrell: Yes, we have you back.

Trent Botkin: Okay, great. As I said, this was the first statewide Wildlife Corridors Action Plan created in the country that looked over all the data available for both safety and ecological corridors purposes, and developed a plan to set forward.

Next slide. The two components, as I was just saying, were wildlife vehicle collisions, which is obviously a major concern for the Department of Transportation. Then we also looked at wildlife corridors. This was covered in the previous presentation, but in this area, you're not seeing major wildlife collisions, but the road itself is causing a break within a wildlife corridor and preventing wildlife movement back and forth, so we looked at those as well.

Next slide. The prioritization of wildlife vehicle collision hotspots. We looked at the number of collisions mile per year, the total number of crashes involving wildlife. Property damage versus injury crashes, vulnerable species, land ownership, public versus private. Also, public NGO and agency support, so looking across all elements of government and non-government entities.

The top five wildlife vehicle collision hotspots are US 550 north of Cuba, I-25 Glorieta Pass, where I am right now. US-180 in New Mexico 90 near Silver City, US-70 Bent near Tularosa, and US-70 New Mexico, 48 within Ruidoso.

Next slide. We needed to identify and prioritize the wildlife corridors so that we weren't just picking at random because these require significant financial investments. We modeled wildlife movements. A lot of that was within support of New Mexico Game Fish that played a large role in development of the statewide plan. Validation, calibration of remodeling results. Then additional validation and calibration using modeling studies, and then gathering all input available from public agencies, non-government, tribal, general public, and then, of course, our own public safety data.

Next slide. These are the top six wildlife corridors. These are areas that do not have significance or as significant safety concerns, but are major wildlife corridors that are currently severed by transportation infrastructure. That's US 64/84 Chama, US 285-- hold on a second.

[pause 02:25:05]

the Peloncillo Mountains at I-10, I-25, US 64, New Mexico 505, the Pronghorn Triangle, that was covered in the last slide, and then also within the Questa-Red River area.

Next slide. Looks like the slide is up. Now that we have a plan, the question is, let's build it, but how do we go about it? This slide here is with Jim Hirsh, who's our current wildlife coordinator within the I-25 Raton Pass area underpass. Currently, we've received three allocations from the legislature specifically for wildlife corridors. These funds have all come directly through the DOT budget so far, 2 million in 2022, 5 million in 2023, and 5 million in 2024. There's also been additional lobbying for additional funds. So far, these funds have gone into planning, and then also we're currently in design for the US 550 project, which we'll cover in just a minute.

How do we go about these projects? Well, we follow the same process that we do for our normal road infrastructure. First, we go into a scoping report, where we do a feasibility study and develop a conceptual design.

Next slide. Here's the US 550 project. After we went through conceptual design scoping report, you can see this is a pretty complex project. It starts in Cuba, which is the red star, which is in the bottom right corner there. It then passes through US Forest Service land, BLM, and then finally Hickory Apache. To make this feasible, we broke this up into four phases. Then the distance between the different structures, the passing structures within this area are based off scientific modeling.

The O's represent the overpasses, the U's represent the plan to underpasses. This area is of extremely high safety issue within the area. It's estimated that dozens and probably-- because there's a lot of large truck traffic do this, that there's not file police reports, there could be hundreds of strikes within this area per year. Certainly, over the entire study area, we've seen just police reports alone, hundreds of vehicle strikes within this area.

This is showing construction planning. Of course, with current construction inflation rates, we are really chasing the amount of money that it requires. It seems that double almost every year as all construction costs are currently continue to go up. We broke this into four phases to make this into realistic projects to where we could pursue additional funding.

Next slide. This is a computer graphic rendering of a wildlife overpass. In some areas, you have a natural drainage structures as we do in other areas on US 550, where you can use fencing to root the animals under existing drainage structures, which would be very large concrete box culverts or preferably bridges. In some cases, the natural topography does not allow you to do that. Wildlife overpass has become an option. Currently, New Mexico does not have any wildlife overpasses, although numerous are present in Colorado, Arizona, Utah, California, and Wyoming. Within the design phase, we currently have two overpasses planned for US 550 North of Cuba within this stretch.

Here's a rendering. We go through the entire development process within this area. We currently have 30% design plans that should be ready, I believe, at the end of this month in January we expect to be at 60%. By later this year and final plans developed by next year. Currently, we only have funding for design. We are pursuing federal grants for additional funding, and also inform the legislature of the cost to see if they want to appropriate additional funds to this project.

Here's a listing of our current priority project areas. I just discussed the US 550 Project North of Cuba. There's the US 70 Bent project that is down near Tularosa. That project has received feasibility scoping funding from the Federal Highway Administration. We also currently have a DOT feasibility project that's going on there as well.

This is the US 70 Bent Project Area. It is particularly challenging because it's a very flat area. Underpasses and underpasses are extremely challenging. It does have high migration in the fall area through this. By migration, I don't mean as much regionally, but the seasonal migration moving back and forth. It also has a large resident population. Being on a US route, it is a challenge because it has a very high safety concern element.

This is an example of what would be a current culvert structure. This culvert is handling the current drainage requirements within this area. Obviously, this cannot pass large mammals. Although bears will use just about anything that is available, but certainly deer or in this case elk, which are within this area are not going to be passed within this. You're going to need to construct a significant large crossing structure. Meaning large concrete box culverts or a bridge structure within this area.

