



GMU 22

March 8, 2024

Species within this unit:

Bighorn Sheep, Black Bear, Elk, Javelina, Merriam's Turkey, Mountain Lion, Mule Deer, White-tailed Deer, Tree Squirrel, Quail

Unit Boundaries

22 boundary – Beginning at the junction of the Salt and Verde Rivers; north along the Verde River to the confluence with Fossil Creek; northeasterly along Fossil Creek to Fossil Springs; southeasterly on FS trail 18 (Fossil Spring Trail) to the top of the rim; northeasterly on the rim to Nash Point on the Tonto-Coconino National Forest boundary along the Mogollon Rim; easterly along this boundary to Tonto Creek; southerly along the east fork of Tonto Creek to the spring box, north of the Tonto Creek Hatchery, and continuing southerly along Tonto Creek to the Salt River; westerly along the Salt River to the Verde River; except those portions that are sovereign tribal lands of the Tonto Apache Tribe and the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation.

Species Information

Bighorn Sheep

Overview: Historically desert bighorn sheep occupied many of the mountain ranges around the greater Phoenix area. Most of the sheep disappeared at the turn of the century with the arrival of settlers and livestock. In 1980/81, The Arizona Game and Fish Department successfully translocated approximately 30 desert bighorn sheep into Unit 22 in the Goat Mountain area north of Apache Lake. Today, the bighorn sheep range in a relatively narrow strip of habitat from



roughly Goat Mountain at Apache Lake, westerly to Stewart Mountain just west of Saguaro Lake. In 1986, the first bighorn sheep permit was authorized for this unit's (refer to regulations for current tag allocations). The population peaked in 1994 and has had a couple declines over the years. As with most sheep populations, they are cyclic but GMU 22 always offers the opportunity of a quality hunt.

Unit 22 bighorn sheep offers a unique, close to the Phoenix metropolitan area, wildlife viewing opportunity. The best time to see these magnificent animals is in early July from a boat off of Canyon Lake. You may even see large rams butting heads and it is the best time for wildlife photography and pre-season scouting if you are lucky enough to draw a permit.

Areas: Take Power Road north out of Mesa to Bush Highway. Take Bush Highway east to Stewart Mountain and to Saguaro Lake. Bighorn sheep can be observed by hiking Stewart Mountain and glassing them with binoculars or spotting scopes. To see sheep from Saguaro Lake, you can rent a boat or bring your own boat. Go to the east end of Saguaro Lake and look for them on the north shore from the no wake zone to Mormon Flat Dam. To observe sheep from Canyon Lake and Apache Lake, Take US 60 Freeway east to Apache Junction. Turn north on Idaho Road, then east on State Route Highway 88 to Canyon Lake and Apache Lake. You can rent boats at both lakes or bring your own boat. You can observe sheep all along the north shore of Canyon Lake from Mormon Flat Dam to Horse Mesa Dam. You may also see bighorn sheep on the south side of Canyon Lake in Unit 24B that were also translocated. Access for the most part is via boat only. From Apache Lake, most of the bighorn sheep are on the north shore and stay around the Goat Mountain Area west to Horse Mesa Dam.

You can obtain a map of the area by purchasing a Tonto National Forest Map at local map and hiking stores or by contacting the Tonto National Forest Office in Phoenix at (602) 225-5200 or The Mesa Ranger District at (480) 610-3300. If you go to any of the three lakes, you must purchase the Tonto National Forest recreation pass to use the launching and parking facilities. If you go hiking or hunting you should purchase topographical maps of the area at local map stores. For hunting and wildlife watching, good quality binoculars and spotting scopes are essential.

Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep

Overview: Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep have a substantial population in Unit 22. Please refer to the regulations for the Unit 22 Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep hunt area. Be prepared to hunt in the wilderness with little motorized access.



Sheep are often located near the end of Deadman Mesa, the south and west side of Cedar Bench and near Hieroglyphic Canyon. There is a separate population located in the Hellsgate Wilderness along Tonto Creek.

