



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish EPLUS Habitat Incentive Program



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The EPLUS Habitat Incentive Program is designed to incentivize and recognize participating EPLUS landowners who are conducting significant habitat enhancement projects for elk on their private deeded property. Only projects completed in the past three-year period or active improvements to existing projects will be considered for the program. The program does not recognize projects that are planned in the future or routine ranch maintenance activities.

Approved and qualified habitat projects may earn eligible landowners elk incentive authorizations. These incentive authorizations are part of the EPLUS authorization formula and are pulled from the bonus pool of authorizations. Elk incentive authorizations are limited in number and type, and are subject to availability from year to year.

Not all habitat projects completed on a ranch and reflected in the habitat application will qualify for the habitat program nor will all projects qualifying for the program rank high enough in the evaluation process to generate an award of an elk authorization.

Landowners wishing to participate in the incentive program must submit a new application each year before the annual January 5th deadline. Incentive authorizations are awarded through a competitive process ranking the value of the individual projects for elk against all other projects in the Game Management Unit.

Elk incentive authorizations are not guaranteed to be available each year. Consequently, the allocation received by properties accepted into the program may vary annually both in number and type.

This document is designed as a guide to participants wishing to apply for the program. It is intended to provide basic information on the types of projects accepted, what components of a project are important and important deadlines. Department staff are available to consult with landowners about the Habitat Incentive Program and how to improve their properties for wildlife and elk by contacting the area offices.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The purpose of this program is to recognize landowners who are making a significant contribution to improving elk habitat and management in New Mexico and provide a process to fairly and transparently distribute available elk incentive authorizations through the EPLUS program.

The Habitat Incentive Program is not a compensation program for efforts expended to improve habitat but only a limited way to recognize landowners for certain qualifying projects for a limited amount of time. The Department will not re-review applications submitted during a license year after all authorizations are issued however landowners are encouraged to reapply each license year they wish to be considered.

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“A portion of the bonus allocations or two year unconverted, should they be available, may be distributed to specific ranches in the form of incentive authorizations issued in recognition of significant contributions to elk management.”

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for the Habitat Incentive Program, properties must be enrolled in the EPLUS program and conducting qualifying improvements for elk on the private deeded lands within the past three years or must be actively improving on an existing habitat project. Landowners participating or wishing to participate in the program must submit a completed habitat incentive program application prior to the January 5 deadline for the current application period. In addition, the ranch file must be up to date and contain a complete set of all current ownership documentation as required by the EPLUS rule.

Small contributing ranches completing certain practices may only have one year of eligibility for that practice however, if the practice is of significant value, the Ranch Score may be increased to recognize the projects overall improvement to the property.

QUALIFYING HABITAT PROJECTS

The following habitat projects have been identified by the Department of Game and Fish (DGF) as relevant and beneficial to elk in New Mexico. This list includes projects that may not be directly related to habitat improvement but still provide benefit to elk. **For a project to be considered for the incentive program, it must have been completed or must be an active improvement to an existing habitat project conducted within three years of the current application.** Routine maintenance of existing or historical projects (water systems, fence, etc.) do not rank as high as new or active projects and may not qualify for the program. Projects must be complete or near completion to be considered. We do not recognize projects that are planned in the future.

- **WATER** is of critical importance to all wildlife species. The distribution and availability of water for elk varies from one part of the state to another. The development of water projects in parts of the state where water is scarce or sparsely distributed will constitute a higher priority than water development in areas where water is more abundant or widely distributed.

The duration of available water will also affect the value of a water project. Water projects that provide water year round will be of highest value. Multiple water projects on a property may also increase the value in this category.

- **FOREST MANAGEMENT** benefits wildlife as well as promotes forest health. Projects that improve forest management/health might include select cutting/thinning which reduces canopy cover and encourages grass and forb growth in the understory. These projects are typically larger in scale and may include a forest management plan.

Other projects may include fuel load reduction along with thinning to re-establish or establish an open pine savannah like environment.

By increasing the total number of acres affected the priority of these projects may be increased.

General thinning projects directed at woody vegetation such as pinon/juniper thinning or lower limb removal may best be categorized as a rangeland improvement project. These types of projects are typically conducted to improve forage potential by reducing competition for water and sunlight.

- **RANGELAND IMPROVEMENT/GRAZING MANAGEMENT** can provide many benefits to elk and other wildlife as well as increased productivity for grazing livestock.

