



GMU 5A

Region 2 - GMU 5A: October 2026 *(This document date reflects its most recent review. Updates are made only when necessary.)*

Species within this game management unit (GMU): [Pronghorn](#), [Black Bear](#), [Bighorn Sheep](#), [Deer](#), [Elk](#), [Merriam's Turkey](#), [Mountain Lion](#), [Band-Tailed Pigeon](#), [Tree Squirrel](#) and [Cottontail Rabbit](#).

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Game Management Unit Boundaries

Beginning at the junction of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest boundary with the Coconino National Forest boundary at the Mogollon Rim; northerly along this boundary (Leonard Canyon) to East Clear Creek; northeasterly along East Clear Creek to AZ Hwy 99; north on AZ Hwy 99 to AZ Hwy 87; north on AZ Hwy 87 to Business I-40 (3rd St.); west on Business I-40 (3rd St.) to Hipkoe Dr.; north on Hipkoe Dr. to I-40; west on I-40 to the Meteor Crater Rd. (Exit 233); southerly on the Meteor Crater Chavez Pass-Jack's Canyon Rd. (FR 69) to AZ Hwy 87; southwesterly along AZ Hwy 87 to the Coconino-Tonto National Forest boundary; easterly along the Coconino-Tonto National Forest boundary (Mogollon Rim) to the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest boundary with the Coconino National Forest.

All Hunts

Your big game hunter questionnaire link is located on the back of your tag. You also will receive a hunter



questionnaire postcard in the mail. You can choose to return the hunter questionnaire postcard via postal mail or online [here](#). You may also receive an email containing a link to your hunter questionnaire. You can respond by one method only. This information is a critical component of the hunt recommendation process, and your information helps us to accurately estimate species harvest and set permit levels.

Landowner Compact Program

Much of the state land area of GMU 5A is “checker boarded” with alternating state and private land sections. A valid Arizona hunting license is required to access state lands and no off-road vehicle travel is permitted while on State lands. Access is permitted on the Bar T Bar Ranch and the Hopi Three Canyon Ranch by access permission ([AZGFD Landowner Compact/Access Agreement Link](#)). There are also a few areas of private lands posted against trespass. Keep in mind that it is unlawful to discharge a bow while hunting within one quarter- mile of a residence without permission while pursuing herds around the drainages and canyons near residential communities. Some of the huntable areas located on Forest Service lands are open to hunting by licensed hunters. Forest Service maps are available at any Forest Service office in the state and can be [ordered online](#).

The Bar T Bar Ranch is enrolled in the Landowner Compact Program and Ranch access passes are available for hunting and other recreational activities, located in both GMUs 5A and 5B. The ranch is about 25 to 40 miles east of Flagstaff. Anyone intending to access Bar T Bar Ranch property must obtain a free ranch pass prior to accessing ranch lands. Those recreating or hunting on ranch lands must also abide by all ranch rules, as well as all applicable state laws and regulations. Violation of ranch rules or applicable state laws or regulations may result in loss of access privileges and being trespassed off all Landowner Compact Program Ranches. Note that no off road travel is permitted and a road management plan is in place to direct travel. Refer to [the following page](#) for a complete list of Ranch Rules and more Landowner Compact Ranch Program information concerning the Bar T Bar Ranch.

For hunts in Unit 4A, Unit 5A, and Unit 5B, the Arizona Game and Fish Department has entered into an agreement with the Hopi Tribe to allow access to Hopi Trust lands on the [Hopi Three Canyon Ranch](#). This includes the Aja Ranch (Unit 4A), the Clear Creek Ranch (Unit 5A) and the Hart Ranch (Unit 5B). Access is permitted by written permission through the [Department Landowner Relations Program web page](#), or by scanning the QR code on signs at all approved access points. All hunters and everyone in their party must have written permission.

Coconino National Forest Travel Management Rule

The Travel Management Rule only allows motorized use on designated roads, trails and areas as identified on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). These maps are available for free at Forest Service offices or through the following link: [Coconino National Forest](#). Motorized retrieval of wildlife, including all big game species, is not permitted on national forest lands in GMU 5B. For further information regarding the Travel Management Rule, please contact the Coconino National Forest or see information [here](#).