Areas: There is a hiking trail system that can be accessed off of Hardscrabble Mesa area west of Strawberry or Pine that leads to the Mazatzal Wilderness. Most hunters access Cedar Bench using the Twin Buttes trailhead. It is approximately 13 miles one way to the end of Cedar Bench where the confluence of the Verde River and East Verde River is located. Looking over the bluffs with binoculars will help you locate sheep. From Strawberry, the Fossil Creek road will lead to Deadman Mesa. Here access to the end of Deadman Mesa can be accomplished by traveling down a very rough road. The road will end near Deadman tank at the edge of the Mazatzal Wilderness. A hiking trail will then lead to the end of Deadman Mesa. Sheep are also sometimes located on the west face of Polles Mesa and as far south as Wet Bottom Creek and Mule Shoe Bend. The sheep in Hellsgate are usually found in bluffs along Tonto Creek from just above Gisela up to the confluence of Spring Creek. Remember Tonto Creek divides Units 22 and 23.

Black Bear

Hunt Structure: The hunt structure for bear seasons are instituted to minimize female harvest from the population. In an effort to keep the Unit 22 season open for a longer period of time, increase hunter opportunity while minimizing female harvest, unit 22 has been split into North and South units with a variety of seasons (Refer to regulations for season dates). The Arizona Game and Fish Department relies on accurate reporting by responsible dedicated hunters to ensure the best wildlife management possible and that hunting opportunities for bear remain in Arizona. Hunters are responsible for checking to see if the hunt is still open by calling 1-800-970-BEAR(2327) or visiting the AZGFD website. Hunters are also required to contact the Arizona Game & Fish Department on the website or by phone at the same number within 48 hours after taking a bear. In addition, the hunter shall present the bears skull, hide, and attached proof of sex for inspection within 10 days of taking a bear. If a hunter freezes the skull or hide before presenting it for inspection, the hunter shall prop the jaw open to allow access to the teeth and ensure that the attached proof of sex is identifiable and accessible.

Conformation differences between sexes are rather slight, but nonetheless discernable. Care should be taken to watch for cubs near a potential game bear. Small bruins are not always readily visible in dense cover. They do not always stay close to their mother. Older boars generally have greater skull mass than do sows and have a wider eye set. Male bear muzzles tend to be wider, giving the animal a “short snout” appearance. The female conversely seems longer and pointy. Chest depth of course is better for males displaying a wide view from the front and a more cylindrical body side profile. When seen from the side, sows appear funnel -shaped, with the small end of the triangle toward the head.



These characteristics vary considerably in young bears, but hold fairly well for mature animals. These characteristics are general and should not be used to exclude sows with cubs.

Overview: Bear activity during the spring is not related to food supplies as much as the fall. Early spring food sources such as grasses and manzanita fruit occur from about the 4,500-7,000 foot elevations throughout the unit. During the fall hunts, bears range widely in search of acorns, juniper berries, mushrooms, and of course prickly pear cactus fruit in order to prepare their bodies for winter. In poor precipitation years, acorn and juniper berry crops tend to be low and bears must travel a great deal for feed, making them more visible to hunters especially in the lower elevations when bears seek out cactus fruit. Conversely, good precipitation years, especially after drought years tend to produce high yields of acorns and berries and provide the bears with an ample food supply. Bear hunting during these periods can prove to be difficult because the bears do not move much in the heavy dense scrub oak. Bears will still descend to lower elevations to feed on cactus fruit, but for not as long a period as they do in dry years. Concentrate hunting in moist canyons and northern slopes or where you find good acorn yields.

Find the food and you should find some bears. A good pair of binoculars with tripod is a must and a spotting scope can come in handy. When hunting in dense habitats with bear sign, try a predator call, this can be very productive.

Areas: Access to bear areas in the unit may be reached from the Phoenix metro area from Highway 87 north towards Strawberry, and along Highway 188 towards Tonto Basin and Roosevelt Lake. A USFS Tonto National Forest Service map can be purchased at local map or hiking stores or by contacting the Tonto National Forest Phoenix Office at (602) 225-5200 or any of the Tonto National Forest Ranger Districts located in: Mesa (480) 610-3300, Cave Creek (480) 595-3300, Payson (928) 474-7900, Globe (928) 402-6200 and Tonto Basin (928) 467-3200. It is also highly recommended that you purchase several topographical maps of the areas you intend to hunt at local map and hiking stores to get more detailed information on canyons, peaks, and springs to aid you in your hunting.

