

COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA BRIEFING

Meeting Date: August 25, 2011

Agenda Number: 15

Presenter: Ray Aaltonen

Back-up for Details: Leon Redman

Agenda Title: Silver City Deer Management Issues/Overview

Summary of Agenda Item: Department will provide the Commission with a presentation of the draft deer management proposal for the current situation of excessive deer numbers in and around Silver City and neighboring communities. The draft proposal includes options for resolving some of the issues by trap and transplant operations, utilization of departmental kill permits and antlerless archery and crossbow hunts. The overall goal is to reduce deer densities in and around the Silver City area.

2) Strategic Plan References & Possible Impacts of Agenda Item:

Goal III. Wildlife Depredation and Nuisance Abatement.

That the Department's depredation and nuisance complaint administration and intervention process meet the expectations of private landowners, leaseholders, and other New Mexicans for relief and preclusion from property damage, annoyances, and threats to public safety caused by protected wildlife

Objective 1: Resolve 95% of depredation complaints through 2014 within one year of a problem being reported and verified

Goal I. Sport Hunting and Fishing Program.

That the Department's provision of a statewide system for hunting activities and self-sustaining and hatchery-supported fisheries satisfies the participation expectations of New Mexico residents and takes into consideration hunter safety, quality hunts, high demand areas, guides and outfitters, quotas and local and financial interest.

Objective 2: That by 2014 the Department has established broadly supported management objectives for 9 species of big game, and 7 fishing waters that maximize recreational and economic benefits within the context of relevant biological, ecological, physical, social, economic, political, spatial, and legislative factors.

3) Estimated Distribution, Abundance, Habitat Requirements, Breeding Habits and Economic Values (17-1-26 NMSA 1978) of Species if Applicable. Deer are distributed throughout the Silver City area in GMU 23 and 24, but vary in density and abundance. High concentrations have recently been documented in the Silver City area. The population appears to be very healthy and recruitment is in excess of current harvest levels for the area.

Wildlife complaints involving deer causing damage to private property and the surrounding habitat are common.

- 4) **Considerations Regarding Duplications and /or Conflicts with Existing Statutes or Rules:** None identified at this time.

- 5) **Description and Summary of Public Involvement Process and Results.** The department has held three public meetings in Silver City. A general information meeting was held August 26, 2009 with 76 citizens in attendance. Two meetings with the local governing bodies occurred on April 20th, 2010 with the Grant County Commission and an April 27th meeting with the Silver City Town Council. All feedback obtained from the meetings indicate there is a strong desire by all parties to address the deer population within the Silver City area.

- 6) **Suggested Motion: No Motion required.** All information provided is strictly for discussion and will be brought before the commission in a following agenda item for a formal motion.

DRAFT 8-10-11

Silver City Deer Management Proposal

Goals:

To reduce the deer densities in and around the town of Silver City using various management techniques. Develop cooperative partnerships between the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Department), landowners, and other interested publics. Establish criteria for trap and transplant operations, kill permits and selected antlerless deer harvest techniques within a designated area.

Background/History:

Over the last several years various environmental and land management practices, drought and increased urban sprawl have led to significant numbers of mule deer in and around Silver City. Mule deer have found this area to be very accommodating allowing reproduction and recruitment rates to increase at a pace greater than the natural mortality rate. This has resulted in a population of mule deer reaching high levels, which has increased the number of predator sightings, mostly mountain lions. The numbers of animals have progressed from creating a visual novelty to levels where significant property damage, increased vehicle/deer collisions, and in some instances, aggressive behavior towards residence have occurred. Silver City has seen vehicle deer collisions increase significantly with numbers estimated at approximately 300 vehicle/deer collisions per year. Artificial feeding of deer remains an issue due to the negative effects on property and unnatural deer concentrations. The affected area is approximately 40 square miles. The Silver City area has a history of high number of wildlife complaints and landowners have reported damages to gardens, ornamental trees/plants, bird feeders and damage to the natural flora in the area.

