



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish  
**NOTICE OF CHANGES TO EPLUS PROGRAM REGULATIONS**



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## **PLEASE READ: IMPORTANT CHANGES FOR 2019**

At the November 30, 2018, State Game Commission meeting, significant changes were adopted to the Private Land Elk License Allocation rule (19.30.5 NMAC), better known as EPLUS. These changes are intended to improve the EPLUS program, help the Department achieve its elk management goals, and will better acknowledge ranches that provide meaningful benefit for elk. The new rule, which officially goes into effect on April 1, 2019, contains several changes that will affect ranches currently participating in EPLUS.

To improve clarity of the Program, changes have been made to the basic terminology used in EPLUS. There were previously two management zones for elk in New Mexico; COER (Core Occupied Elk Range) and Outside the COER. With the Rule change, the management zones used for elk will be the Primary Management Zone, the Secondary Management Zone and the Special Management Zone. The Primary Management Zone (previously COER) is that part of the state where elk license numbers are set by the State Game Commission, harvest objectives are determined, and the distribution of private land elk authorizations is strictly regulated. Complete definitions for all three zones can be found in 19.30.5 NMAC.

### **Primary Management Zone**

#### **Boundary Changes**

- Primary Management Zone Boundaries have been expanded in GMUs 9, 12, 13, 21A, and 34 to improve management of these elk herds.
- All of GMU 12 is now inside the Primary Management Zone.
- Maps of the elk management zones are available on the Department's website by following the hyperlink at the bottom of this flyer.

#### **New participation requirements for ranches within the Primary Management Zone**

- Every ranch in EPLUS must qualify in accordance with the new Commission approved guidelines. These guidelines are designed to determine a property's meaningful benefit to elk as required by rule.
- Two separate requirements must be met: 1) the ranch must demonstrate regular elk use during the entirety of one or more seasons and 2) the ranch must provide meaningful benefit and contain habitat components that are known to be beneficial to elk.
- The Department will evaluate all currently enrolled ranches using a scoring system, with a maximum of 13 points that assesses specific habitat measures. Scoring will be done by a committee consisting of local biologists and conservation officers assessing six major criteria; forage, water, cover, surrounding area, agricultural use, and for other meaningful benefits not captured elsewhere.
- Ranches must receive a minimum final score of seven points to qualify for the EPLUS program.
- Maps of all ranches participating as unit-wide will be posted on the Department's website and made available to the public prior to the hunting season.

#### **Ranch audits and request for updated ownership documentation**

- To ensure the Department is accurately assessing every ranch in the program, participants may receive an EPLUS Updated Document Request Form. If you receive this form, it must be completed and all listed documents returned to the EPLUS Manager by the deadline date on the form or your ranch will be placed in review; suspending all future agreements and elk authorizations until the documents are received and verified.
- If after one year, adequate documentation of ownership is not provided, the ranch will be inactivated.
- If you do not receive an Updated Document Request form, you do not need to submit any additional documents at this time.

#### **Properties that no longer qualify for the EPLUS program will be notified**

- All participating ranches in the Primary Management Zone will be scored to assure they meet the new participation requirements.
- If the Department determines that your ranch does not meet the new minimum participation requirements for EPLUS, you will receive a "Does Not Qualify" notice from the Department with an option to request a review of the determination.
- The Department will mail out "Does Not Qualify" notices by April 1<sup>st</sup>.



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- Requests for a review will be processed in accordance with the provisions of 19.30.5.12 NMAC, Landowner Right to Review.
- Requests for a review must be submitted within 30 days of the date on the Department's letter to be considered for the current year.

**Changes to the elk authorization allocation process**

- Private land elk authorizations are issued to ranches within the Primary Management Zone through an acre based formula, which is described in the EPLUS rule (19.30.5 NMAC).
- The Small Contributing Ranch (SCR) draw will no longer use a rotation system based on prior draw history. SCRs will now compete in a random draw weighted on the ranches ranch score.
- SCRs with a higher ranch score will have an improved chance of drawing an elk authorization.
- Bonus and two-year unconverted allocations will be added into the pool for the SCR drawing first. Any allocations remaining will be redirected to the acre based allocation formula for base ranches.
- Base ranches will continue to receive their base allocation through the acre based allocation formula.

**Special Management Zone**

- Units 46, 54 west of NM State Road 199 and 55A now comprise the Special Management Zone.
- Properties must demonstrate occasional elk use to qualify.
- Private land authorizations in the special management zone will continue to be negotiated on a ranch by ranch basis.
- All authorizations shall be ranch-only and transferable to other private property with written permission.
- Bow-only hunts are limited to Sept.1-24. Any legal sporting arms hunts are limited to any 5 consecutive days from Oct.1 – Dec.31. Exceptions to these dates may be considered on a ranch by ranch basis.

**Secondary Management Zone**

- Landowners within the Secondary Management Zone will not be required to complete an EPLUS application.
- Ranches will be required to verify ownership in the Secondary Management Zone and obtain a ranch code.
- The ranch code will be required to purchase an over the counter private land elk license for a specific ranch. All licenses shall be ranch-only and transferrable to other private lands within the same GMU and management zone with written landowner permission.
- Ranch codes will be available online through the Department's website, by telephone: 1-888-248-6866, and at any NMDGF office beginning on July 1, 2019.
- Bow-only hunts are limited to Sept.1-24. Any legal sporting arms hunts are limited to any 5 consecutive days from Oct.1 – Dec.31. Exceptions to these dates may be considered on a ranch by ranch basis.

**For more information about the changes above, maps of the Management Zones, and a complete copy of the Private Land Elk License Allocation rule, 19.30.5 NMAC, go to <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/maps/elk-private-lands/>.**