Major canyons along the Mazatzal Mountain Range of the unit generally have good bear populations. When scouting, consider food items available and watch for sign especially near springs. Bear sign such as bear scat, hair on fences and trees, turned over rocks, and torn up rotten logs are easily recognized sign. Tracks in rough rocky terrain are sometimes hard to find unless you find them in canyon bottoms with soft dirt or around water sources. They can also be found on mountain saddles that may act as travel corridors. Tracks in pine needles or dense leaves can sometimes be recognized and may appear as if someone were dragging their feet. Concentrate on hunting for bear in Unit 22 from the



3,500-foot elevation on up. An essential tool for bear hunting is a good pair of high quality 10X power binoculars at a minimum. A tripod for your binoculars and using a good spotting scope will also greatly aid you.

Try both the western and eastern slopes of the Four Peaks Wilderness Area. The Four Peaks can be accessed from both Highway 87 and Highway 188. Also hunt to the north of Four Peaks along FS Road 422 towards Edwards Peak concentrating on moist canyons and spring areas and where food sources are most abundant on both sides of the ridge line. The Mount Ord area is mostly accessed from Highway 87, but the eastern foothills can be accessed from various forest service roads west of Highway 188. Large portions of Unit 22 including the Four Peaks and Mt. Ord areas are still recovering from major wildfires. If hunting these areas look for pockets of unburned habitat as well as new recovery green ups.

To the west of Highway 87, you can continue hunting the Mazatzal Mountain Range from the Mormon Grove Area, Cane Springs, Barnhardt Trail, and into the Mazatzal Wilderness Area. These areas tend to have less hunter densities, but still offer good bear populations. Once you get to the northern end of Unit 22, hunt under the face of the rim from Strawberry to the Tonto Fish Hatchery. This area is particularly good on good acorn years and offers good hound dog hunting.

In response to past fires and fire dangers, some portions of unit 22 may be closed down or have access restrictions. Call the appropriate Tonto National Forest Ranger District for up to date information prior to going a field.

If you use an off-highway vehicle (OHV) to drive on some of these Forest Service roads, you must stay on the existing roads and cannot drive cross-country. The wilderness areas are particularly strict on motor vehicle use. If you have further questions about OHV use, contact the Tonto National Forest Service Phoenix Office at (602) 225-5200. If you see wildlife violations, please report them by calling the Operation Game Thief Hot Line at 1-800-352-0700.

Elk

Overview: Generally, large populations of elk exist throughout the northern portions of Unit 22. Unit 22 is split into two subunits, Units 22 North and 22 South to better direct elk hunting pressure to where elk need to be harvested (see hunting regulations for a full description of subunit boundaries). Unit 22 North is generally the area north of Payson, and it holds the majority of the elk in the Unit. Elk in 22 South occur in lower densities compared to 22 North.



The early 22 North and 22 South hunts occur in warm to hot daytime temperatures, so be prepared to get the meat cooled quickly. For all of the hunts (firearms and archery), hunter success will increase with time spent glassing.

Unit 22 is entirely below the Mogollon Rim. The early season general, archery and muzzleloader hunt success is generally high. Late archery hunt success is closely related to the late October and early November temperatures. If rainfall is lacking, hunting around tanks and springs from a tree stand will produce good success. It will still be warm enough each day that elk will water in the morning or evening. If we receive heavy winter snow it will push elk off of the Mogollon Rim into unit 22N during the November and December hunts. A 4-wheel-drive vehicle will be required if the weather turns to rain or snow. An OHV will help get you off of the main roads. The side roads are brushed in and very rough. If you are bringing an OHV from another State be sure to get your Non-Resident Arizona OHV decal (<https://ohv.azgfd.com>). Temperature will average a daily high in the 40s to a low in the 20s.

Areas: The areas around and in the fire scars under the Mogollon Rim are an excellent place to hunt. Areas inside the burns with standing sections of live trees will hold elk. The burn areas are now in various stages of forage regeneration with some of the older scars being very thick. Good numbers of elk can be found within the burn areas, especially during the later hunts. There are numerous roads that will take you under the Rim off the Control Road. Take any of these roads during the late hunt and pick a good spot to glass. More than likely you can find elk feeding on or just below the Rim. Take a pack frame with you if you hunt in this area because dragging a downed elk or driving to a downed elk is nearly impossible.

Hardscrabble Mesa (northwest corner of Unit 22) and the northern end of the Mazatzal Wilderness can be good depending on water availability.

The early hunt in Unit 22 South has several good areas including Round Valley northeast to the Lion Springs area, and the Green Valley Hills. The areas west of Rye in the foothills of the Mazatzals can also be productive.