Species Information

Pronghorn

Overview: Pronghorn occurs in the open grassland and sparse pinyon-juniper country in the northern part of the GMU. Hunting for pronghorn occurs during the annual rutting period. During this period, bucks are active, cover lots of ground, and are easily seen. Pronghorn country is sparsely watered, making animals dependent on and vulnerable at reliable water sources. Hunters should first locate areas of green up, and then they will find pronghorn. The pronghorn herd in GMU 5A is stable and produces opportunities for mature bucks to be harvested.

Areas: Highest concentrations of pronghorn occur west of Highway 87, south of I-40, and north of West Sunset Mountain. Easiest access to this area is off Meteor Crater Road. Lands in this area are state and private checkerboard. Private lands belong to Hopi Three Canyon Ranch and Bar T Bar Ranch. Another area to check is on top of west and East Sunset Mountain and Moonlight Bay north of East Sunset Mountain. A few large herds of pronghorn stay in the less open country south of the forest boundary.

Bighorn Sheep

Overview: Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep have recently been reintroduced into the East Clear Creek drainage in 2018. Radio collared animals have shown dispersal throughout East Clear Creek. Subsequent releases occurred in 2019 and 2021, which have helped to bolster the population, which continues to improve. Do not be surprised if you glass across a drainage and find sheep that are once again in their historic habitat.

Areas: Bighorn sheep have dispersal well throughout East Clear Creek from the C.C. Cragin Reservoir north past East Sunset mountain.

Black Bear

Overview: The GMU 5A bear hunt is combined with GMU 4A, with current female harvest objective found in the hunting regulations. The bear season closes at sundown the Wednesday immediately following the harvest objective being met. This harvest objective is designed to maintain and improve bear hunting opportunity by ensuring continued balanced boar: sow ratios and recruitment to the population. Harvest of males is unlimited while the season is open. Sows with cubs may not be taken, so hunters should always look for cubs near a potential bear.

Areas: In the fall, bears are concentrated on important food sources such as acorns. When good mast crops occur, bears are easily located in close proximity to stands of oaks. Bears often come from surrounding GMUs during a good acorn crop, making it seem like there are bears around every corner. Before acorns mature, look for signs of bears feeding on ants, grubs, termites and berries. Look for bear signs along any large drainage north of the Mogollon Rim. Opportunities to glass for bears are few in GMU 5A due to the thick mixed conifer forest.



Hunters are responsible for confirming whether the GMU is still open before going into the field and should monitor the Arizona Game and Fish Department [harvest tracking page](#) to ensure the season remains open. Click [here](#) for more information on black bear regulations and harvest reporting.

Hunters are required to report black bear harvest information to the department within 48 hours of taking a black bear. In addition, the hunter (or their designee) must present the skull and hide, with attached proof of sex, to a designated department employee for inspection within 10 days of harvest. Visit the Arizona Game and Fish Department [harvest reporting page](#) to complete the mandatory report and schedule a physical checkout.

Deer

Overview: The GMU 5 deer hunt includes GMUs 5A and 5B. In GMU 5B, highest densities of mule deer during hunting season occur in transition areas between high elevation summer range and lower elevation pinyon-juniper woodland. Old juniper bushes, chaining, and other openings also attract deer. These areas typically are attractive to mule deer because of an abundance of cool season forage such as acorns, mountain mahogany, and cliffrose. These transition areas and openings occur along the rim of Anderson Mesa and its associated drainages that run north toward I-40. Deer tend to concentrate along larger drainages in the area including Walnut Canyon, Mormon Canyon, Padre Canyon, Grapevine Canyon, and Canyon Diablo. Deer are vulnerable along drainages and in openings, early or late in the day as they feed. Deer typically bed in thick juniper in close proximity to canyon rims or other rugged escape cover.