This is a rendering of an additional proposed structure within this area. This could be either an underpass or an overpass within this area that's been designed to be able to convey wildlife.

The next area, one that's recently come about at the I-25, US-550 Sandia-Jemez Mountains Corridor. This is historic and an ancient corridor within this area. The Pueblo of Sandia recently received, I think, \$6.5 million in funding from the Federal Highway Administration to be able to complete feasibility study and design a passage within this area. Of course, this will be in cooperation with the DOT because most of the structures within this area that would be involved are current DOT infrastructure.

The Wildlife Corridor Action Plan with construction funding. One of the funding sources I identified was the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program. This is very competitive. This is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act through the Federal Highway Administration. We have applied the past two years and received very high scores, but the DOT has not been awarded funding yet. As I've said, Mescalero and Sandia have both received feasibility and design funding.

There's also the Highway Safety Improvement Program known as the HSIP. We have used this on numerous projects before to install fencing, and we currently have a project on I-25 near Watrous, which was a relatively new wildlife safety issue resulting from adjacent alfalfa hay fields that has already resulted in one fatality in traffic and numerous elk and bear strikes within the area. We have funding through that HSIP program to address that.

Next slide. Continuing with funding, there's additional opportunities that we are constantly exploring. We have a grant funding program at the DOT. The RAISE Grant is another possibility. They would typically not just be independent wildlife projects. This would be larger construction projects with a wildlife crossing project integrated into it. Then a newer source we're currently using on a couple of different areas, although not yet for wildlife, which are PROTECT Grant is also part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, which allows us to improve transportation infrastructure resiliency and may co-benefit aquatic terrestrial connectivity if it's integrated into the transportation project.

Again, thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name's Trent Botkin. I am the NEPA Natural Resource Manager here at the DOT. Normally, this presentation, I would've given it with our wildlife coordinator, Mr. Jim Hirsch, but he was not available today. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Botkin. That was fascinating stuff. Thank you, Director Liley. That was great. I think we have a couple public commentaries from the public, so if John Crenshaw would come up. **[pause 02:35:51]**

John Crenshaw: Good morning, and thank you very much for the opportunity. I'm John Crenshaw, born and raised in New Mexico, used to work for Game and Fish. I retired about the time - I think Director Sloane was probably still cleaning hatchery troughs. Yes, a little after that. Anyway, I'm here today basically to speak on my own behalf rather than on the wildlife federations that I often do. I have a personal experience on Highway 550 coming up a curve in a hill and at the top just about gathered up to anywhere from two to four bull elk, with my wife and, at that time, 10-year-old granddaughters in the backseat. That's stuck with me.

With that in mind, what I wanted to do is just take the opportunity, and I will do this personally, be contacting the Governor's Office and our legislators and anybody else that I can gather up and talk to that might help, and really encourage them to put the money up to get the plans in operation and build the dadgum structures.

With that, I'd also really like to congratulate Chief Liley and the whole crew that work for Game and Fish and the Department of Transportation. That action plan that they built was a national model, really good work. Thank you.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Crenshaw. Bryan Bird?

Bryan Bird: Good morning, it's still morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the commission. My name is Bryan Bird. I am the Southwest Director of Defenders of Wildlife. We're a national wildlife NGO. Our Southwest office is headquartered here in New Mexico. I'm here today to just really offer my support and gratitude to the Department of Game and Fish, the staff, the commission, everyone who has worked so hard on wildlife corridors and crossings over the last decade or so, as well as the Department of Transportation. Everyone has really put their weight into this effort, and I think it's showing in what you just saw today.

We are one of the NGOs that tries to partner with the tribes and the state government and federal government to try to both identify these corridors and these crossings, but also help raise the funds to construct them, because as we've seen today, they are not cheap. I'm here today to, again, offer my support. I do have a couple things I want to mention really briefly.

One is that I was really impressed with all the work that Chief Liley was showing today. One thing I didn't hear was any talk about bighorn sheep. One of the interesting things is that the bighorn sheep down in the Bootheel do use that crossing, or at least historically use that crossing. I think Commissioner Clemente is very familiar with that area. I would encourage looking at bighorn sheep, especially down there in the Bootheel. That's important. I'm very impressed that we're looking at corridors and not just crossings. Crossings are important, but the landscape is important too.

Finally, I will say that there will likely be a budget line item, as you heard, in these upcoming budgets during the legislative session. I will be there personally to support that, and I very much hope that both the Department of Game and Fish and Transportation can support that line item because it's going to be really important this year. Thank you very much.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Bird. Do we have anyone online for comment?

T. Carrell: Yes, we do. The first will be Brittney Van Der Werff. Brittney, you are permitted to speak.

Brittney Van Der Werff: Awesome. Can you hear me?

T. Carrell: Yes, we can.

Van Der Werff: Awesome. My name is Brittney Van Der Werff, and I'm here to support y'all's, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, great work with wildlife crossings and have that corridor specifically. I personally am concerned for the safety of our drivers and wildlife on the state's roads and highways, so this is a great effort. I would like to see this work to be continued to be implemented in accordance with the Wildlife Corridors Action Plan. Thank you.