For cow elk hunting in Unit 22 South, look South of the Payson Municipal Golf Course on National Forest land and in the foothills of the Mazatzals west of Rye. The Payson Municipal Golf Course can be found by going east on Main Street in Payson off of the Beeline Hwy. There is access to the National Forest directly south of the golf clubhouse.

Just be aware that it is illegal to discharge a gun or bow while taking wildlife within a quarter mile of any occupied building. Do a thorough job of scouting the area prior to the hunt to ensure you are familiar with private and public land



boundaries as well as the locations of all of the homes.

Javelina

Overview: Javelina are distributed throughout Unit 22 ranging from the southern end of the unit, (lower Sonoran desert scrub habitat), to the northern end of the unit, (ponderosa pine forest), just below the Mogollon Rim. However, the elevations with the most concentrations of Javelina are in the lower to mid elevations ranging from 1,500-5,000 feet. Lower Sonoran desert habitat to juniper grassland habitat types hold the most Javelina. When weather patterns are cold, Javelina move relatively late in the day when the weather warms up. They have very little body fat and their pelage does not adequately keep them warm, you may therefore find them bunched up and laying on each other during very cold mornings or not moving around to feed until the sun warms the hillside into late morning. During cold temperatures Javelina may feed throughout the day. During hot weather, Javelina will move early and late in the evening to feed, and may continue moving in the coolness of dark.

A good pair of binoculars with a steady rest or tripod will greatly enhance your chances of a successful Javelina hunt. Scouting for Javelina and locating several different herds will also increase your chances of a successful hunt. Locate springs and water holes and scout a 360-degree circle around that water source of approximately 1.5 – 2 miles from the source. Because Javelina are very territorial, it is a good practice not to hunt the same herd year after year, but to hunt several different herds. This will allow the herds a chance to recuperate especially if several hunters harvested Javelina from the same herd. Special care should be taken to observe the Javelina herds and avoid if possible harvesting sows with young piglets or “Reds”. Most piglets will stay close to their mother’s heels, but can be as far as 20 yards away.

Some Javelina sign is relatively easy to locate. When scouting look for signs of Javelina rooting around various plants, grasses, bushes, and cactus. Javelina will eat prickly pear cactus more during the fall winter months and it will appear very shredded at the bite location. Cattle and rabbits leave more of a clean bite mark on cactus. Javelina will also eat hedgehog cactus and it will appear as if the cactus was laid open and the inside of the cactus was scooped out with a spoon. Also look for Javelina scat, it looks similar to dog scat but dries up quickly, turns white and falls apart. Javelina scat generally breaks up very quickly in the environment and does not last long unlike deer pellets. If it is green, you are right on top of them and the Javelina are using the area. Also check rocky overhangs, caves and under trees where Javelina might bed. During spring and early summer, Javelina will graze on green grasses and new forbs and their sign of rooting or cactus chewing will not be as evident.



Areas: Access to the unit is best obtained by purchasing a USFS Tonto National Forest Map at local map and hiking stores or by contacting the Tonto National Forest Service Office in Phoenix at (602) 225-5200 or at any of the local Ranger Districts located in: Mesa (480) 610-3300, Cave Creek (480) 488-3441, Payson (520) 474-7900, Globe (520) 402-6200 and Tonto Basin (520) 467-3200. Not all roads are listed on the Tonto map, so it's highly recommended that you purchase several topographical maps of the area you intend to hunt. These maps will give you more detailed information on canyons, peaks, springs and roads to aid you on your hunt.

The unit can be accessed by taking Highway 87 north from the Phoenix area towards Payson. To access most of the unit, it is best to have four-wheel-drive or an off-highway vehicle (OHV). If you use an OHV or four-wheel-drive please stay on existing roads. Cross-country driving is prohibited. Report OHV violations, vandalism, and litter at 1-800-VANDALS and game violations at 1-800-352-0700. Remember to leave the area cleaner than what you found it to protect your privilege to hunt there in the future.

Starting on the west side of Highway 87, you can hunt just north of the Fort McDowell Indian Reservation in the Lower Sycamore Creek area and Sugar Loaf Mountain area to the unit boundary (Verde River). At the beginning of these two areas, they tend to get a lot of OHV recreation use, but if you continue past those areas, you can get into some good quality Javelina hunting areas that receive very little hunting pressure. You can also try the "Rolls Area" north of Saguaro Lake. Take Forest Service (FS) Road 143 and hunt the lower elevations towards Saguaro Lake and the Cane Springs area. Several large fires have run through this area. Concentrate on hunting the edges of the unburned vegetation. Javelina may utilize the edges of the burned area for new green growth. Continuing north up Highway 87, you can hunt off the Four Peaks Road, Ballentine Trail Area, and just off Highway 87 on both sides. All these areas offer good lower Sonoran desert Javelina hunting.