In 5A, deer hunters will want to concentrate around the burns just on top of the Mogollon Rim and then throughout the pinyon-juniper country north of Highway 87 milepost 312 to the Sunset Mountains. Mule deer can be found in small numbers along Jacks Canyon and some of the pushes on the east side of Highway 87. While herds may occur in small numbers, mule deer numbers are increasing, and there is a good chance of finding a mature buck.

Whitetail deer occur in small numbers in large drainages across the GMU. Whitetails prefer rugged terrain with steep slopes and thick brush. Few whitetails are taken due to low numbers and difficult terrain. However, a hunter willing to put in the effort could harvest an older age class animal.

Archery Deer Nonpermit-Tag Special Regulation: Hunters are responsible for confirming whether the GMU is still open before going into the field and should monitor the Arizona Game and Fish Department [harvest tracking page](#) to ensure the season remains open. When the number of deer equaling the archery deer harvest limit for a particular unit and species has been reported, that unit will be closed to further archery deer hunting at sundown the Wednesday immediately following. Click [here](#) for more information on archery deer regulations and harvest reporting.

Hunters are required to report archery deer harvest information to the department within 48 hours of taking a deer. Visit the Arizona Game and Fish Department [harvest reporting page](#) to complete the mandatory report.

Elk

Elk occur throughout GMU 5A from high elevation mixed conifer near the Mogollon Rim, north to the Sunset Mountains just south of Winslow. The Mogollon Rim country is very rugged with long ridges and deep canyons. The winter range is rolling pinyon-juniper country with some deep canyons.

The 5A elk herd is mostly a migratory herd. Typically elk concentrate in the high elevation summer range, however some elk do spend the entire year on low elevation winter range near Red Hill and the Sunset Mountains. At the first snow, the southern part of the herd typically migrates off the Mogollon Rim, and the central part of the herd typically migrates to lower GMU 6A. The northern part of the herd typically resides year round in the juniper grassland habitats of the northern part of the GMU. When heavy snow occurs, hunting can be very good in the transition zones between the summer range and winter range as the elk migrate to the low elevation winter range. Elk hunts in GMU 5A are strictly permitted hunts; there are no non-permitted/over-the-counter tags offered. Limited opportunity hunts are offered in the northern part of GMU 5A. Hunts start in September and run into December depending upon which weapon type you are drawn for. Successful strategies also depend upon your weapon type, terrain, time of year, and habitat conditions. GMU 5A has fairly good water sources, compared to most other Arizona hunt GMUs, so hunting over water is not as productive. In years with good mast crops, hunting oak patches can be a very productive method.

East Sunset/West Sunset/Meteor Crater Hunt Area: This is a hunt area in northern GMU 5A, which encompasses the state and private land. Obtaining permission from ranches enrolled in the Landowner Compact Program (Bar T Bar and Hopi Three Canyon Ranch) is necessary for access to nearly all of the limited opportunity area. See information above regarding access to the Bar T Bar Ranch and the Hopi Three Canyon Ranch ([AZGFD Landowner Compact/Access Agreement Link](#)). This hunt is offered to address resident elk herds on winter range and hunt success may be very low. Reference limited opportunity hunt descriptions in the Arizona Game and Fish Hunting regulations to further understand the unique conditions of these hunts and the exact sub-unit boundaries.

Habitat types range from pinyon-juniper to grassland. This country is rolling hills with two large mountains and two large canyons. Spot and stalk hunting will be the most productive method in this country.

Mountain Lion

Overview: Mountain Lions occur primarily in the southern and central parts of GMU 5A. Densities of lions are lower than most other predators near the top of the food chain. Lions have very large home ranges (75-125 square miles), and except when rearing young, are constantly on the move. Lions feed primarily on elk, deer and other ungulates. Lions will move seasonally as their prey moves to and from winter range. Lions breed year round, and females care for their young alone. Lions with spotted kittens may not be taken so hunters should always look for kittens near a potential lion.



