



FOR PUBLIC REVIEW HABITAT STAMP FUND DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS

November 01, 2011

BACKGROUND:

The Habitat Stamp Program (HSP) was established in 1991 on a statewide basis with five regional boundaries (Figure 1, Table 1). These boundaries were arbitrarily drawn and a funding formula was established to distribute funds. Rationale for these boundaries and the associated funding formula were not retained.

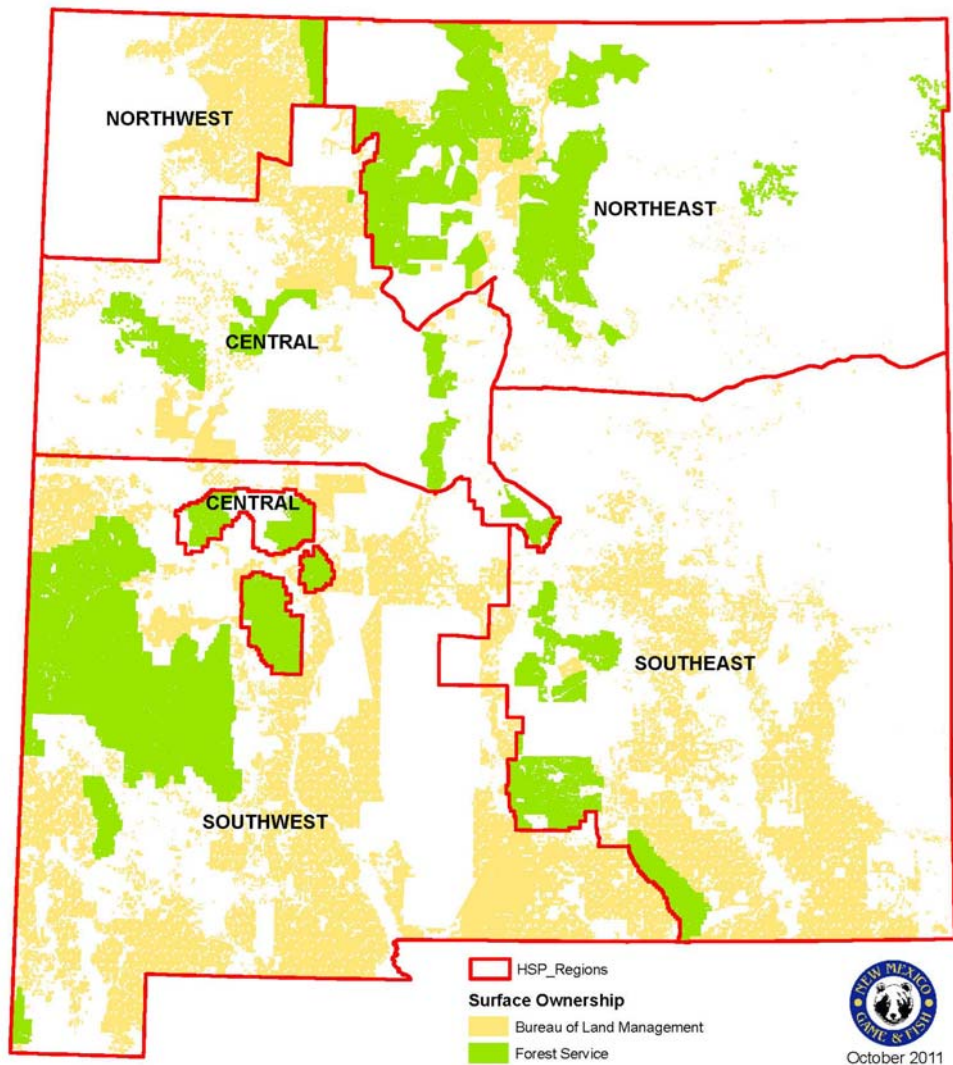


Figure 1. Present HSP regional boundaries.

Table 1. Distribution of BLM and FS land (acres) by HSP regions.

