

# N.M. Game And Fish Director Reorganizing Department

By David Bowser

CORONA, N.M. — One of the problems facing ranchers in New Mexico is lack of grazing because of drouth.

Traditionally, ranchers can cut the number of livestock on drouth acres, but the question remains for ranchers, what to do about wildlife numbers?

That may be up to the bureaucracy of the state's wildlife officials.

Jim Lane is the director of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

"I've been in New Mexico for right at three years now," Lane says.

He's been director of the Game and Fish Department since November.

"I came west from Kentucky," Lane says. "I was wildlife director for Kentucky Fish and Wildlife for a few years."

He was wildlife chief in Kentucky for two and a half years before becoming director.

Lane says that in Kentucky he felt he was successful in working with the private landowners.

"The state is 96 percent privately owned," he notes.

Lane says the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish can't be successful and go where he wants it to go without working with the ranching community.

"We've got to do that in a meaningful way."

Consequently, Lane says he's in the process of reorganizing the department.

"The organizational structure

is a little broken right now," he says, "but we're in the process, I think, of fixing it."

That should make the department more efficient for the agency's customers and more efficient for the delivery of services to the citizens of New Mexico.

One of his priorities, he says, is to put together teams of people to address the needs of the state's wildlife and the needs of the people of New Mexico.

"I'm putting a habitat program together. I'm pulling some folks out of the field."

He's putting the private lands program under Cal Baca.

Lane says there is some money available to producers for wildlife programs through the Farm Bill. He's also planning to set up some cost-share programs through his department that can help ranchers and the wildlife of New Mexico.

He says ranchers own some of the best land in New Mexico.

"Given that," Lane says, "we're interested and excited to work with ranchers."

Lane says his agency has not tried to cut wildlife numbers in the face of the drouth.

"Our state game commission sets the big game rules for the state of New Mexico," he says.

Lane explains that, right now, that planning is on a four-year cycle.

"That sets management strategies in place that we hope to gather data over three years worth of hunting seasons and three years worth of surveys to

make recommendations back to them on what we want those herds to do," he says.

Lane says that doesn't mean they won't address local concerns or local problems as they come up.

"But the overall statewide management of the resource is something that we keep in place," he says, "and we try to do with a strategy in place."

Sometimes, he says, that strategy is to increase herds. Sometimes, it is to decrease some herds.

"Sometimes, it's to stabilize the population right where it's at," Lane adds.

They try to maintain hunting license sales and maintain the carrying capacity of the land. To that end, he says, they work with the producers in the area.

"We actively seek input from a lot of producers in the state of New Mexico and work with a lot of the counties to help to try to balance the game management needs of the state with the needs of the producers."

He says the agency continues to monitor the drouth and its impact on elk, deer and antelope numbers, but he says they are interested in the long-term impact on wildlife.

"It's something that we are keeping track of," Lane says of the drouth, "but we have not taken any strategy, or put any in front of our commission, to decrease herds."

That said, Lane says his agency can help ranchers who have cut their grazing numbers only to be overrun by wildlife.

"There are various means by which we can do that," he says.

Lane says they can offer fencing material and help with fencing.

"We are also in some areas of the state during this drouth entertaining forage leases where we directly compensate some of those folks for the elk use on their pastures," he says.

Ranchers can call the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's Depredation Hotline for help in such situations.

Baca says his department

will determine the extent of damage and then their depredation specialists who will work with the property owner or land manager to come up with the best strategy for the situation.

Situations will vary with the production goals of the producer, Baca says.

He says their programs are not all or nothing programs. The agency can tailor a strategy to fit a producer's situation.

"We go out and say 'What are we trying to accomplish here?'" Baca says.

He says working together with landowners has proven to be more effective than simply coming in and mandating action.

Lane adds that New Mexico has been adapt at growing predators for the past decade or so, based on the data he's seen.

"We had strategies in place that were designed to grow bears and designed to grow lions," Lane says. "We did that well."

The increase in predators, combined with the decrease in habitat quality, has caused problems, he admits.

"We've probably got the maximum predator load out there," Lane says. "We're hitting our ungulates pretty hard right now, across the state. You've got a double whammy going on right now with a lot of our populations."

He says his agency isn't just interested in their four-year planning cycle.

"We monitor data every year," Lane says, "and if we see that we need to back up or go back to our game commission and ask them to do something different, we certainly will do so."

Lane is speaking to New Mexico ranchers here as part of the Southwest Center for Rangeland Sustainability.

This session is being sponsored by Purina Mills, according to Larry Varner, a wildlife nutritionist with Purina Mills and director of their technical research program.



tems are quite a bit different in some specific ways that folks need to be aware of when they're trying to manage both livestock and big game."

Wildlife enterprises on private land, Smallidge says, are a great way for managers to diversify their income.

Such enterprises, he says, are a relationship between the landowner, the buyer of the service, and the state game agency.

"That's an important consideration," Smallidge says. "Having said that, if you are fortunate enough to have marketable wildlife on your place, you can generate a tremendous amount of revenue from that."

In many instances, he says, a landowner can generate more revenue from wildlife operations than from cattle operations.

"There's lots and lots of examples of that here in New Mexico as well as west-wide," Smallidge says.

From the ranching sector there is Mike Hobbs, manager of the Express UU Bar Ranch.

"We have been in existence as the Express organization since 2006," Hobbs says.

The ranch covers about 185,000 acres of deeded land and about 17,000 acres of state trust land.

Hobbs says that while they are primarily a cattle operation, they have a significant wildlife operation that includes elk, deer, antelope, bear, lion, and turkey. He says their wildlife operation includes everything that is indigenous to northern New Mexico.

"The ranch itself encompasses all the life zones known in New Mexico," he says. "We go from the Chihuahuan Desert

all the way into the Alpine kind of country."

Hobbs admits that there are a lot of different challenges.

"I don't want to represent myself as an expert," he says. "The longer I'm in this business, the more humble I become."

He says he's constantly learning with his wildlife operation.

"It's a wonderful mix whenever we can combine our cattle operation with our wildlife program," Hobbs says, "but it is not without significant challenges."

The climatic conditions the state has been experiencing the last three years, he says, have been difficult.

"The years that we've wanted to rest and leave our livestock off," Hobbs says, "the elk find out where that is pretty quick, and they come take advantage of what we were trying to leave and really complicate a management plan."

Hobbs says that in comparing stressed pastures to those that are not as stressed, he's noticed that there is a natural decline in wildlife numbers.

"It impacts the wildlife many times at the same level that it impacts the livestock," Hobbs says. "We're seeing that at the UU Bar; it is a little bit prone to self-limiting. I mean we're seeing a reduction in fawn crops. We're seeing a reduction in calf elk crops as a result of our environmental stresses."

## Graham Auction Sells 833 Head Of Cattle

GRAHAM — (April 23) — Cattle receipts totaled 833 head.

Steers: under 300 pounds \$200-240, 300-400 pounds \$180-200, 400-500 pounds \$160-180, over 500 pounds \$110-170.

Heifers: under 300 pounds \$175-190, 300-400 pounds \$160-180, 400-500 pounds \$150-170, over 500 pounds \$110-160.

Slaughter cows: cows \$60-90; bulls \$90-110.

Replacement cows: cows and heifers \$1000-1400 per head; cow-calf pairs \$1300-1800 per pair.

The richest man is not he who has the most, but he who needs the least. — *Unknown.*



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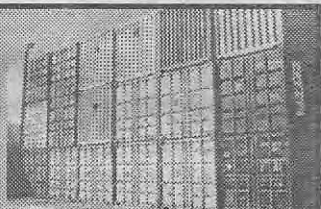
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