Chair Stump: Excuse me. I think Jesse Deubel would like to say something before we go back to online. [silence]

Jesse Deubel: Thank you very much, Chairman, Commissioners, Director Sloane, and Chief Liley. I appreciate the opportunity. Sorry, I didn't fill out the comment card. I did for the general public comment, but not for this particular agenda item, so I'm a little bit out of turn here. I want to thank you for highlighting and emphasizing this very, very important issue. Again, Jesse Deubel, Executive Director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, we're working very hard on this particular topic.

I want to commend the agency New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and Department of Transportation for what John Crenshaw mentioned is a national model. The Wildlife Corridors Action Plan is one of the most impressive documents I've ever read, and I read all of it, and it's like 700 and some pages. It's a very lengthy, comprehensive document. What's important now, though, is that we take the planning that was done and actually turn that into implementation. It's time that we get some of these crossings constructed so that your great work on this issue is not wasted, because planning without implementation doesn't solve the problem, obviously.

This issue is win-win-win. What I mean by that, it's a win for wildlife because wildlife that loses its life crossing busy highways, interstates, and roadways is tragic. Also, the motorist safety issue is really important, but also the robust populations of wildlife support the activities that the members of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation care so much about, like hunting and angling. In the state of Colorado, for example, almost the same number of deer that are harvested by hunters every year are killed on the roadways in Colorado every year.

When we talk about hunting opportunity-- and I know a lot of times I'm in front of this commission complaining about hunter opportunity and resident hunting opportunity and tag allocation and all of those

things. You all are tired of hearing me make those arguments. When we have increased populations of wildlife, when we're not losing animals on the roadways, there's additional opportunity for residents and nonresidents alike to be engaging in the activity of hunting, taking protein home to our families, feeding our families, and fully utilizing those animals, opposed to allowing them to go to waste on the side of our roadways.

Also, Dan Roper was here this morning from Trout Unlimited. He asked me to please provide a comment in support of wildlife crossings on behalf of Trout Unlimited and his membership. He had to get to another meeting, but he said, although it doesn't seem maybe natural for a trout organization, the fishing organization to engage in this type of issue, that his members are very interested in this, and they strongly support the work of this agency and Department of Transportation as it relates to the wildlife corridors and crossings issue.

Thank you all very much. Again, Chairman Stump, thank you so much for including this on today's agenda. I think it was a very educational and informational topic, and I think it's of great interest to the public. Thank you all.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Deubel. Back to the online, please.

T. Carrell: Okay. Jan Cohen, you have been allowed to speak. If you could unmute.

Jan Cohen: Thank you very much. I'm speaking as a private citizen. I'm an educator, and I spent a year commuting through that Glorieta Pass area to get to Pecos High School. I can tell you, even without animals crossing the road, it's a very unpredictable pass. It's not a high pass, but you get a whole lot of dicey weather going through there, ice and cloud cover coming down. Anyway, so I'm very excited that you're going to be moving forward with making it safe for wildlife and for people driving on that road and other places all over the state, but that has been my experience. Thank you.

Chair Stump: Thank you.

T. Carrell: Thank you. Next, we will have Nancy Johnson. Nancy, you have been allowed to talk.

Nancy Johnson: Hi. I'm Nancy Johnson, and I live in Eldorado at Santa Fe. I did testify at the 2022 hearing because of my work up in Seattle at the Woodland Park Zoo, where we were working with a group that was reintroducing grizzly bears to the Cascades, and wildlife corridors did come up. It's wonderful to drive along I-90 over the Cascades and see horns just crossing the highway above you. People finally figured out that they don't need to stop and wonder what it is. I hope that the commission here will continue to support this because it's good for the animals and it's good for the people. I thank you for your work.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Ms. Johnson.

T. Carrell: That is everybody who has their hand raised.

Chair Stump: Okay, great. Thank you so much. That was a great presentation, Mr. Botkin, Chief Liley. It's afternoon, so why don't we take a break and have some lunch? What do you guys think, half-hour? Okay, we have some lunch here. Half-hour. Let's meet back 12:45.

[lunch break]

Chair Stump: Welcome back. Item No. 14 is the Proposed 2025 Meeting Schedule. Director Sloane, please proceed.

Director Sloane: These are the dates that we put together and locations that we're suggesting for meetings for 2025 and January of 2026. These are based on what we believe the workload will be and on publication dates for rules. Obviously, the commission has the prerogative to change dates, locations, all that kind of stuff, so this is just our suggestion as a starting place.

Chair Stump: I know that there's a couple [inaudible 02:47:18] commissioners' mind. Would anybody talk about that?

Commissioner Pack: On the dates, I would have conflict the October 24th proposed date. I would hope that the commission would consider changing that date. I've had a four-year commitment set up four years ago on that date.

Chair Stump: Would next week work for you, the week after?

Commissioner Pack: Any other day but October 24th.

Chair Stump: How about the rest of you guys, would that work? Gregg is not on.

Director Sloane: Stick to Fridays. That would be either Halloween, the 31st of October, or November 7th.

Commissioner Pack: Is there an advantage to the department making any decisions needed by one of the earlier or later?

Director Sloane: I think because of the time between meetings will be fine in terms of publication dates and that kind of stuff, so, no, I don't think that particular one makes a big difference.

Chair Stump: Well, the other question is, are we going to have that in Albuquerque? There was some talk about going somewhere else to represent a different district.

Commissioner Pack: Commissioner Stump-- or Chairman Stump?

Chair Stump: Yes.

