

Recommendations to Protect the Future of New Mexico's Wildlife

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Water and Natural Resources Committee
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1. Provide the Commission/Department with legal authority to manage all of the state's wildlife species, including invertebrates.¹

The framework for wildlife management in NM is contained in NMSA Chapter 17, much of it written in 1921. The authority granted to the NM Game Commission/NM Department of Game and Fish to manage wildlife is contained in Chapter 17. As the chart below shows, there are large gaps in that authority.²

<i>Taxa</i>	<i>Total native subspecies protected</i>	<i>Total native subspecies found in NM</i>	<i>Percentage protected</i>
Mammals	49	245	20%
Birds	382	534	72%
Fish	30	78	38%
Amphibians ³	27	27	100%
Reptiles	112	112	100%
Total vertebrates	600	996	60%

As the principal stewards of our state's wildlife, the Commission/Department need management authority over all species in order to protect our state's extraordinary wildlife diversity⁴ for future generations in the face of climate change and other threats.

2. Invest in our wildlife by providing general funds to the Department.

Wildlife is a public trust. Everybody benefits from it, and it is fair that everybody contributes financially to its management. However, the Department currently receives no general funds. License buyers provide most of the Department's revenues. Wildlife watchers generate \$377 million in economic activity in New Mexico.⁵ Using general funds to support wildlife conservation is an equitable and smart investment in the wildlife "asset" and will help sustain our outdoor recreation economy. This will be especially critical if/when Congress passes the Recovering America's Wildlife Act⁶ which will generate substantial new federal funding for the Department but also require a significant match.

¹ At least 12 states include invertebrates in their definition of wildlife.

² Sources: Biota Information System of New Mexico online database (BISON-M); New Mexico Ornithological Society, Checklist of New Mexico Bird Species, July 31, 2015, online at <http://www.nmbirds.org>.

³ Protection for amphibians and reptiles only extends to commercial collecting, not personal take.

⁴ NM ranks second among the states in number of bird species, and third in mammals and reptiles.

⁵ 2011 Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Related Recreation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

⁶ Introduced in the U.S. Senate by Heinrich (NM) and Blunt (MO). It is estimated that RAWA could generate \$27 million annually for NM but would require a \$9 million match.

3. Revise the policy declaration in Chapter 17 to align with the times.

Written in 1921, the policy declaration at 17-1-1 NMSA sets the tone for wildlife management in New Mexico and serves as the foundation for the Department's mission statement. It reflects the utilitarian view of wildlife (“game”) at the time and should be revised to incorporate modern ecological understanding and public trust principles.

Current statement:

“It is the purpose of this act to provide an adequate and flexible system for the protection of the game and fish of New Mexico, and for their use and development for public recreation and food supply.”

Recommended revision:

“It is the purpose of this act to provide for the conservation and management of the state's wildlife as a public trust with intrinsic and ecological value, for the equitable benefit, use, and enjoyment of all New Mexicans, including future generations.”

4. Change the name of the Commission and Department

New Mexico is one of only 10 states that have not replaced “game” with “wildlife” in the name of their wildlife agency. New Mexico should follow suit and change the name of the Commission and Department to reflect a more ecological focus. This could be done gradually over several years to minimize fiscal impacts.

5. Eliminate the Commission or change the way it is constituted

Although most New Mexicans do not hunt or fish, and wildlife is a public trust that should be managed professionally for the benefit of all New Mexicans, the way the Game Commission is currently selected and operates makes that a challenge. The governor has exclusive power to appoint members and can fire them at any time without reason. Commissioners are not required to have any expertise in wildlife conservation either by education or occupational experience. Historically most commissioners have been hunters, anglers or agricultural representatives. Either the commission should be eliminated entirely, and wildlife conservation left up to professionals within the Department, or the process for selecting and operating it should be revised to ensure that it is more professional, transparent and representative of all New Mexicans.

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