



Stephanie Garcia Richard, Land Commissioner
State of New Mexico

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Commissioner Garcia Richard Restricts Hunting Near South Valley Neighborhoods

*Hunting Improvement Negotiations with Department of Game and Fish
Hit a Snag*

Albuquerque, NM - In an effort to increase public safety in the South Valley and shield family homes from stray bullets, Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard today announced a restriction on hunting and trapping on 212 acres of state trust land along the Rio Grande Bosque, adjacent to Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Bernalillo County.

Access to nearly 9 million acres of state trust land for hunters and other sportspeople is set out in an agreement between the New Mexico State Land Office and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF). The Rio Grande Bosque parcel of state trust land has historically not been used for hunting but saw an increase in hunting this year due to a new parking lot at the Refuge. The agreement between the two agencies, signed in 2016, is meant to improve access to state trust land for New Mexico hunters and sportspeople. Negotiations to renew the agreement for nearly 9 million acres of trust land have been underway between the agencies. The Land Office sought input from across the state—from recreationalists, sportspeople and the agriculture community in preparation for the negotiations.

Some of the ways the Land Office has proposed to improve the hunting experience for New Mexicans are: doubling the allowable scouting period, addressing locked gates that limit hunting access, a pilot program for dispersed camping in the White Peak area, pilot backpacking in the Luera Mountains and White Peak areas, and additional collaboration

and planning by the two agencies (signage, road maintenance, mapping, education, kiosks, and public engagement.) In a recent letter, the NMDGF staff have denied the Land Office's request for these improvements and increased access for hunters.

“As one of the few states that allows hunting on almost all state trust land, I am committed to expanding hunting access across the state of New Mexico and hope the commission will reconsider my request to increase access and improve the hunting experience in our state,” Commissioner Garcia Richard said.

At the beginning of waterfowl hunting season, the Land Office started receiving calls from South Valley residents reporting gunshots in close proximity to their homes. Increasing concern from the community prompted staff to visit the land along with representatives from the NMDGF and the Refuge.

Commissioner Garcia Richard issued a letter to NMDGF withdrawing the Rio Grande Bosque state trust land parcel from the agreement and banning hunting and trapping in the area effective November 27, 2019. The letter cites proximity to residential neighborhoods, Bosque educational programs, as well as New Mexico's first and largest urban wildlife refuge as reasons to prohibit hunting and trapping. In order to access the area, hunters must drive through a portion of the Wildlife Refuge, which expressly bans hunting.

“This small parcel of land on our pristine Bosque, in the heart of Albuquerque, is not well-suited for hunting. The proximity to homes, schools, businesses, and other people enjoying the Bosque makes hunting here a serious public safety concern,” Commissioner Garcia Richard added. “Quite frankly, allowing hunting right next to a wildlife refuge is the equivalent of allowing hunting next to the Albuquerque BioPark. It's not safe, it's not smart.”

By withdrawing the Rio Grande Bosque state trust land, the Commissioner has exercised the authority given to her by the agreement with NMDGF to determine if hunting on this land is in the best interest of the state trust. This is the only withdrawal of state trust land made under the agreement by Commissioner Garcia Richard.

Oil, gas, and mineral production, ranching and farming, and commercial development on State Trust Lands support public schools, seven universities, New Mexico Military Institute, New Mexico School for the Deaf, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospitals, correctional facilities, water conservation projects, and public building construction and repair. In fiscal year 2019, the State Land Office collected \$1 billion from lease payments, oil and gas lease sale earnings, rights-of-way, permits, interest, fees, and oil, gas and mineral royalties.