Commissioner Pack: Can I discuss locations then if we're going to jump into that category? I know the public realizes probably too we're divided into five districts in this commission, basically the four quadrants of the state, and then Bernalillo being District 5. Looking at the schedule, and I know that-- thank you, Director Sloane, for providing a list from 2018 to now, I just know that from the people that aren't my district, it is important that we visit the district.

After last year being in April, we did come to Silver City when we were bringing the orientation, which we certainly appreciated, but I know that a lot of people feel that District 2 hasn't had a lot of visits from the Game Commission as a venue to be able to come to and participate potentially in public comment. Looking at this proposed schedule, to distribute our meetings across the state, I think, would be advantageous.

We were proposing five meetings, we have five districts. Looking at the history, and we did a great job of spreading it out over the state, but knowing and looking at this history, we haven't been to Catron County. We've gone to Grant County once. We haven't-- For the last eight years, [unintelligible 02:50:12] we've been to Catron County, Hidalgo County, or Luna County, or Sierra County.

In my district, I know that having something in our area is very-- I'm thankful that you did schedule tentatively one in Socorro. I'm okay with that, but I would encourage, since right now there wasn't anything in Districts 3 or 1, that we certainly consider the commissioners moving them around. I'll come back with this if you guys want to add any additional comments or thoughts of what we should do.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Mr. Chair, if I may suggest, let's stick first to the dates and then let's go to the locations. With availability, my April 11th is not good. I would prefer another date in April. Again, it's actually a personal obligation that I have in another state, it's a wedding, so I wouldn't even be able to join in video. I know that for members of the public and for our commissioners as well as for the department, Fridays are the best. I would say April 4th. If that's not a good date, then I would suggest any other date, like on April 7th, 8th, or 9th. I'm sorry?

Commissioner Pack: April 4th is good for me.

Director Sloane: Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, the reason that we went with the 11th was that we should have a clearer picture of any impact from the legislative session. We may not by the 4th. If we wanted to stick with Fridays, I would ask for the 18th.

Commissioner Lopez: Mr. Chairman and members of the commission; on the 18th, being a devout Catholic from Rio Arriba County, that is Holy Week and Good Friday. Most of Northern New Mexico, or not all of New Mexico will be in other activities during that week. I don't know if there's anything the week after or if it's too late in the month.

Chair Stump: What about earlier in the week?

Vice-Chair Hickey: How about the 25th? April 25th. Is that too late?

Commissioner Lopez: Not late for me, but I don't know if there's anything the Director could foresee coming on the week after.

Director Sloane: I think we could do the 25th.

[silence]

Vice-Chair Hickey: Is that good for all of the commissioners?

[silence]

Commissioner Clemente: I just wanted to say I don't have a conflict.

[laughter]

Vice-Chair Hickey: Okay, can we go to June 13th? Are there any conflicts with that date? None for me.

Commissioner Lopez: Mr. Clemente, I have no conflicts.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Can we go to August 22nd? Is that good for everyone? Okay. Then October 24th, and that's-- Thank you, Commissioner Pack, where you're saying that's not good for you.

Commissioner Pack: Correct.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Do you want to move it to October 17th?

Commissioner Pack: [inaudible 02:54:06]

Vice-Chair Hickey: Right, so [crosstalk] the 21st?

Commissioner Pack: 31st.

Director Sloane: I think--

Vice-Chair Hickey: 31st.

Director Sloane: --part of the challenge with October is that it's kind of the middle of the hunting season, so it makes more sense to move it later.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Could we move it to November 7th? How about November 7th? Why does it have to be in October?

Director Sloane: It doesn't. November 7th.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Commissioner Chair, we have April 25th, we have June 13th, August 22nd, November 7th, and January 4th. I think those are [crosstalk]--

Commissioner Pack: January 9th.

Director Sloane: January 9th.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Excuse me. January 9th. Why did I say 4th? Now if we could divert our attention to the location. I respect what Commissioner Pack has said, being very mindful of, as we continue to be, we always have been, looking at the quadrants of the state, but we never really drilled down into a level of detail, which you did, going into counties within those districts. I think we've been mindful of location for public access, so I don't mind going into the county. Let's start with April 25th, Santa Rosa. Does everybody agree with that location?

Chair Stump: Well, there was talk with Commissioner Pack, she felt like it'd be better represented down in Roswell.

Vice-Chair Hickey: We want to change that to Roswell?

Chair Stump: Does department have any input on that?

Director Sloane: Mr. Chairman, it's clearly up to the commission. The only thing is we have not been to the Santa Rosa-Tucumcari Metroplex in quite some time.

Commissioner Pack: May I comment?

Chair Stump: You may.

Commissioner Pack: In the proposed list, three of the meetings were in District 4, and Santa Rosa is barely in District 4. If we keep Santa Rosa, then maybe we move one of the others. Commissioner Lopez, didn't you say that we have to have one in Santa Fe by law?

Commissioner Lopez: Can be once a year.

Commissioner Pack: Yes, so I just think that we need to probably have something in District 1. I would think we should consider that so that Gregg Fulfer's district has a chance to attend [crosstalk]--

Commissioner Fulfer: I'm all for that.

[laughter]

Vice-Chair Hickey: Okay.

Commissioner Lopez: I know that Roswell has a really great convention center down there and [inaudible 02:57:12]

Director Sloane: We have our office there as well.