As you continue north up Highway 87 the habitat turns into juniper prickly pear grasslands at about the 3,200-4,500 foot elevation. Try scouting the Diamond Mountain Area on the west side of the highway or in the Bushnell Tanks Area on the east side of the highway.

The Slate Creek area up to the Junction of Highways 87 and 188 offer some very good Javelina hunting. There are only a few roads to the east and west of the highway, but you can access some good areas by hiking east of Highway 87. By taking Highway 188, you can hunt the Jakes Corner, and Tonto Basin areas. Remember to hunt west of Tonto Creek and Roosevelt Lake to stay in Unit 22. Concentrate on hunting Reed Springs, Cottonwood Creek, Slate Creek, Buena



Vista Springs and The Three Bar Wildlife Area.

To the north of the junction of Highways 87 and 188, try Brady Canyon, FS Road 184 along Rye Creek, and off of FS Roads 417 & 417A west of the town of Gisela. Also try scouting the Barnhardt Trail area, Half Moon Springs and the 414 road west of Rye. You can also try scouting west of Payson on the Doll Baby Ranch Road FS 406.

In response to past fires and present fire dangers, contact the appropriate Tonto National Forest Ranger District to inquire on any access restrictions. Good luck and have fun.

Merriam's Turkey

Overview: Turkey numbers in Unit 22 are much less compared to other turkey units in the State. The population is recovering after receiving translocated birds from the eastern part of Arizona. Currently there are a limited number of Spring tags. The transplanted turkeys will have an aluminum leg band.

Areas: The majority of the turkeys in Unit 22 will be found in the northeast portion of Unit 22 under the Mogollon Rim, especially the area north of Tonto Village (Turkey Ridge). Other areas include Roberts Mesa and Ellison Creek. You can also hunt Pyeatt Draw (USFS Road 198) working the area North towards the Rim.

Some birds can also be found in the Chase Creek, Bray Creek, and Weber Creek drainage as well as Hardscrabble Mesa west of Pine.

Mountain Lion

Overview: Unit 22 from Four Peaks along the Mazatzal Wilderness to the Mogollon Rim is considered excellent mountain lion habitat. The rough canyons and ridges within the chaparral vegetation zone and upper Sonoran desert provide mountain lions all they need.

The ruggedness and lack of snow cover over most of the unit throughout most of the year makes it difficult for most hound hunting, but some with good dogs can do quite well. Approximately, 60 percent of the total yearly harvest comes from hunters using hounds. Therefore, a good percentage (40 percent) of the harvest comes from elk, deer and bear



hunters or people specifically predator calling mountain lions. If you do draw an elk or deer tag or go bear hunting in Unit 22, you would be wise to get a mountain lion tag before you head out into the field. Additionally, if you decide to hire a guide be sure to get references and talk to them about their hunting experiences with a particular guide before hiring anyone. Some guides are definitely better than others at helping you fill your lion tag in an area like Unit 22. Refer to regulations on current season structures and requirements.

Areas: As stated earlier, much of the unit is considered excellent mountain lion habitat from Four Peaks along the Mazatzal Wilderness to the Mogollon Rim. Most rugged areas with good deer, elk or javelina populations will also support mountain lions.

North of Payson: Look for sign in areas like the Diamond and Little Diamond rims, Crackerjack Road area north to Fossil Creek and along the Mogollon Rim.

South of Payson: From the Doll Baby Ranch (along the East Verde River, west of Payson) south along the foothills of the Mazatzal Wilderness to Sunflower. Also, the canyons off Mt. Ord to the edge of the Lone Fire (Four Peaks) are good places for a mountain lion to be found. Predator callers might try some of the larger canyon areas extending north of Canyon and Apache Lakes. These canyons are major travel routes for lions and their prey.

Mule Deer

Overview: Mule deer numbers in Unit 22 have declined since the peak in the late 1980's just like most of the state during this time of very little precipitation. Mule deer can be found from the southern portion of the unit in the Sonoran Desert north to Mogollon Rim into the Ponderosa Pine forests on the Mogollon Rim. Unit 22 offers extensive opportunities for archery hunters and Junior hunters (refer to regulations for current season structures and requirements). The mule deer general hunt season opens approximately the first week of November. Hunters during the general season should glass hillsides early in the morning and just before dusk to locate mule deer before they bed. Mule deer tend not to move much after the early morning. Scouting is very important to locate deer and deer sign before the season starts.