Projects considered for rangeland improvement could include planting/restoration of native forage, removal of invasive plants, other brush control projects and controlled burning.

Removal of invasive vegetative species can be important for the reestablishment of desirable forage and native plants. Thinning or removal of undesirable vegetation or woody species may be accomplished by mechanical means such as mowing or cutting, chemical means or through prescribed burning.

Planting food plots can be beneficial on a local level however it is not a high priority for the incentive program and may not compete well against larger or more permanent habitat projects.

Also considered is a structured grazing management plan which includes techniques such as seasonal or rotational grazing, or reduced numbers or elimination of livestock. To be considered for grazing deferment or livestock reduction, the property must have a recent history of continual grazing and the deferment or reduction of cattle implemented within the past three years.

The scope of rangeland improvement or grazing management/alterations is also important. By increasing acreage the priority of these projects may increase.

- **AGRICULTURE CROP PRODUCTION:** Due to the free roaming nature of elk, agricultural crops are occasionally utilized as forage. Agriculture has been incorporated into the habitat incentive program so landowners who are willing to allow wildlife access to agricultural crops may be recognized.

For the purposes of the Habitat Incentive Program agriculture is defined as a commercially harvested field crop either for sale or utilization directly on the ranch. Crops grazed by livestock and not mechanically harvested do not qualify as production agriculture in this program.

Competing agricultural projects are evaluated based on their productivity, total acres and overall benefit to elk and other wildlife in the area.

- **FENCE MODIFICATIONS** that are wildlife friendly can be important projects that decrease both wildlife mortality and fence damage. While fence modification is not increasing or improving habitat directly it does enhance habitats by making them more accessible for elk.

Modifications that may be considered include: elk crossings; addition of high visibility material to existing fence; installation of smooth wire on top and bottom; top strands at 42 inches or lower; bottom strands at 18 inches high or higher; spacing of 12 inches or greater and; removal of sheep fencing or old fencing materials no longer in use. Scale and scope of these projects will be considered. Routine maintenance of fences will not be considered.

Laydown fencing is also considered as a fence modification that is beneficial for elk. Consideration will be given for the amount of laydown fencing utilized on the ranch, the timing and duration of the fence being down, and the frequency of elk presence, movement and/or migration through the ranch.

The Department may provide specifications for wildlife friendly fencing. More information may be found on our website at <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/maps/elk-private-lands/>

- **RIPARIAN DEVELOPMENT/PROTECTION** is important for clean water and erosion control. Many wildlife species thrive in and around healthy riparian areas.

Riparian improvements for this program will only be considered for permanent or intermittent streams/rivers with reliable seasonal water flow.

Projects considered will include adjacent erosion control projects, exclusionary fencing, bank stabilization plantings or other approved bank stabilization projects.

- **OTHER PROJECTS** beneficial to elk may also be considered. Please include projects or activities that you are involved in that may benefit elk but are not listed above.

PROJECTS NOT CONSIDERED

Specific projects that will not be considered for the habitat incentive program include plantings of exotic or invasive species as listed by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture and projects considered contrary to DGF policy and/or opinion. Projects that were completed more than three years ago or routine ranch maintenance activities will not be considered eligible for the incentive program.

ASSIGNMENT OF ELK AUTHORIZATIONS AND TYPE

There are three types of elk authorizations available: Mature Bull (MB), Either Sex Archery (ES) and Antlerless (A).

The number and type of elk authorizations available for the incentive program vary between Game Management Units (GMU) and may change in number and type from year to year.

All applications are reviewed by Regional Review Committees made up of local NMDGF field staff. Applications are evaluated based on the scope of the habitat project/s, added benefit to elk on the landscape and practices that make significant contributions to elk management. Individual projects are

scored during the evaluation process and the overall score is used to rank each application against other applications from the same GMU.

The types of elk authorizations available to a property are determined based on the quality of projects implemented and the significance and benefit to elk that the projects provide.

Authorizations will be assigned starting with the properties having projects providing the most significant benefit to elk as determined through the scoring process. Number and type of authorizations are based on the ranking, number of individual projects, and type of projects implemented. Scoring thresholds are set for each authorization type and number. Thresholds increase as the number of projects increase. Applications that do not meet the threshold value for a single authorization will not be eligible to receive an authorization.

Issuance of authorizations will continue through all qualified properties until all available authorizations for each GMU are distributed or until all qualifying projects have been recognized.