Commissioner Lopez: Yes, we do have the office, but then a really great convention center [crosstalk]--

Commissioner Pack: One comment. This organization that I'm conflicted with October was having their convention there, and they're rebuilding the whole convention because of the flood. It took it out. You might have other locations, but I know the convention center, they told us a year, year and a half to rebuild.

Director Sloane: Mr. Chair, it sounds like Roswell for April.

Chair Stump: Yes.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Okay, so Roswell for April 25.

Chair Stump: Okay, next is Red River. Does anybody have a problem with Red River in June?

Director Sloane: Red River is fine-

Chair Stump: Okay, Red River is great.

Director Sloane: -but fishing is super on at that time of the year.

Chair Stump: In August, we have Socorro. You suggested Deming, but Socorro seems to work. It's central for everyone.

Commissioner Pack: Looking at our list, I'm okay with Socorro. We've been there twice in eight years. I know that Reserve would be thrilled to have us, as would other places, but I would like to hear what the commissioners think about not just returning to Socorro, not that there's anything wrong with Socorro, but to consider potentially some of the places where we've had a lot of interest in public sharing their ideas with us.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Oh, Mr. Chair, Commissioner Pack, I'm happy to consider what you just said, but can you be more specific and offer some name of some cities?

Commissioner Pack: Reserve. [crosstalk] **[unintelligible 02:58:57]** Catron County.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Okay. I have no problem with Reserve.

Chair Stump: The problem I have with Reserve is there's not a lot of lodging there, and we'd have to go down the night before, as well as all staff, to get set up. What else would you like **[inaudible 02:59:18]** in that area?

Commissioner Pack: Of course, we could return to Silver City. When have you been to Deming? Have you been to Deming or Lordsburg recently?

Director Sloane: We've had commission meetings in both locations. Deming is probably the more recent.

Participant: **[inaudible 02:59:42]**

Director Sloane: Probably in 2017 or so **[inaudible 02:59:48]**

Chair Stump: So it's been a while.

Director Sloane: It's been a while.

Vice-Chair Hickey: There is lodging in Deming?

Director Sloane: Yes.

Commissioner Pack: I have a question. How much lodging do we need when a commission travels with your department? How many rooms are we talking about? 20, 25 rooms?

Director Sloane: North of 15 for sure.

Commissioner Pack: Okay. [silence] Fernando, **[unintelligible 03:00:18]** since this is all down our region, do you feel that there's more interest in Hidalgo County versus Luna County?

Commissioner Clemente: To me, as long as we have **[unintelligible 03:00:26]** I think one meeting on the south would be good, give the opportunity to the people. Again, we want to maximize the attendance. I would like for people to attend these meetings, and that's the reason why we're going through this. Now another suggestion is five meetings, it's for **[unintelligible 03:00:48]** a year?

Director Sloane: That's my recommendation for the load that we have this year, but certainly, if we want to add meetings, we can do that. [crosstalk] I want to point out that I think Socorro is actually, potentially, closer to Reserve than is Deming, for example. It's closer to Las Cruces than **[inaudible 03:01:08]** travel-wise.

Commissioner Pack: I do know that because it's in the top of our district, but we have other meetings in Santa Fe, so I'm looking at Albuquerque. If we kept it in Albuquerque, we're pretty close to Albuquerque in Socorro. That was my thinking and just bringing it farther into District 2 in the southwest corner.

Chair Stump: What do you think of Deming?

Commissioner Pack: I'm good with Deming.

Chair Stump: Okay. Everybody else?

Vice-Chair Hickey: Deming.

Chair Stump: Deming.

Commissioner Lopez: **[unintelligible 03:01:38]** Deming.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Deming, August 22nd.

Chair Stump: Okay, so we did talk about changing the Albuquerque location this year. You recommended northwest part of the state. Cuba is a good option. There's Gallup.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Farmington.

Chair Stump: Farmington.

[silence]

Commissioner Clemente: Again, whatever recommendation or whatever changes we do, we need to look at attendance. That's the reason of these meetings.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Yes, right.

Chair Stump: Any feel, Director Sloane, on where we might get the most attendance in the northwest quadrant?

Director Sloane: Mr. Chair, I guess I really don't know. I think I mentioned in an email that we've had declining attendance since we've been putting it out on Zoom and on the internet, so it's kind of independent of location how many folks show up. We usually get the regulars and then folks that come online. I'm not convinced that location makes a huge difference for the number of attendees. Probably get a few from different places, but overall numbers, I'm not sure are affected by location.

Chair Stump: Okay, thank you.

Commissioner Pack: Commissioner Stump, can I comment on that?

Chair Stump: Yes.

Commissioner Pack: I think in the past-- I understand there's been a lot more attendance five years ago or before COVID. Is that correct?

Director Sloane: I think that's a fair statement, yes.

Commissioner Pack: My thought is that I'm-- Jesse Deubel is not here right now, but he made a comment about attendance and the importance of in-person attendance. I almost would like to make sure we have commissioners are out there in the public, in those districts even when they have the opportunity to participate by Zoom and try to rebuild that connection, because we love them to be online, but we also like to hear them in-person. I think if we afford them the opportunity and we value their comments that maybe we can increase that participation and understanding of all the great things you're doing. I think that we ought to give it a chance.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Your proposal is?

Commissioner Pack: Since this is your district, Commissioner Lopez, is there a particular area that you feel better needed to be served?