HSP Region	BLM	FS	Total
Central	1,252,154	1,625,689	2,877,843
Northeast	593,712	3,017,291	3,611,003
Northwest	1,161,113	153,355	1,314,468
Southeast	3,620,077	1,090,863	4,710,940
Southwest	6,868,577	3,340,767	10,209,344

The funding formula implemented in 1991 has not changed since the inception of HSP, and has distributed funds to the five regions as follows: Central=18.6%, Northeast=22.4%, Northwest=14.4%, Southeast=24.8%, Southwest=19.8% (Figure 2).

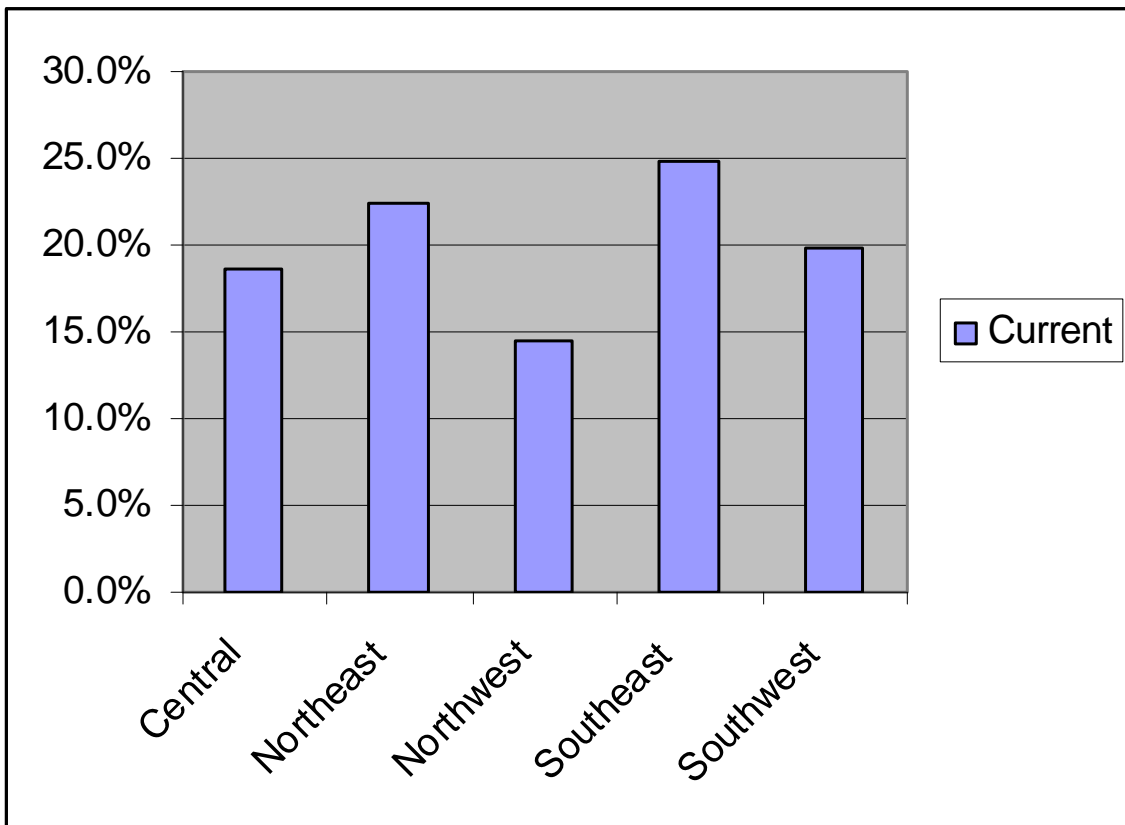


Figure 2. Percentage of HSP funds distributed to the regions, 1991 to present.

At the June 9, 2011 State Game Commission meeting, HSP partners, including the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Department), U.S. Forest Service (FS), and U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), proposed to set aside $\frac{1}{3}$ of available funds for statewide, land-scape scale projects. Commission-appointed Citizen Advisors would then provide recommendations for spending these funds to implement habitat projects on a statewide basis. The remaining funds would be available to maintain structures and conduct regional projects on a competitive basis within each of the HSP regions. This change was proposed to address concerns that the effectiveness of HSP was being compromised because of divergent values of the different partners.

