

DEER PROPOSED RULE CHANGE SUMMARY

Date of update: 5/6/2026

**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

General Statewide Proposed Changes

- 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) Designate the premium statewide deer hunt as a Quality Hunt.
- 4) Evaluate current antlerless hunts across the state.
- 5) 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.
- 6) 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.
- 7) Evaluate potential caps on private-land licenses.

Specific Proposed Changes

- 1) Reduce deer licenses in GMU 2B based on input received during current rule cycle.

- 2) Based on input received during the current rule cycle, the Department analyzed the total number of license reductions required to move GMU 2B to a Quality Hunt unit. Moving GMU 2B to a Quality Hunt unit would require a reduction of 885 deer licenses across public and private land (see table 1 below).
- 3) Create a public muzzleloader deer hunt on Wildlife Management Areas in GMU 4 to coincide with the private land hunt (10 licenses).
- 4) Structure the January hunt on White Sands Missile Range (GMU 19 WSMR only) as a youth hunt.
- 5) Create a December rifle hunt for Coues white-tailed deer in GMUs 16 and 22 (20 licenses in each GMU) to be consistent with Coues white-tailed deer hunts in the southwest.
- 6) Create a separate hunt code for the Silver City Management Area antlerless archery hunt (50 licenses). With this hunt code, archery hunters that hold a license in GMU 23 and 24 who do not harvest a deer during their archery hunt will not be permitted to hunt the Silver City Management Area antlerless hunt.
- 7) Change the restricted muzzleloader deer hunts (GMUs 33 and 52) to general muzzleloader deer hunts.

Table 1. Summary of changes to deer license numbers required to designate GMU 2B as a Quality Hunt unit.

Type	Hunter Category	Hunt	2023-2027 Hunt Code	Hunt Timing	Bag Limit	Current Licenses	Proposed Adjusted Licenses	License Change	Estimated Change in Harvest
GMU 2B Public	REG	Rifle1	DER-1-110	Mid-Oct	FAD	275	140	-135	-32
	YO	Rifle1	DER-1-111	Mid-Oct	FAD	125	125	0	0
	REG	Rifle2	DER-1-113	End Oct	FAD	350	90	-260	-119
	REG	Rifle3	DER-1-115	End Oct/Early Nov	FAD	400	100	-300	-170
	YO	Rifle2	DER-1-117	End Oct/Early Nov	FAD	25	20	-5	-5
	REG	Archery1	DER-2-118	Sept 1-24	FAD	130	130	0	0
	YO	Archery1	DER-2-119	Sept 1-24	FAD	20	20	0	0
	REG	Archery2	DER-2-121	Jan 1-15	FAD	180	90	-90	-38
	YO	Archery2	DER-2-122	Jan 1-15	FAD	50	55	5	2
	REG	Muzzleloader1	DER-3-124	Sept 27-Oct 3	FAD	175	175	0	0
YO	Muzzleloader1	DER-3-125	Sept 27-Oct 3	FAD	20	20	0	0	
GMU 2B Private	REG	Rifle1	DER-1-112	Mid-Oct	FAD	25	15	-10	0
	REG	Rifle2	DER-1-114	End Oct	FAD	25	15	-10	-4
	REG	Rifle3	DER-1-116	End Oct/Early Nov	FAD	75	15	-60	-16
	REG	Archery1	DER-2-120	Sept 1-24	FAD	10	10	0	0
	REG	Archery2	DER-2-123	Jan 1-15	FAD	30	10	-20	-10
	REG	Muzzleloader1	DER-3-126	Sept 27-Oct 3	FAD	10	10	0	0
TOTAL						1,925	1,040	-885	-392

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

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