Commissioner Lopez: Thank you, Commissioner. Looking at the game [unintelligible 03:04:15] page 79 of the RIB [unintelligible 03:04:18] map I could bring up. We were Farmington last year our attendance was low. We only had two commissioners show up live. It is a long way in the San Juan County. We haven't been to Los Alamos since '18, Mike? '19?

Director Sloane: I think that's correct.

Commissioner Lopez: I know Los Alamos is a little up on the hill, as they call it, but there is facilities there and it is central towards Santa Fe, not that far from Taos or [unintelligible 03:04:54] of any stakeholders or [unintelligible 03:04:55] need to attend. If we had any interest from stakeholders in the northwest part of the district, it'd be Farmington and Gallup. We've gone to Gallup for- we went three years ago, two years ago. We can consider Los Alamos. It's central to northwest-ish, where there is facilities there. Where was the last one? Was it at the library?

Director Sloane: The last one that I remember there was in a hotel kind of by the airport.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Oh, Holiday Inn.

Commissioner Lopez: Would they let us use Fuller Lodge?

Vice-Chair Hickey: We can use Fuller Lodge.

Director Sloane: There are an abundance of facilities.

Commissioner Lopez: Lodging for staff from headquarters, I don't think would be an issue since we're so close. If the need be, there is plenty of facilities there. There is plenty of other areas. It's central. I would say Los Alamos be the most central area for that area. It allows people from Sandoval County to attend if they cross over the Valles Caldera.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Jemez Springs.

Commissioner Lopez: Jemez Springs.

Chair Stump: They could cross over from Valle Vidal, but [crosstalk]--

Commissioner Lopez: That's a long way.

Chair Stump: Yes.

Director Sloane: Chairman, November 7th in Los Alamos. Is that what I'm hearing?

Chair Stump: Sounds good to me. Everybody else, sound good? [silence]

Vice-Chair Hickey: Commission Chair, do you mind repeating all those dates and locations, please?

Chair Stump: April 25th, we have Roswell. June 13th, we have Red River. August 22nd, we have Deming, but you did-- and I apologize for this. You mentioned that Socorro was closer to Reserve than Deming. Correct?

Director Sloane: Chairman, that's correct.

Chair Stump: I want to circle back to that.

Commissioner Pack: I do know I have-- and I think Commissioner Clemente would agree, we have people down in the Bootheel that would potentially come to this meeting, who would want to have-- Because we haven't had anything in Luna County that-- I know you said you've had one more than eight years ago [unintelligible 03:07:16] because it's not on the list. I'm thinking that it would be good to go to the Bootheel.

Chair Stump: Okay. August 22nd, Deming. November 7th is Los Alamos, and January 9th is in Santa Fe. Tom Paterson did want to speak. Would you like to say something, Tom?

Tom Paterson: Yes, sir. [silence] Tom Paterson, New Mexico Cattle Growers, the President-elect, and a cattle rancher from Catron County. During the meeting that the commission had in Silver City this past spring, Commissioner Forward from Catron County graciously invited all of you to have a meeting in Catron County. I'm authorized by our county commission from Catron County for you to come to Catron County. Come to Reserve. Come to Glenwood.

We can arrange the lodging. It may mean that someone has to travel from Glenwood or from Alpine to our Fair building in Reserve, but please come. Please come to where we deal with wolves and elk. Please come to where 90% of the wolves in New Mexico are located. Please come where the wolves are threatening our school kids. Please come where they're eating my livestock right now. Please come where they're eating my neighbors' who lost five calves this past week while he's calving out heifers. Please come where we have to deal with elk, with your management policies about elk. Yesterday, I had to dodge elk coming up here from Luna.

Please come where we know what a laid-down fence looks like. It's because hunters are no longer just cutting our fences and throwing down our gates. They're actually taking their ATVs and driving over our fences and laying them down that way. Please come to where your decisions are making a profound impact on the daily lives of our people. Please, the county commissioners in Catron County will make this work. If you can't do it this year, please, please come to Reserve next year. Thank you very much.

Commissioner Lopez: Mr. Paterson, I have a question for you. Where's the fairgrounds located at?

Tom Paterson: It's just on 12 as you leave Reserve headed towards 180. It's very close to the T and Reserve.

Commissioner Lopez: Okay.

Director Sloane: It's across the street from the Forest Service.

Commissioner Lopez: In considering what we just heard in public comment, or a comment on this section for Mr. Paterson, I think it would behoove the commission to consider moving maybe the Deming meeting to one of those areas. I don't know if we can work-- it will take us time to work logistics with staff, but I think with that much leeway that we have, it's very possible to make it happen. I wouldn't mind staying in [unintelligible 03:10:31] bide time to get me a New Mexico apple pie, sounds good to me. [crosstalk]--

Tom Paterson: We would be profoundly grateful.

Commissioner Lopez: I like traveling to experience the different parts of New Mexico, and doing this job, that's the best part about it. I think the commission should probably consider that since, again, we do have the Mexican gray wolves down there. It might be a contentious issue, it is a contentious issue, but we can't hide from these contentious issues if we want to do our jobs appropriately, and it's pretty part of the state as well.

Tom Paterson: We will fill the Fairgrounds building. You will have attendance from the public.

Chair Stump: I believe that is true. Commissioners?

Vice-Chair Hickey: Mr. Chair, Commissioners, I hereby move-- [chuckles] not a formal motion, but I'm going to say, I hereby move, based on all of the discussion that we've had, that we make our August 22nd meeting in Reserve. Are there any objections?