Subsequently, the Commission asked for further information and options at the August 25, 2011 Commission meeting. The Commission is seeking public input on alternative formulas or criteria as how to distribute HSP funds. Included are five possible options for HSP fund distribution. The public is welcome to suggest other options.

ASSUMPTIONS:

The HSP is committed to involving citizens early on in the decision making process. In any option to distribute funds, Commission-appointed Citizen Advisors would continue to review and recommend habitat improvement proposals for funding. Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) are asked to assess a final list of current proposals and a tentative list of future (out-year) proposals. The tentative list of out-year proposals affords the agencies advance notice to complete necessary budgeting, workforce planning, and clearance activities.

Land management agencies are beginning to assess project work at it relates to the cumulative impacts on social, economic, and biological factors. These planning areas vary in size from individual watersheds to entire mountain ranges. With its limited staff, the Department needs to maintain contact with federal agencies during all phases of the planning process. In any of the options discussed below, HSP funds are most appropriate where site selection prescription have involved and incorporated Department input. Furthermore, the HSP authorizing legislation requires the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture develop, in consultation with the State agency, comprehensive plans for use of these funds.

HSP funds distributed under any option would continue to be used as a match with other state and federal dollars. Leveraging partner funds and assets in an effort to implement larger projects takes advantages of economy of scale principles and is the most meaningful to wildlife populations. Leveraging processes are more conducive to options that allow funds to be concentrated. For example, aquatic habitat improvements are often not considered due to the inability to pool funds in a short implementation window.

The CACs have historically ranked the maintenance of existing HSP structures (water developments, fences, gates) as a high priority. In 2010-11, maintenance of 552 existing habitat structures cost \$290,889, or 32% of HSP funds expended. In any of the options presented below, we envision the CACs will continue to review agency maintenance proposals and rank them high for funding.

1. USFS-BLM LAND STATUS PER HSP REGION OPTION

This option respects regional citizen participation in the HSP, but distributes available funds based on the percent of FS and BLM lands in each of the five HSP regions. In this scenario, the HSP regions would receive the following allocation: Central=12.7%, Northeast=15.9%, Northwest=5.8%, Southeast=20.7%, Southwest=44.9% (Figure 3).

