

COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA BRIEFING

Meeting Date: February 20, 2026

Agenda Number: 7

Presenter: Stewart Liley

Corroborator: N/A

Agenda Title: Initiation of Bighorn Sheep Rule (19.31.17 NMAC) for the 2027 – 2030 hunting seasons.

1. Summary of Agenda Item

The Department will present proposed changes to the Bighorn Sheep Rule (19.31.17 NMAC) based on survey information, management goals and public comment. We are currently analyzing data and reaching out to public and interest groups to evaluate alternatives and to help inform the rule development process.

Proposed changes include:

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

2. Background Information

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

Bighorn sheep hunting in New Mexico is conservative and managed to produce older age class rams for harvest. Ram licenses are once in a lifetime (Rocky Mountain and desert) and are quite limited in number every year. In cases where bighorn populations are large enough to be limited by winter range or issues involving dispersal behavior (i.e., some Rocky Mountain bighorn populations) the Department prescribes a conservative ewe harvest to maintain populations at appropriate levels. Currently there are no desert bighorn populations large enough to support ewe harvest and the Department is actively restoring desert populations to historical vacant range when surplus sheep are available.

3. Strategic Plan References and Possible Impacts of Agenda Item

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

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

None

5. Description and Summary of Public Involvement Process and Results

The Department is at the beginning of the public involvement process. Proposed changes to the bighorn rule will be posted on the Department's website. Input will be gathered from mail, email, and public meetings with interested members of the public. Public meetings will be held in several locations to gather public comments on the proposed changes to the bighorn sheep rule.

Suggested Motion

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