Chair Stump: No, I don't think there's any. Gregg, do you have any opinion?

Facilitator: He's muted.

Chair Stump: He's muted? Okay. Commissioner Sloane, August 22nd, it will be in Reserve.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Everything else remains the same?

Chair Stump: Everything else remains the same.

Director Sloane: We could go through it one more time. April 25th in Roswell. June 13th in Red River. August 27th in Reserve.

Vice-Chair Hickey: 22nd.

Director Sloane: 22nd, excuse me. Sorry, I got 27th [unintelligible 03:12:17]. November 7th in Los Alamos. January 9th in Santa Fe.

Chair Stump: All right.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Thank you.

Chair Stump: Okay, moving along here. Thank you, Director Sloane. We don't have any comment on the internet, do we, online?

Facilitator: At this point, we do not have any hands raised.

Chair Stump: Okay, thank you. Item No. 15 is General Public Comment, and I only have two speakers. We can start with Tom Paterson again.

Tom Paterson: [inaudible 03:12:54]

Chair Stump: Okay, thank you very much. Mr. Deubel.

Jesse Deubel: Thank you very much, Chairman Stump, and Commissioners, Director Sloane, Chief Liley, for another productive meeting. A couple quick comments, the first one regarding the schedule of the upcoming Game Commission meetings. Prior to COVID, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation would host a get-together the day prior to the commission meetings on a lot of these out-of-town meetings, and we're going to start doing that again this year, so commissioners are invited.

I know there is rolling quorum issues and things like that, so I'll let you all work that out. Also, department staff who travels to these remote places of the state to attend commission meetings, this provides an opportunity for networking with various conservation organizations, members of the public, and department staff, so be on the lookout for those announcements of the venues where those type of events are going to be taking place.

It was a lot of fun when we did it previously, and a really good opportunity for groups who sometimes don't agree on all the issues to spend time together building relationships and finding compromise and finding common ground and those kinds of things. I think it's a very valuable resource that the New Mexico Wildlife Federation would like to provide.

I appreciated Chief Liley's presentation on pronghorn earlier, and I just want to make a couple of comments about that. First, the North American model of wildlife conservation is one of the most successful models that's existed in modern history. There's seven tenets to the model, of course. One of those tenets is that wildlife management must be based in science.

I just want to emphasize that when you have private landowners who have the authority to issue unlimited opportunities to hunt native species, whether mule deer, elk in the secondary management zone, or pronghorn, then I really don't see how you can make the argument that that's scientific-based management. They can sell more authorizations if they need more income, less authorizations if they need less income. That's not scientifically based. I'd really encourage this commission to think about that policy of unlimited private landowner tags for some of our species. I just don't see how it makes sense. I think the Department of Game and Fish has a responsibility to manage wildlife. That responsibility should be based in science, and we should consider that policy and put it maybe under review.

The last thing I'll mention is I'm not a scientist, I'm not a biologist, and I have deep respect for Chief Liley and the entire scientific staff at the agency. It was clear today that changes can be made to existing big

game rules outside of the four-year process-- is it four years or five years? Four. I'd urge Chief Liley to consider stopping the nanny hunts on ibex in the Florida Mountains.

Again, I'm not a scientist [inaudible 03:15:54] but my membership, it provides some citizen science. I think there's some value to that. I've got overwhelming comments coming in from my members about the lack of ibex population in the Floridians, to the point that numerous people who've drawn the tag are telling me they're not going hunting because the population could not afford to lose even an individual animal. There's just not enough out there. The fact that we still have nanny hunts, I think is also something that maybe should be considered. Thank you all very much.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Mr. Deubel. I guess that's it for public comment. Was there-- No, there's somebody online?

Facilitator: No.

Chair Stump: Commissioners, do you have anything you'd like to say today about anything?

Commissioner Lopez: I do have one comment. Are we on commissioner comments?

Chair Stump: Yes.

Commissioner Lopez: District 3, first off thank you to field operations leadership, Colin and Shawn, and I guess the Colonel left. Thank you to all conservation officers who have really stepped up patrols around the state, especially towards the Catron County Grand Terrace for OHV enforcement. The checkpoints that I was fortunate enough to go through-- I didn't [unintelligible 03:17:18] this year, by the way, but I still went through a checkpoint and it was cool. It was great to see everybody out there working, all the hard work they're doing on holidays, on the wintry days in the snow, hunting seasons working at night. When I hear the radio calls at night from Vegas at two o'clock in the morning, there they go. They're going to respond to calls and stuff, so thank you so much for that.

Of course, our licensed buyers and stakeholders for buying our license, funding the department. Really quiet season, Unit 51, 50, 52, and Unit 4, but they do provide us a lot of tax base as well when out-of-state hunters and hunters come in. We are busy. Tomorrow I will be attending the Northern New Mexico Livestock Association annual meeting to get a couple of earfuls regarding our contentious issues, but that's what we're here to do is to hear everybody's concerns. Been a quiet season since our last meeting, so not much to report from District 3.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Lopez. I'd actually like to reiterate about the OHV enforcement that's been happening up north. It's making a difference and landowners in particular are really pleased with it. Thank you, the department and all of our officers who are out there in the field. Appreciate you guys. Okay, so-- [crosstalk] Yes?

Commissioner Pack: Can I have a comment?

Chair Stump: Oh, I'm sorry.