Areas: The Mazatzal Wilderness area holds pockets of mule deer where water is found year round and this area can be accessed by the Sheep's Bridge Crossing road along the east side of the Verde River. There are several good



trailheads along this road to get you into the wilderness area, but access is limited to foot or horseback travel only.

The Edwards Park area just south of Mt. Ord holds a fair number of mule deer and receives little pressure because of the ruggedness of the road. Access off of Highway 87 to the Four Peaks Rd., (FS 143) east to FS 422, go north to Edwards Park, which is at the end of the road.

Mt. Ord: Access off Highway 87 and FS 626 to the east, the lower basins like Cottonwood Basin hold mule deer on the western facing slopes below the thick chaparral vegetation on the hillsides.

Bushnell Tanks: Access off of Highway 87 to FS Road 22, mule deer can be found on most of the hillsides in this area. Glass the long ridges and canyon areas on both sides of the FS Road 22.

Four Peaks: Access off of Highway 87 or State Route 188 to FS Road 143 and go to the large mountaintops and ridges and glass the southern most sides to the north and south of FS Road 143. There is lots of country in this area to look at for mule deer so scouting is recommended for this area.

Three Bar Wildlife area: Access is off Highway 188 from the Jake's Corner area to the Roosevelt Dam. The areas behind Tonto Basin provide good visibility for locating moving deer along and in the canyons. Whitetail deer also inhabit these areas so be sure of your identification before shooting.

Payson: Mule deer can be found all through the Tonto National Forest area around Payson. The main road into this area is the Control Road, FS Road 64, which crosses below the Rim from Pine to Indian Gardens. Mule deer can be found in all of the forested areas and pre-scouting is advised because of high activity in these areas. Locate waterholes in the area and look for sign of recent activity.

White-tailed Deer

Overview: Whitetail deer can be found in all habitat types occurring in Unit 22, from the semi-desert grassland areas through the ponderosa pine forests under the Mogollon Rim. However, most of the whitetail population occurs in the chaparral vegetation zones extending from the Four Peaks area northward to the Mogollon Rim. Generally, this zone is above 3,500 feet in elevation.



The general Whitetail hunt in unit 22 is broken into three seasons, the first two early hunts occurring in October/November and a third late hunt in December (Refer to regulations for exact season dates). Approximately 90% of the permits are offered in the early season giving better drawing odds when compared to the December hunt. For those who are lucky to draw the December hunt, this means a high quality hunt in the rut. The rut will occur from mid-December to mid-February and peak the first part of January. Don't discard the early hunt. Although the Whitetail are not in the rut, this can prove to be a very productive hunt. Archery hunters enjoy generous seasons in August/September and January. Additionally, only antlered deer are legal to harvest in Unit 22.

Unit 22 has very little access problems occurring from private property issues like occur in many of the southern Arizona whitetail units. The only access problems occur from the ruggedness and remoteness in some parts of the unit, like the Mazatzal Wilderness Area. In response to past fires and fire dangers, there may be access restrictions at certain times of the year. Prior to going a field, you should contact the appropriate Tonto National Forest Ranger District to inquire on present restrictions. As with any hunt, a scouting trip or two before your planned hunt will greatly increase your chances of filling that tag.

Areas: Starting at the northern part of the unit and going south. Fossil Creek Canyon and Hardscrabble Canyon: Both areas are located west of Strawberry and can be accessed off FS Roads 708, 591, or the 194. Both canyons are deep and steep, but good bucks can be found here.

Polles Mesa: This area is for those wishing a pack trip. The south and east side of Polles Mesa are good whitetail country. Polles Mesa is located in the Mazatzal Wilderness area north of the LF Ranch, which is roughly four miles west of the Doll Baby Ranch where the trailhead starts. Doll Baby Ranch is west of Payson and can be found on FS Road 406.

Eastern foothills of the Mazatzal Wilderness: Good whitetail country can be found from Doll Baby Ranch to Slate Creek. Specific areas include City Creek, Boyd Mountain, Deer Creek, Gold Creek and Slate Creek. Access to these areas is off of Highway 87 and on FS Roads 406, 414, 442, 419, 415 and the 201.