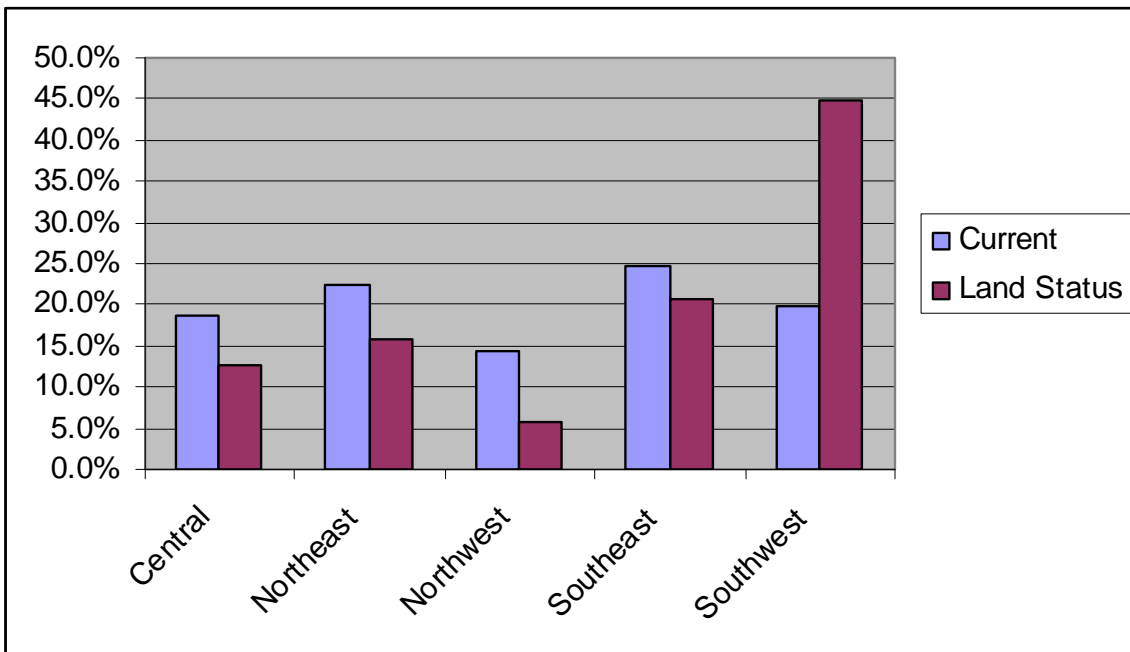


Figure 3. Percentage of HSP funds distributed to the regions based on amount of BLM and FS land in each region.

Pros:

- This option would objectively distribute funds based on the amount of public land in each region.
- Cooperators in the southwest region would benefit from increased funding because more public lands is located in this part of the state.

Cons:

- Some parcels of public lands are more beneficial to wildlife than others, but all are treated the same in this formula.
- No advantage will be given to public lands that are in greater need of restoration/improvement across regional boundaries.
- Four of the five regions will experience a decrease in allocated funds which may cause dissatisfaction in those regions.
- Aquatic habitat for anglers is not directly represented in the distribution.

2. DEER-ELK-PRONGHORN HUNTERS & ANGLER USE PER LAND STATUS OPTION

HSP funds would be distributed to the five regions based on a formula that includes the estimated numbers of hunters (deer, elk, and pronghorn) and anglers using public land and the amount of FS and BLM lands in those HSP regions. The proportion of FS and BLM land masses in each region would be 50% of the score, proportion of anglers in each region would be 25%, and proportion of hunters in each region would be 25%. Public land elk and deer hunter numbers were derived from the current four-year rule, and pronghorn hunters from the 2007-08 harvest report. Angler surveys were last conducted in 2007-08.

A geospatial analysis of this data (with subjective hunter divisions where boundaries overlap) with the above mentioned proportions resulted in a distribution of funds as follows:

Central=9.0%, Northeast=26.2%, Northwest=11.6%, Southeast=19.3%, Southwest=33.9% (Figure 4).

