

TO: Larry D. Voyles, Director

FROM: Jim deVos, Assistant Director
Wildlife Management Division 

PRESENTER: Brian F. Wakeling, Game Branch Chief

TITLE: Consideration of Proposed Commission Orders 3, 4, and 26 for 2014 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 2014 fall hunting season. A detailed description of proposals is available for public review at all Department offices.

DATE: November 15, 2013

Summary:

Hunt structures and recommendations were formulated based on the two-year hunt guideline package approved in September 2013. The following hunt recommendations for fall 2014 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 16–21, 2013. Attendance was low at these meetings. 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 26 and December 4, 2013 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 23, 2013.

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). The plans were posted on the Department's web site on November 23, 2013 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 above guidelines at 36:100, whereas fawn to doe ratios remaining below guidelines at 29:100. In Region 3, continued public access within many of the large private ranches is facilitating pronghorn hunting, although the modest fee charged to enter the Big Boquillas is not universally supported by hunters. Unit 10 is a unit where improved availability of bucks enables the Department to recommend a 10-permit increase. 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); recent private ranch sales may foster improved cooperative access for hunting in the future.

General season permits are recommended to increase by 31 from last year for a total of 445 permits. The archery-only pronghorn permit recommendation is 286 permits, which is a decrease of 8 permits from last year. Muzzleloader pronghorn seasons are recommended for 72 permits, an increase of 4 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 Raymond Wildlife Area will be reopened to all pronghorn hunters in this unit.

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 near the top of guidelines at 34:100; calf to cow ratios remain within guidelines at 40:100. 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 15,030 permits, a decrease of 110 permits from last year (the change comprises a decrease of 29 bull elk permits and a decrease of 81 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. The Raymond Wildlife Area will be reopened to all elk hunters in this unit.

Juniors-only general antlerless elk permit numbers are recommended at 1,137 permits, a decrease of 14 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).

Muzzleloader permits are recommended to increase by 29 permits to 1,127 (the change comprises an increase of 4 bull elk permits and an increase of 25 antlerless elk permits). One muzzleloader permit is recommended for Hopi tribal members in Unit 5B.

Archery-only elk permits are recommended to decrease by 254 to 5,705 (the change comprises a decrease of 263 bull elk permits and an increase of 9 antlerless elk permits). Hopi tribal members are recommended to receive 19 archery-only bull and 5 archery-only antlerless permits in Units 4A, 5A, and 5B.

CHAMP permit levels will remain unchanged from last year's recommendation, which will provide 45 any elk permits.

The Department's recommendation is generally consistent with the weapons allocation formula in hunt guidelines. Bull and antlerless elk harvests are allocated by sex and weapon type using 5-year averages of first-choice application demand and 5-year averages of hunt success by weapon type; limited opportunity 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 4.3% of the total elk permits (4.7% of elk permits excluding limited opportunity hunts).

Excluding limited opportunity, CHAMP, and juniors-only seasons, the targeted and recommended allocations for bull and antlerless elk permits are as follows:

Bull Elk:	<u>Target</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
General	57.3%	57.3%
Muzzleloader	5.5%	5.4%
Archery	37.2%	37.3%

Antlerless Elk:	<u>Target</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
General	85.8%	84.1%
Muzzleloader	3.9%	4.8%
Archery	10.5%	11.1%

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 127 general permits to 1,907 and limited opportunity archery-only hunts are recommended to decrease by 25 permits to 435. Two muzzleloader limited opportunity hunts are recommended with 50 permits, an increase of 20 permits from last year. Hopi tribal members are recommended to receive 38 antlerless general limited opportunity permits in Units 5A and 5B.

Units 12A and 12B and Units 13A and 13B are recommended to be added to the nonpermit over-the-counter elk seasons for 2014 since there have been some new sightings north of the Colorado River.

Season structure on Camp Navajo in Unit 6B is still under development at this time, but options will be presented for the Commission to consider at the December 7, 2013 meeting.

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 if the permits are issued. Although the Department is recommending that the Commission authorize 1,525 deer (1,475 general and 50 archery only), 1,710 elk (1,145 general, 100 muzzleloader, 25 HAM, and 440 archery only), 770 javelina (360 general, 250 HAM, and 160 archery only), 170 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 2014

November 15, 2013

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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