Not all habitat projects completed on a ranch and reflected in the habitat application will qualify for the habitat program nor will all projects qualifying for the program rank high enough in the evaluation process to generate an award of an elk authorization.

The number and type of authorizations awarded to a ranch may fluctuate from year to year depending on the number of incentives available by GMU. Thus, participating properties are not guaranteed to receive the same number and/or type of incentive authorizations each year.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

All applications must be received or postmarked prior to **January 5th** of the application period. The Department will review application projects, rank properties and assign available elk incentive authorizations. Elk incentive authorization awards will be included in the annual EPLUS account statement.



EPLUS
Habitat Incentive Program Application
 April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022



The Habitat Incentive Program is designed to incentivize and recognize EPLUS landowners who are conducting significant habitat enhancements or provide other benefits to elk on their private deeded property. Approved and qualified projects may earn landowners additional elk incentive authorizations.

Elk incentive authorizations are limited in number and are subject to availability, and ranking against other habitat improvement/benefit projects in a Game Management Unit.

All applications are evaluated and ranked through a competitive process by the Department. Applications will be evaluated based on the scope of the habitat project/s, added benefit to elk on the landscape and practices that make significant contributions to elk management. Certain projects on Small Contributing Ranches may only be eligible for the incentive program one time, however, if the project provides significant improvement to the property, the Ranch Score may be improved.

Scope: Significant acres improved; multiple projects; impact of projects; longevity provided by project

Added Benefit: Increased/improved/created habitat components

Significance: Created or enhanced water, cover, or forage where it was limited or absent before

To be eligible properties must be currently enrolled in EPLUS with complete documents on file and habitat projects must be completed within the previous three years or very near completion. If multiple properties are owned or managed, a separate, unique application must be submitted for each property enrolled in EPLUS.

Authorizations awarded through this program may change from year to year based on availability and the significance of the contributions provided to elk compared to other projects submitted in the same Game Management Unit.

APPLICATION DEADLINES:

- Elk Incentive Application must be submitted or postmarked by **January 5** to be considered for the next license year.
- **Late or incomplete applications will be rejected.**

For more information please visit our website at www.wildlife.state.nm.us. If you need help completing this application call toll-free 1-888-248-6866. Hours: Monday through Friday 8 AM – 5 PM

***AUTHORIZED RANCH CONTACT INFORMATION:**

 Name (First, M.I., Last)

 Ranch Number

 Mailing Address

 Telephone number

 City State Zip Code

 Alternate telephone number

 Email

***Application must be submitted by the Authorized Ranch Contact listed on file for the EPLUS Ranch.**

FOR DEPARTMENT USE ONLY				Postmarked date: _____	Date received: _____	Renewal Date: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete application	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete documents on file	<input type="checkbox"/> Late or incomplete application	<input type="checkbox"/> Returned to Landowner			
Game Management Unit (GMU): _____		Ranch Number: _____				
<input type="checkbox"/> Qualified	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not Qualify	<input type="checkbox"/> Notice Mailed	<input type="checkbox"/> Updated Document			

READ THE FOLLOWING TERMS OF AGREEMENT CAREFULLY BEFORE SIGNING

APPLICATION AGREEMENT:

- I have read this Habitat Incentive Application form and understand that participation is voluntary;
- I have read the Habitat Incentive Program description which outlines qualifying projects and gives additional information about completing this application;
- I accept that this application is contingent upon my participation in EPLUS and is subject to the terms and conditions of my signed EPLUS agreement;
- I am the legal owner or have been assigned by the legal owner(s) as Authorized Ranch Contact to handle this application;
- I attest that the ranch information provided with this application is true and correct;
- I understand that habitat work initiated or completed does not guarantee application approval;
- I understand that application approval does not guarantee issuance of incentives;
- I understand that incentives are not guaranteed each year and are subject to availability, and ranking against other projects;
- I understand that participating properties are not guaranteed to receive the same number and/or type of authorizations each year;
- I agree to allow prearranged access to the property for the purpose of on-site evaluations of habitat projects if necessary;
- I understand that habitat projects completed on the ranch and reflected in this application may not qualify for the habitat program;
- I understand that projects qualifying for the program may not rank high enough in the evaluation process to generate an award of an elk authorization;
- I agree that application approval and any incentive awards are at the sole discretion of the Department; Types and/or number of incentives authorized will be determined by the Department based on priority of the project and availability of authorization types;
- I understand that incentive applications must be submitted each year before the annual January 5th deadline.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