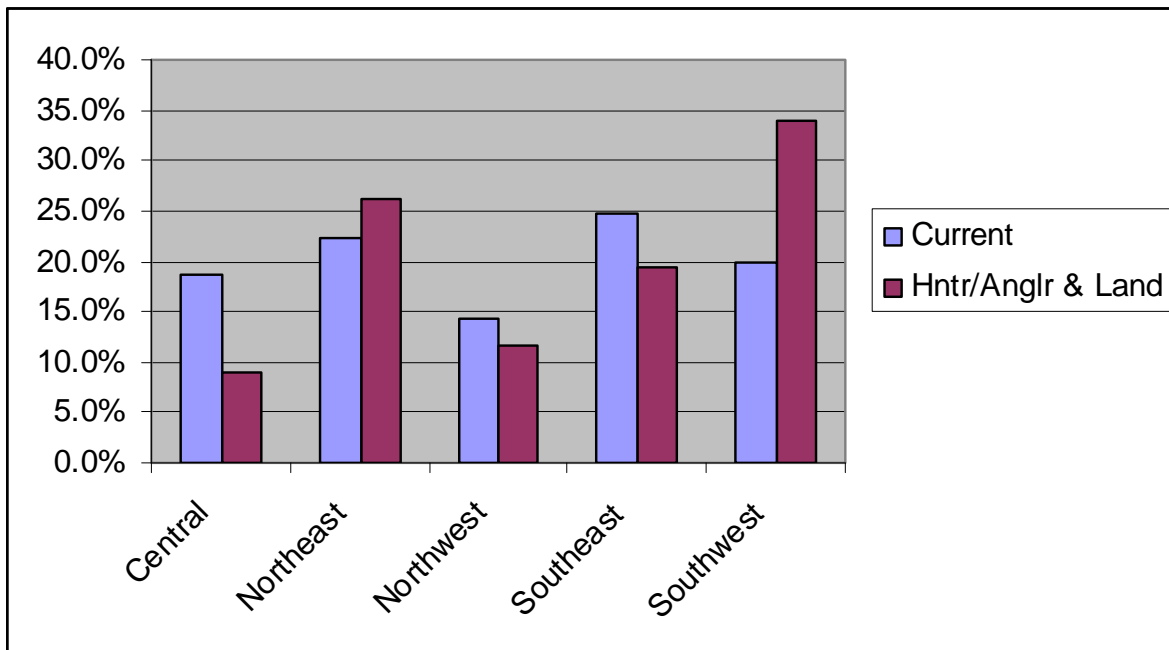


Figure 4. Percentage of HSP funds distributed to the regions based on amount of BLM and FS land, numbers of deer, elk, and pronghorn hunters, and anglers.

Pros:

- Attempts to distribute funds based on hunter and angler use on public land within each HSP region.
- Anglers would be represented based on historical fishing activity.
- Funds are distributed to regions based, in part, on sportsmen who are paying the bill.

Cons:

- Some public land parcels are more beneficial to wildlife than others, but all are treated the same.
- No advantage will be given to public lands that are in greater need of restoration/improvement across regional boundaries.
- All hunter data are currently captured from game management unit (GMU) boundaries that in some cases overlap HSP regional boundaries (Figure 5). Distribution of hunters to each region is therefore subjective and may result in a need to modify the HSP regional boundaries to align with GMU boundaries.
- Potential misrepresentation of the angler component resulting from the lack of annual angler surveys due to expense.
- “Public” pronghorn hunter numbers vary annually and the majority are assigned to ranches with varying amounts of federal and State Trust lands. Therefore, those licenses cannot be consistently attributed solely to federal public lands.