Commissioner Pack: I will echo that. I understand there's been three different special-- what do they call them? Additional patrol, swarm patrols in District 2, so we appreciate that, and I know the ranchers appreciate that. I wanted to thank, I don't know if they're still online, our two attendees from the Habitat Stamp Committee. I really appreciate them being with us today. I think you did a great job, Chief Liley, on that presentation. I know we have a lot of comments from public all the time on that. Good work being done there.

I'm happy to always meet with different organizations. We get phone calls all the time as commissioners. Love to hear your concerns and your interest. It is important to us to hear from you, so thank you. Thank you [unintelligible 03:19:32] for being here too. I've seen you online. It is important. Thank you for sharing your ideas.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Mr. Chair, I will just add one last thing. We had a third CAC member and [crosstalk]--

Commissioner Pack: Good.

Vice-Chair Hickey: We did, and he was present here in the meeting. His name is Manny L'Esperance, and he was sitting right in the back, I think behind John Crenshaw there. I thanked him for attending. I'll just echo everything that you all have said. Your presence is very important to us. Everything that you say, everything that you send to us, we hear. I think we've made an effort to be very transparent with where we're coming from. At the end of the day, we need you. We need our public, we need the

department, and we need our experts. Thank you for the collaboration that we continually see. That's it, no more.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Commissioners. On that note, let's move on to Executive Session. We're closed for executive session, but I need a motion, please.

Vice-Chair Hickey: Yes. Mr. Chair and Commissioners, I hereby move to adjourn into executive session closed to the public pursuant to Section 10.15.1H8 NMSA 1978 to discuss purchase acquisition or disposal Section 10.15.1H7 NMSA 1978 attorney-client privilege litigation update and Section 10.15.1H2 NMSA 1978 limited to personnel matters. I thank you again, everyone, for your patience and understanding.

Chair Stump: May I have a second, please.

Commissioner Lopez: Second.

Chair Stump: Mr. Director, please call the roll.

Director Sloane: Commissioner Pack?

Commissioner Pack: Yay.

Commissioner Lopez: Yes.

Director Sloane: Commissioner Fulfer?

Commissioner Fulfer: Yes.

Director Sloane: Clemente?

Commissioner Clemente: Yes.

Director Sloane: [inaudible 03:21:50] Hickey?

Vice-Chair Hickey: Yes.

Director Sloane: Chair [inaudible 03:21:52]

Chair Stump: Yes. Motion passes. We are now adjourning executive session. Commission adjourned into executive session closed to the public. During the executive session, the commission discussed only those matter specified in its motion to adjourn and took no action as to any matter. The commission discussed the state land lease agreement. Stewart, can you give us a brief overview of that, please?

Chief Stewart Liley: Yes, Mr. Chair, members of the commission. As you said, we discussed the state land easement that we have for hunting and fishing on state lands. That expires on March 31st of this year. We've been working with the State Land Office to renew that easement, and part of that negotiations, we virtually left everything unchanged in the easement in terms of the general principles on how access occurs, roads, et cetera.

The only changes that did come about and proposed, that we've negotiated out with the State Land Office, is two provisions in the compensation. That is an increase of \$50,000 of cash on an annual basis, so moving from \$800,000 to \$850,000. Then an increase of \$100,000 in in-kind contributions. Currently, we're doing \$200,000 annually in in-kind contributions for things like habitat management, road improvement, et cetera, on state land. This would increase to \$300,000 for a total compensation on the lease of \$1,150,000.

The other thing that we worked with the State Land Office on, on a provision would allow us to do \$50,000 of in-kind match for law enforcement efforts that are conducted on state land as agreed upon with the State Land Office.

Those are the main changes. Outside of that, virtually everything else on the easement remains unchanged from its current form. That's what we've presented to you for potential to approve from the commission to have that lease go into effect April 1st of this year.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Chief Liley. Is there a commissioner with a motion?

Commissioner Lopez: Mr. Chair, move to approve the terms of the draft state land easement agreement, and authorize the Chair of the New Mexico State Game Commission to execute the easement agreement for hunter and angler access to state lands.

Chair Stump: Is there a second?

Commissioner Clemente: I'll second the motion.

Chair Stump: Motion passes.

Director Sloane: Mr. Chair, I think they need to vote.

Chair Stump: Oh, call the roll.

Director Sloane: Mr. Chair, I think you could do with a voice vote, but I'm happy to call the roll if you would prefer.

Chair Stump: All those in favor say aye.

Commissioners: [in unison] Aye.

Chair Stump: Any opposed? Motion passes. Thank you, Director Sloane.

Director Sloane: Thank you.

Chair Stump: We have one last matter. We had a date conflict in the Reserve meeting, which is on August 22nd. Commissioner Pack?

Commissioner Pack: Yes. From District 2, August 22nd is their county fair, so we are proposing August 15th of previous Friday.

Chair Stump: Thank you, Commissioner Pack. Thank you all for attending today's meeting. I look forward to seeing you all again in our April 11th meeting in-- where is that one?

Director Sloane: Roswell.

Vice-Chair Hickey: April 25th.

Chair Stump: In Roswell. Did we change that to 25th? Okay, way to go.

Vice-Chair Hickey: April 25th in Roswell [crosstalk]--

Chair Stump: April 25th in Roswell. This meeting is adjourned.

[03:25:39] [END OF AUDIO]