

TO: Larry D. Voyles, Director

FROM: Larry Riley, Assistant Director
Wildlife Management Division 

PRESENTER: Brian F. Wakeling, Game Branch Chief

TITLE: Consideration of Proposed Commission Orders 3, 4, and 26 for 2012 Hunting Season.

DESCRIPTION: The Commission will consider and may vote to approve Commission Orders 3 (pronghorn antelope), 4 (elk), and 26 (population management) establishing seasons and season dates, bag and possession limits, permit numbers or authorized limits, and open areas for the respective 2012 fall hunting season. A detailed description of all proposals is available for public review at all Department offices.

DATE: November 7, 2011

Summary:

Hunt structures and recommendations were formulated based on the two-year hunt guideline package approved in September 2011. The following hunt recommendations for fall 2012 pronghorn antelope, elk, and population management seasons are based on the guidance provided by that document. Regions 1, 2, 3, and 6 held public meetings after analyzing current year survey data and prior to meeting with the Game Branch to discuss permit recommendations. These meetings were held during October 5–19, 2011. Zero to 6 people attended each meeting. At each of these meetings, Regional staff shared recommended management direction regarding harvest with those in attendance.

Each Region will hold an open house between November 23 and December 2, 2011 at which the public can ask specific questions about hunt recommendations for pronghorn, elk, or population management seasons from knowledgeable staff. The hunt recommendations will be posted on the Department web site on November 18, 2011.

In accordance with Hunt Guidelines, the Department will continue to allocate a proportion of the permits for pronghorn and elk within Units 4A, 5A, and 5B to Hopi tribal members based on the estimated populations of pronghorn and elk that occupy those lands. In exchange, the Hopi tribe will grant access to Hopi Trust Lands for permit draw hunters within the open hunt area. Likewise, Hopi tribal members that draw from their allotted permits will have access to the entire open area in the hunt area.

The Department has revised the Pronghorn and Elk Management Plans (attached). These were shared with the Arizona Elk Society, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Arizona Antelope Foundation on November 6, 2011 for their review and comment. The plans were posted on the Department's web site on November 18, 2011 along with this memo and the recommended permit numbers.

Specific information about pronghorn, elk, and population management seasons follow.

Commission Order 3 – Pronghorn Antelope

Attached to this memo are details of the recommended permit numbers by unit.

Statewide buck to doe ratios are within guidelines at 27:100, whereas fawn to doe ratios dropped slightly, remaining below guidelines at 29:100. Favorable winter precipitation was followed in many parts of the state with a dry spring, which did not help recruitment of fawns. In Region 3, closure of private ranches to public access is an ongoing concern and influences permit recommendations. Unit 19B is recommended to have permits for general, muzzleloader, and archery seasons (5 permits each), and the Chino Grande Ranch is working with the Department to provide access for a limited number of permit holders that may be willing to sign an permission and release agreement (draft attached).

General season permits are recommended to decrease by 8 from last year for a total of 417 permits. The archery-only pronghorn permit recommendation is 307 permits, which is a decrease of 5 permits from last year. Muzzleloader pronghorn seasons are recommended for 64 permits, a decrease of 8 permits from last year. Hopi tribal members are recommended to be allocated 10 general permits, 3 archery-only permits and no muzzleloader permits in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B.

The hunt for pronghorn on Fort Huachuca in Unit 35A is recommended to continue with a single general permit.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 3 – PRONGHORN ANTELOPE AS PROPOSED.**

Commission Order 4 – Elk

Attached to this memo are details of the recommended permit numbers by unit.

Statewide bull to cow ratios are within the newly established guidelines at 31:100; calf to cow ratios remain within guidelines at 41:100. Populations in many units are stable or slightly declining. As with pronghorn, a proportion of the permits in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B are recommended to be allocated to Hopi tribal members.

Elk harvest is recommended to allow limited population growth in some areas where growth is possible as identified in the Elk Management Plan; individual populations may be managed according to current habitat and environmental conditions.

