

DEER PROPOSED RULE CHANGE SUMMARY

Date of update: 2/25/2026

**The Department remains actively engaged in reviewing biological data and considering public input as the rule development process progresses. Please check back regularly for updates and additional information as decisions are finalized.*

DEER BIOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

Deer population growth is driven by both adult female and fawn survival. Adult doe survival is consistent across the mule deer range with only minor variability. Fawn survival on the other hand varies by region and across years, and it is heavily influenced by precipitation timing and quantity coupled with habitat conditions. Therefore, multiple years of good winter moisture and timely summer monsoonal rains are necessary to see significant deer population growth in New Mexico.

Because a single male can breed many females within a breeding season, more than 95% of females will be pregnant each year. Research indicates that pregnancy rates remain high unless buck numbers fall below 10 bucks per 100 does. Therefore, male mortality at or above this ratio does not meaningfully affect overall reproduction. For this reason, the Department primarily implements a male-only harvest strategy, as harvest of males does not negatively impact population growth under these conditions.

The Department uses two primary management strategies to meet diverse stakeholder interests: Standard hunts and Quality hunts. Standard hunts (also defined as opportunity hunts) are designed to maximize hunter participation while maintaining overall population health. These hunts typically have higher license numbers, higher hunter density, and a younger average age of harvested bucks.

In contrast, Quality hunts are designated to provide a more limited, higher-quality hunting experience. These hunts generally feature lower hunter density, higher success rates, an older average age of harvested bucks, and/or more favorable season timing and length. Quality hunt designations are established by the State Game Commission and involve more restrictive license allocations to maintain those characteristics.

For more information on deer biology and management in New Mexico, see this report:

<https://wildlife.dgf.nm.gov/download/new-mexico-deer-hunting-prospects/?wpdmdl=45001&refresh=699f46e7a03421772046055>

PROPOSED CHANGES TO DEER HUNTING

- 1) Adjust season dates where necessary.
 - a. Shifting start dates to maintain hunts beginning on Saturday or adjusting to calendar day starts for consistency.
 - b. Evaluate season dates for hunt structure consistency across the state.
 - c. Evaluate season dates to ensure harvest is biologically sustainable.
- 2) Adjust license numbers to meet management strategies and reflect changes in deer herd dynamics.
- 3) Reduce deer licenses in GMU 2B based on input received during current rule cycle.
- 4) Evaluate the potential to designate GMU 2B as a quality hunt unit which will require significant reduction in licenses. The Department will analyze the total number of license reductions required and will update this document as more information becomes available.
- 5) Create a public muzzleloader deer hunt on Wildlife Management Areas in GMU 4 to coincide with the private land hunt.
- 6) Create a December rifle hunt for Coues white-tailed deer in GMUs 16 and 22 to be consistent with Coues white-tailed deer hunts in other southwest GMUs.
- 7) Designate the premium statewide deer hunt as a Quality hunt.
- 8) Structure the January hunt on White Sands Missile Range as a youth hunt.

- 9) Consider changing the restricted muzzleloader deer hunts (GMUs 33 and 52) to general muzzleloader deer hunts.
- 10) Evaluate current antlerless hunts across the state.
- 11) Require the purchase of a license at least a day prior to the start of the hunt. For hunts where published season dates are less than 6 days, hunters will no longer be able to buy a license once the hunt starts.
- 12) Evaluate a potential “ranch registration” process for OTC private-land deer licenses, similar to the current registration process used for private land elk hunting in Secondary Management Zones.
- 13) Evaluate potential caps on private-land licenses.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Department continues to receive public comment. If you would like to comment on the proposals, please send an email to: DGF-Deer-Rule@dgf.nm.gov.