Mt. Ord: Access off Highway 87 and FS Road 626. Whitetail can be found right off Highway 87, but most range from



half way up to the top. Also, the south side of Mt. Ord is good whitetail country and can be accessed off FS Road 22 (Bushnell Tanks Road).

Slopes off Edwards Park: Nice whitetail country, with many burns on it over the past 10-15 years. Access off Highway 87 and FS Road 22 (Bushnell Tanks Road) or off Highway 188 and FS Roads 524, 409, or 421. FS Road 143 to FS Road 422 takes you out on Edwards Park itself.

Bush Fire Scar: Much of the Southeastern portion of Unit 22 is still recovering from the Bush Fire. These areas include Mt. Ord, Four Peaks, Bushnell Tanks and others. If hunting in the Bush Fire look for unburned pockets as well as new recovery green ups.

Foothills around Ballantine Trailhead (south of Sunflower on Highway 87): Surprisingly, a decent whitetail population occurs down in the upper Sonoran desert of this area.

Tips: Pre-season scouting is very important. Purchase a Tonto National Forest map at a minimum and topo maps for a more detailed look at the areas. Locate an area that gives you a good vantage point to glass. The December whitetail hunt is a rut hunt and the bucks are actively seeking does. The early hunt is out of the rut, but bucks can be patterned much more easily. Mornings and evenings are great times to glass but don't exclude midday. Bucks are seen all day and if you're not in the field looking you're not going to see them. Good luck, be safe, and have fun.

Tree Squirrel

Overview:

With the warmer than average temperatures for the past several winter's squirrel numbers are good. Both Abert and gray squirrel can be found in northern Unit 22. Gray squirrel are limited to drainage with pines and mix hardwoods while Abert can be found throughout the pine-covered portions of Unit 22.

Areas: The northern corner of Unit 22, particular the areas near the Control Road (USFS 64) and the Piuete Draw Road (USFS 198) will provide good starting points to hunt Abert's. The drainage off the Mogollon Rim, Weber Creek, Bray Creek, Dude Creek, and Ellison Creek will be good spots for Abert and gray squirrels.



Special points of concern with hunting in the area are the large numbers of summer homes found scattered through the area. Remember, no hunting with a firearm within a quarter of a mile of a home without permission.

Quail

Overview: Unit 22 has one species of quail, the Gambel's quail. Gambel's quail is widely distributed over the unit ranging from lower Sonoran desert to juniper scrub oak grasslands.

If you use an off-highway vehicle (OHV), obey all laws and stay on existing roads. It is illegal to drive cross-country or hunt from a motor vehicle. Most of the unit is public land intermixed with small holdings of private land. Obey and respect all trespassing signs and laws, and remember to leave the hunting area cleaner than how you found it. One further note, shotgun shells are considered litter so please protect your privilege to hunt and pick them up.

Access to the unit is best obtained by purchasing a USFS Tonto National Forest map at local map and hiking stores, or by contacting the Tonto National Forest office in Phoenix at (602) 225-5200 or any of the Tonto National Forest Ranger Districts located in: Mesa (480) 610-3300, Cave Creek (480) 488-3441, Globe (520) 402-6200, Tonto Basin (520) 467-2236, or Payson (520) 474-7900.

Areas: From the Phoenix metro area, the unit can be easily accessed from Highway 87 north to Payson and south on Highway 188 towards Tonto Basin and Roosevelt Lake. Good quail numbers can usually be found starting at the southern end of the unit west of Highway 87 along Sycamore Creek, up to the Diamond Mountain area, Barnhardt Trail, and west of Payson. To the east of Highway 87, try "The Rolls" area and the foothills along the west side of the Mazatzal Mountains up through Sunflower, and just south of Payson. The east side of the Mazatzal Mountains can be accessed via Highway 188. Hunt along the foothills from Tonto Basin to the Three Bar Wildlife Area. The Three Bar Wildlife Area is open to quail hunting and has many water catchments designed for specifically for quail use.

Theodore Roosevelt Lake

Usually called Roosevelt Lake, sometimes Lake Roosevelt, is a large reservoir formed by Theodore Roosevelt Dam on the Salt River in Arizona as part of the Salt River Project (SRP). Located roughly 80 miles northeast of Phoenix in the



Salt River Valley, Roosevelt Lake is the largest lake or reservoir located entirely within the state of Arizona (Lake Mead and Lake Powell are larger but both are located partially within the neighboring states of Nevada and Utah respectively). Both the reservoir and the masonry dam that created it, Roosevelt Dam, were named for U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt who dedicated the dam himself in March 1911.