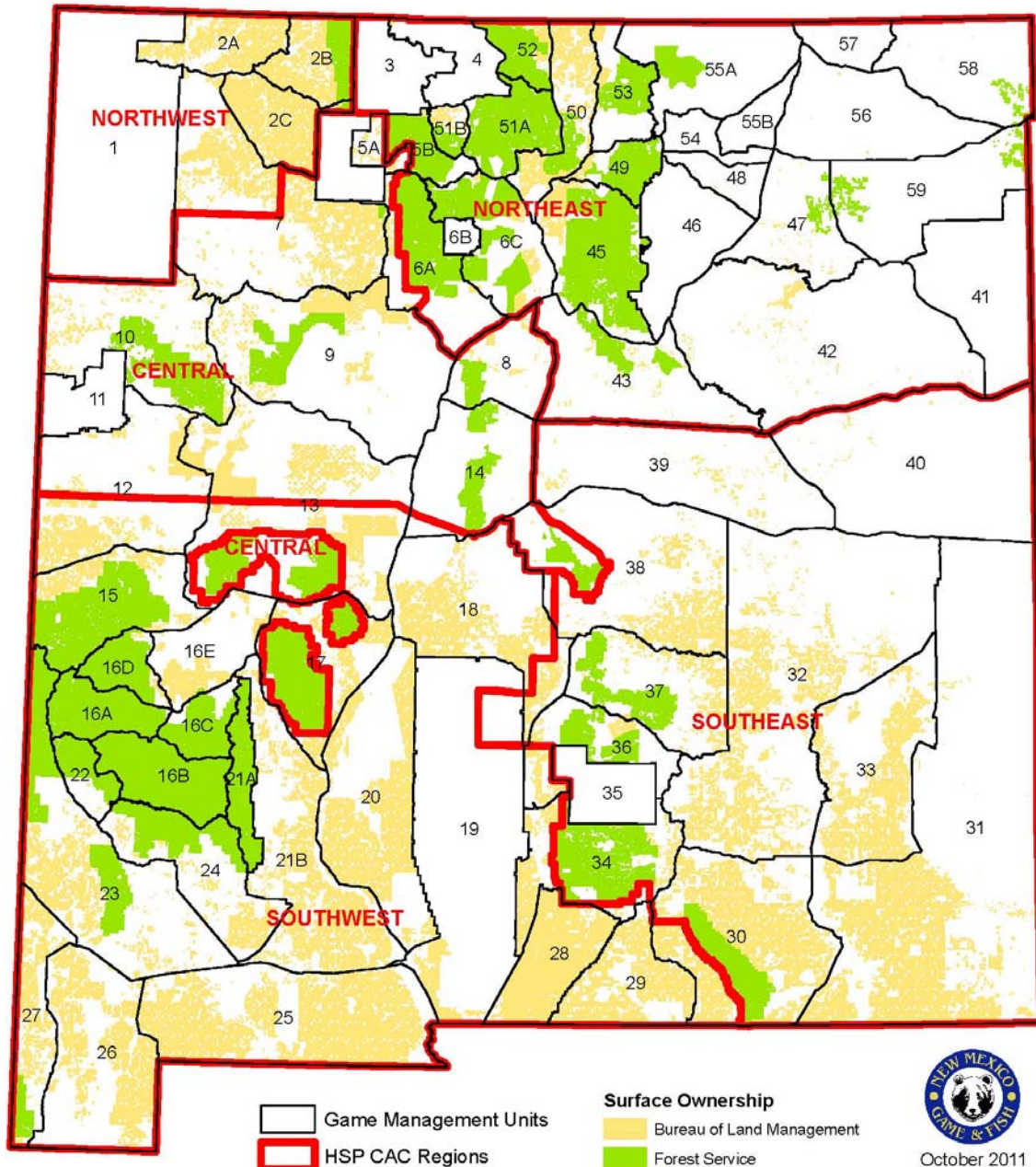


Figure 5. HSP regional boundaries overlaid with GMU boundaries.

3. DEER-ELK HUNTER USE PER LAND STATUS OPTION

This option eliminates some of the difficulties of Option 2 (sporadic angler surveys and pronghorn hunter bias). Data on deer and elk hunters are more reliable and objective as they are established during the four-year rule process. This option weighs the number of public land deer and elk hunters in rule against the amount of FS and BLM lands in those HSP regions. In this option, the proportion of hunters in each region and the proportion of FS and BLM land mass in each region are valued equally at 50%.

A geospatial analysis of these data (with subjective hunter divisions where boundaries overlap) with the above-mentioned proportions results in a distribution of funds by region as follows: Central=11.7%, Northeast=18.2%, Northwest=5.6%, Southeast=24.7%, Southwest=39.8% (Figure 6).