MAIL APPLICATION PACKET TO:

**EPLUS Coordinator
NM Dept. of Game and Fish – WMD
Post Office Box 25112
Santa Fe NM 87504**

STREET ADDRESS FOR OVERNIGHT DELIVERY:

**EPLUS Coordinator
NM Dept. of Game and Fish – WMD
One Wildlife Way
Santa Fe NM 87507**

Agreements may be faxed to (505) 476-8127 ATTN: EPLUS Coordinator or Emailed to: DPF-EPLUS@state.nm.us

GENERAL RANCH INFORMATION

Ranch Name: _____ Unit-Ranch #: _____

Authorized Ranch Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Total Ranch Deeded Acreage: _____

<p>Acreage in Cover: _____</p> <p>Description of Cover (timber, pinion/juniper, etc.):</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Acreage of ungrazed Open Space: _____</p> <p>Composition of Open Space:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Acreage being grazed by livestock: _____</p> <p>Type and number of livestock on ranch, forage composition:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Acreage in agricultural crop production: _____</p> <p>Description of Crop:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Harvested: Yes / No</p>

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS:

The EPLUS incentive program is an annual, competitive process which evaluates your most recent habitat improvement projects on your private deeded land based on the information provided in **this** application. **Staff will not consider previous year applications during the evaluation process.** Your application is then ranked against other applications in the same Game Management Unit (GMU) competing for a limited number of incentive authorizations.

To increase your chances of receiving incentives be sure to completely fill out the application and include specific detail about each project that you want considered. One or two before and after pictures of each habitat project with complete descriptions and dates is helpful for staff during the evaluation process. Do not send videos, or pictures of elk from trail cameras, or pictures of elk tracks, elk droppings or elk damage. Properly labeled maps showing locations of projects can also be helpful.

The incentive program recognizes projects completed in the past three-year period or active improvements to existing projects. Routine maintenance of existing or historical projects (water systems, thinning projects fence, etc.) do not rank as high as new or active projects and may not qualify based on the activity. It is important to include dates on when projects were started and completed, and dates of specific improvements. Projects must be complete or near completion to be considered. We do not recognize projects that are planned in the future. **Only projects described within the "Projects to be Considered" section below will be considered during the application evaluation process.**

The Habitat Incentive Program is not a compensation program for efforts expended to improve habitat but only a limited way to recognize landowners for certain qualifying projects for a limited amount of time. **The Habitat Incentive Program does not recognize routine ranch maintenance activities.** The Department will not re-review applications submitted during a license year but landowners are encouraged to reapply each license year they wish to be considered.

Use additional paper if necessary. Be sure to properly label any additional papers or documents.

**INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS CONDUCTED ON PRIVATE DEEDED
LAND TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

PROVIDE A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EACH PROJECT

Water

Type of project/s: _____
Number of projects: _____
Distance from existing water: _____
Details: _____

Date project/s started: _____
Date project/s completed: _____

Forest Management

Type of improvement: _____

Acres improved: _____
Date improvement started: _____
Date improvement completed: _____

Rangeland Improvement/Grazing Management

Describe rangeland improvements: _____

Acres affected: _____
Date project started: _____
Date project completed: _____
Describe grazing management: (Include historical and current grazing, with dates, if stock reduction or grazing
deferments are being claimed.)

Agricultural Crop Production (Accessible to elk)

Describe type of field crop/s. Include the months most used by elk and general numbers of elk present: _____

Is Agriculture irrigated? Describe: _____
Acres in production: _____
Frequency of harvest: _____

Wildlife Friendly Fence Modifications (Including fence removal)

Type of modifications: _____

Number of modifications: _____

Distance of modifications: _____

Date modifications started/completed: _____

Laydown Fencing on or along deeded acres: Yes / No

Total linear measure of laydown fencing: _____

Describe AND include a map showing the location or locations where laydown fencing occurs on your deeded acres:

Specific months or timing of when fence is down:

Riparian Development/Protection

Describe project: _____

Specific area affected: _____

Date project started/completed: _____

Other

Describe other projects beneficial to elk not included above: _____

Photographs Included

Please provide photographs for each project. Include before and after photographs if possible. Do not send videos, or trail camera pictures of elk, or pictures of elk tracks, elk droppings or elk damage. Properly labeled maps showing locations of projects can also be helpful.