Over the last ten years department staff have implemented numerous techniques to reduce and alleviate the damage created by the high mule deer numbers around the Silver City area. Scare techniques using zon-guns, cracker shells, fuse rope salutes (m-80's), bird bangers, screamers, rubber buck and slugs were all used by Department personnel with landowner assistance. Liquid repellants such as Hinder and Deer Away were also used to deter deer from damaging plants. All of the techniques used had very limited success. Modifications to existing fences and electric fencing have been used to alleviate damage to private property. All scare techniques are short term relief as the mule deer return the next day and in most cases later the same day.

Management Objectives:

Decrease the density of deer within the Silver City area to a level where estimated populations are reduced by 50% utilizing department kill permits, trap and transplant operations and regulated harvest over a three to five year period.

Step 1:

Define and create a map for the Silver City area where the Department will concentrate its management operations. (See attached map)

Step 2:

Conduct annual ground surveys to estimate the current number of deer that inhabit the residential areas of Silver City.

Current population estimates by field staff are that 1,000 to 1,200 deer live within the Silver City area. A three hours ground survey conducted on April 27, 2011 resulted in 401 deer being counted. 273 were does with 111 were classified as fawns. Ground surveys are conducted by vehicle in surrounding residential areas with deer are known to occur. Terrain, vegetation and structures restrict the observers ability to see 100% of the population in the survey area.

Step 3:

Implement a multi faceted management plan allowing the Department to coordinate and utilize department kill permits, trap and transplant operations and the regulated harvest of deer. The utilization of kill permits will allow for the effective reduction of deer densities in the Silver City area. Trap and transplant operations will occur within the Silver City town limits and in area where shooting is not practical or safe. The Department will continue to educate residents on the negative effects of artificially feeding deer.

Kill permits:

The Department will utilize kill permits and department personnel to reduce deer densities in the Silver City area. Deer will be sold in accordance to state law to families and individuals in need.

Trap and Transplant:

The Department will obtain written permission to trap deer on private land from the landowners.

The Department will set up drop nets and clover traps on private property within the Silver City area. The deer will be relocated to public land at prospective release sites which are:

- Mule Creek/Alma
- Snow Lake (Bear fire burn area)
- Slaughter Mesa (Near the current habitat project site)
- Pelona Mountain (Near the current habitat project, West canyon area)
- Heart Bar WMA

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples will be taken if funding is available.

Population Management Hunting: antlerless archery / crossbow only

The Department will offer antlerless archery and crossbow opportunities by utilizing the current population management hunt system and create antlerless only hunts in the designated area.

Long Term Actions:

The Department will continue utilizing kill permits, trap and transplant efforts along with regulated deer harvest opportunities. The Department will conduct annual population surveys to determine the effectiveness of these management actions. When the estimated population goals of 500 to 600 deer are reached or after three years, the action plan will be evaluated to determine future management strategies for the Silver City area.

RM-103 Considerations:

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's policy RM-103 was utilized in drafting this action plan. All deer captured will be released into known deer habitat adequate to support the released deer. The project costs will be offset by utilizing volunteers from sportsmen's groups and wildlife students from NMSU and WNMU. Three public meetings have been utilized to gain public input and to disseminate information. The first meeting was on August 26, 2009 with 76 interested citizens in attendance. The major feedback obtained from this meeting was the desire to reduce the number of deer in Silver City by either killing or trapping and removing. The second meeting was with the Grant County Commission on April 20, 2010. The Department presented management options to alleviate the growing deer population in the Silver City area. Trapping and relocating the deer and archery hunting were discussed. The County commission was in favor of the options. The third meeting was with the city council of Silver City on April 27, 2010. The same options were proposed to the city council, but the city council was less receptive to the options. The city council was not in favor of the Department hunting at all (archery or otherwise) within the city limits. N M Game Commissioner Dutch Salmon was present at all afore mentioned meetings. Future public meetings will be held to further disseminate and gather information with public and government entities.