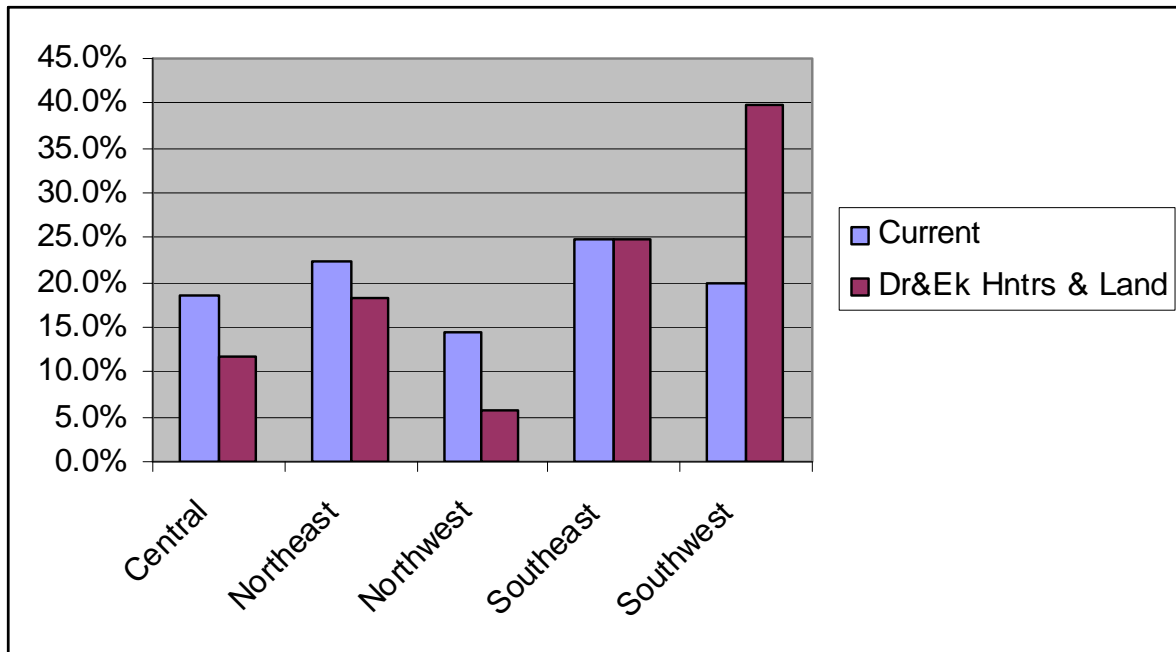


Figure 6. Percentage of HSP funds distributed to the regions based on amount of BLM and FS land and numbers of deer and elk hunters.

Pros:

- This option would distribute funds objectively based upon numbers of deer & elk hunters using public lands in each HSP region.

Cons:

- Some parcels of public lands are more beneficial to wildlife than others, but are treated the same.
- No advantage will be given to public lands that are in greater need of restoration/improvement across regional boundaries.
- All hunter data are currently captured from game management unit (GMU) boundaries that in some cases overlap HSP regional boundaries (Figure 5). Distribution of hunters to each region is therefore subjective and may result in a need to modify the HSP regional boundaries to align with GMU boundaries.
- Anglers are not represented in the distribution.
- Pronghorn hunters are not represented in the distribution.

4. FEDERAL LEADERSHIP OPTION

In this scenario, the Department would focus its activities to collecting fees, enforcement of “stamp” purchases, and providing the agencies with guidance on and oversight of wildlife habitat improvement needs. After collecting the funds, the Department would annually block-grant each federal agency their portion. If available funds were divided by land status, BLM would receive 57.5% and FS 42.5%.

Pros:

- Federal agencies would have dedicated funding to aid in establishing budgets, matching funds, and workforce planning.
- Attempts to fairly distribute funds based upon an objective measure.
- Federal agencies would consult directly with CAC, sportsmen, and the public before implementing habitat improvements.
- Program accountability would be streamlined.
- Much of the current funding for a Department HSP program manager could be redirected to habitat improvements (~\$100K).
- The Department's full time employee could be redirected from day to day management of HSP to grant fiscal management, assistance with habitat project planning, identifying opportunities to apply federal grants to HSP projects, and other Department habitat related projects .

Cons:

- The Department's targeted habitat improvement needs on federal lands that weren't selected for HSP funding would need to be addressed through other funding sources.

5. BEST PROPOSALS OPTION

In this option, a representative statewide group of stakeholders appointed by the State Game Commission would convene annually to rank all current habitat improvement proposals for the current and out years. The best proposals from around the State, as determined by the stakeholder group, would receive funding.

Pros:

- This option allows statewide review and comparison of proposals.
- Tri-agency leadership agreed that this approach had substantial merits with concurrence of sportsmen and State Game Commission.
- In this option, there exists no criterion for distribution other than the merits of each habitat improvement proposal.
- This option addresses an agency's ability and readiness to conduct work.
- All sportsmen contributions would be considered (i.e., quail hunters, trappers, elk hunters, anglers).
- Larger projects with more potential to improve habitat could be considered (Figure 7).

Cons:

- Agency units that have come to rely on some level of funding may not receive an allocation if they are not competitive.
- Regional CACs replaced with statewide stakeholder group.



Figure 7. Habitat improvement priorities as identified by Department staff, 2008.

COMMENTS INVITED:

Interested citizens –

The New Mexico Game and Fish Department is seeking your input on options as to the distribution of Habitat Stamp funds. The State Game Commission will review and discuss these options and associated comments at the December 15, 2011 meeting.

Send us your comments by December 8, 2011.

You can mail them to us at:

New Mexico Department of Game & Fish
c/o Ken Cunningham, CSD
1 Wildlife Way
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87507

Or via email to:

kenneth.cunningham@state.nm.us

Please indicate "HSP Options" in the subject line. Thank you!