This recommendation package will continue to adjust bull to cow ratios to meet or move toward management guidelines. General season permits are recommended at 14,060 permits, a decrease of 788 permits from last year (the change comprises a decrease of 542 bull elk permits and a decrease of 246 antlerless elk permits from last year). An additional 38 general bull and 14 general antlerless permits are recommended for allocation to Hopi tribal members in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B.

Juniors-only general antlerless elk permit opportunities are recommended at 1,027 permits, a decrease of 105 permits, and 6 permits are recommended to be allocated to Hopi tribal members in Unit 4A (juniors-only permits are at 5.0% of standard opportunity).

Archery-only elk permits are recommended to decrease by 157 to 5,166 (the change comprises an increase of 41 bull elk permits and a decrease of 198 antlerless elk permits). Hopi tribal members are recommended to receive 24 archery-only bull and 4 archery-only antlerless permits in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B. Muzzleloader permits are recommended to decrease by 5 permits to 1,113 (the change comprises an increase of 20 bull elk permits and a decrease of 25 antlerless elk permits). Zero muzzleloader permits are recommended for Hopi tribal members since there are no muzzleloader hunts in Units 4A, 5A, or 5B.

A new 10-permit any elk hunt in Unit 10 is recommended this year, which will provide CHAMP hunters with 45 any elk permits, which is an increase of 10 from last year.

The Department's recommendation is consistent with the weapons allocation formula in hunt guidelines. Bull and antlerless elk harvests are allocated by sex and weapon type using five-year averages of first-choice application demand and five-year averages of hunt success by weapon type; limited opportunity hunts and November archery-only bull hunts are excluded from this allocation determination. The Commission directed the Department to allocate at least 5% of the total available elk permits as antlerless elk permits to juniors-only seasons. The permit allocation in this package for juniors-only antlerless elk permits represents 5.0% of the total recommended elk permits.

Not including limited opportunity, CHAMP, juniors-only, or November archery-only bull seasons, the targeted and recommended allocations for bull and antlerless elk permits are as follows:

Bull Elk:	<u>Target</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
General	59.1%	59.8%
Archery	35.6%	34.6%
Muzzleloader	5.3%	5.6%

Antlerless Elk:	<u>Target</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
General	83.4%	82.5%
Archery	12.2%	12.2%
Muzzleloader	4.4%	5.3%

Projected harvest for both bull and antlerless seasons are expected to be within one percent of targeted allocation.

Limited opportunity general hunts are recommended to increase by 45 general permits to 1,782 and limited opportunity archery-only hunts are recommended to decrease by 25 permits to 275. No muzzleloader limited opportunity hunts are recommended. Hopi tribal members are recommended to receive 38 any general and 25 antlerless general limited opportunity permits in Units 5A and 5B.

No changes were recommended to the nonpermit over-the-counter elk seasons.

The hunt recommendation package was coordinated with land management agencies, local habitat partnership committees, and the Forage Resource Study Group in Region 2. Permits for bull and antlerless harvest were managed to meet management guidelines for bull to cow ratios and forage use as noted in the hunt guidelines and the Elk Management Plan.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 4 – ELK AS PROPOSED.**

Commission Order 26 – Population Management Seasons

Population management seasons are recommended for implementation in generally the same units, seasons, and permit levels as last year. "Designated elk," "designated buffalo," or "designated deer" is the legal wildlife in each of the population management seasons so that the Director may designate the desired legal animal for harvest when the permits are issued. Although the Department is recommending that the Commission authorize 1,525 deer (1,475 general and 50 archery only), 1,500 elk (945 general, 100 muzzleloader, 25 HAM, and 405 archery only), 745 javelina (360 general, 250 HAM, and 135 archery only), 160 buffalo (all general), and 122 bear (68 general, 26 HAM, and 28 archery only), these tags will not be issued unless approved by the Director following a determination from the population management hunt review and approval process.

Proposed Commission Orders 3, 4, and 26 for 2012

November 7, 2011

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Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 26 – POPULATION MANAGEMENT SEASONS AS PROPOSED.**

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Attachments:

Proposed Commission Orders

Statewide Elk Management Plan

Statewide Pronghorn Management Plan

Draft Chino Grande, LLC, Permission and Release Agreement