Roosevelt Lake is a popular spot for waterfowl hunters. Many species of both diving and puddle ducks call this lake home during the winter. Some of the more common waterfowl at Roosevelt include Northern Shovler, Mallard, American Widgeon, Gadwall and Teal. The lake is also home to wintering flocks of Canada Geese with occasional Snow, Cackling and Ross visiting as well. The ducks and geese typically begin showing up as soon as the weather starts cooling quite a bit, especially in States to our North.

Pre-scouting areas prior to any hunting trip is always a good recommendation and waterfowl hunting is no exception. Finding areas where the birds are congregating is what you're looking for but can vary year to year. The water in Roosevelt Lake can fluctuate greatly with some of your favorite coves you hunted last year no longer existing this year. But with a little homework places with good hunting can always be found.

Most hunters focus their efforts on both the Tonto and Salt arms of the lake but coves in the main body of the lake offer good hunting also. Boats are required to hunt some of the areas on the lake but walk in shore hunters can do well also. Using decoys and calling seem to produce the best results although pass shooting can also be effective on either of the arms of the lake for those who do not have decoys. Portions of the lake are included in the Roosevelt Lake Wildlife Area and have seasonal hunting and access restrictions that occur during waterfowl season. The Roosevelt Lake Wildlife Area was created to give wildlife a place to be undisturbed during this time of the year.

See the information below for maps and area restrictions.

[Roosevelt Lake closure map](#)

[Waterfowl Boundary Modification](#)

Discover Gila County – near Payson and Roosevelt, Arizona

[Fishing opportunities](#)

[Camping opportunities](#)



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[Outdoor recreation](#)



Unit Summary

Primary Game Species/ Hunting Month(s)

Mule Deer	August-January
Elk	September-December
Javelina	January-March

Secondary Game Species/ Hunting Month(s)

Bighorn Sheep	December
Quail	October-February

Average # permits in past 5 years

Mule Deer	900 (Including 3-Bar Wildlife Area)
Elk	690
Javelina	2000
Bighorn Sheep	2-4



Climate Information

MONTH	AVG. TEMP	AVG. RAINFALL
January	Max 65°/Min 36°	0.84"
February	Max 69°/Min 37°	0.60"
March	Max 74°/Min 43°	0.77"
August	Max 102°/Min 73°	1.20"
September	Max 99°/Min 66°	0.76"
October	Max 88°/Min 54°	0.53"
November	Max 75°/Min 43°	0.50"
December	Max 67°/Min 37°	0.90"

Other Pertinent Climate Information

Lower elevations receive little or no snow; higher elevations receive occasional light snowfalls with little accumulation. Winter rains (November-March) produce 65%-70% of annual precipitation. Tonto Creek is uncrossable at A-Cross Rd. during winter rains.



Cities, Roads & Campgrounds

Major Cities and Towns in or Near Game Management Unit and Nearest Gas, Food, and Lodging

Payson, Fountain Hills, Punkin Center

Major Highways and Roads Leading To

From the East: State Hwy 260

From the West: None

From the North: State Hwy 87

From the South: State Hwy 87, 188 Developed Campgrounds

Canyon Lake: The Point (Boat Access Only), Laguna Beach; Apache Lake: Burnt Corral; Roosevelt Lake: Cholla, Bachelor Cove; Upper Tonto Creek: Ponderosa.

Undeveloped Campgrounds

Saguaro Group Site – Bush Hwy about 1/2 mile north of Butcher Jones; Roosevelt Lake: Horse Pasture, Cholla Bay; Verde River: 2nd and 3rd Crossing.

Brief Description of Terrain, Elevation, and Vegetation

Terrain varies from relatively flat desert grasslands to high, forested mountains. Elevations range from 1,500' at Saguaro Lake to 7,894' at Mazatzal Peak. Sonoran desert vegetation at lower elevations to mixed conifer, spruce/fir/ponderosa pine on Mazatzal Peak at 7,894'. pinyon/juniper and extensive chaparral in the Mazatzal Mountains and along the base of the Mogollon Rim.

Government Agencies and Phone Numbers

Arizona Game and Fish Department, Region VI – (480) 981-9400

Tonto National Forest – (602) 379-6446

Gila County Sheriff, Payson – (928) 474-5177