Areas: Most lion hunting takes place in the cooler winter months on deer and elk winter range. Lions prefer the rougher, more broken country near the deeper canyons in the GMU. Calling with predator calls on canyon rims may be effective. Most lions are taken in GMU 5A by houndsmen.

Hunters are responsible for confirming whether the GMU is still open before going into the field and should monitor the Arizona Game and Fish Department [harvest tracking page](#) to ensure the season remains open. When the harvest threshold is reached, the zone closes to additional mountain lion harvest at sundown on the Wednesday immediately following. Click [here](#) for more information on mountain lion regulations, the management zones map and harvest reporting.

Hunters are required to report mountain lion harvest information to the department within 48 hours of taking a mountain lion. In addition, the hunter (or their designee) must present the skull and hide, with attached proof of sex, to a designated department employee for inspection within 10 days of harvest. Visit the Arizona Game and Fish Department [harvest reporting page](#) to complete the mandatory report and schedule a physical checkout.

Merriam's Turkey

Overview: Before heavy snow cover, turkeys occupy ponderosa pine/mixed conifer forest. During winter, birds move to lower elevation areas between ponderosa pine and pinyon-juniper habitat types. Key forage for turkeys are forbs, insects, mast, and pinion pine seeds. Birds tend to select roost sites in large ponderosa pine trees on steep slopes.

The GMU 5A turkey population improves with moisture from wet winters and continues to provide spring hunt opportunities.

Areas: In the spring, birds are often still located in transition areas between ponderosa pine and pinyon-juniper. Turkeys will follow the snow line back up to higher elevations. Turkeys can be found in drainages just north of the Mogollon Rim. Also, try East Clear Creek drainage. Take advantage of spring road closures by walking in to get away from other hunters and locate undisturbed birds. Calling using hen calls is the most effective hunting technique for springtime hunting. For safety, never make noises that may identify you as a gobbler, and never wear turkey colored clothing. In the fall, look for turkey signs around water tanks and likely roost sights. Building ground blinds out of natural materials and sitting all day can be effective.

Javelina

Overview: Javelina have slowly been spreading throughout Arizona and now occupy many habitats that they aren't traditionally found in. In Northern Arizona, javelina are available to hunt with a non-permit archery only tag in the fall. This gives many hunters who will be carrying a bow an opportunity to fill their second javelina tag of the year during their fall hunts. Finding food sources and signs of a resident herd is key to harvesting a javelina during these hunts. Although they can be found in the pine trees, the majority of javelina in GMU 5A are found in mixed pinyon pine and juniper.

Band-Tail Pigeon

Overview: Band-tail pigeons exist in low numbers in GMU 5A in the ponderosa pine habitat type. Band-tails produce only one young per year. In the fall, these birds feed heavily on acorns, and therefore concentrate in areas with high densities of oak trees.

Areas: Band-tails are drawn to areas of higher density oak trees, as well as stock tanks. Sitting at these tanks early and late in the day can be effective. Keep in mind that it is unlawful to discharge a bow while hunting within one quarter-mile of a residence without permission while pursuing herds around the drainages and canyons near residential communities.

Tree Squirrel

Overview: Tree squirrels exist in the higher elevation ponderosa pine/mixed conifer forest habitat. Both Abert's Tassel-Eared and Red Squirrels can be found in the GMU. The squirrel population continues to do well and hunter should have no problems finding plenty of opportunity.

Areas: Abert's tassel-eared squirrels leave distinctive pine clippings below trees in which they feed. Look for areas of clippings and then walk slowly and quietly through the woods looking for nearby squirrels. Red Squirrels can also be found in the area. They can be located by their distinct chattering. Squirrels will often run long distances on the ground when being pursued, so don't expect them to tree immediately. A dog can be useful in getting a squirrel up a near-by tree quickly. Be extra careful when shooting at squirrels up in trees and always have some kind of a backstop. High angle rifle shots can carry great distances.

Cottontail Rabbit

Overview: Cottontail rabbit hunting is most productive in the northern half of the GMU. This is open grassland and pinyon-juniper habitat types. Start your hunt early and glass the edges of openings. Rabbit hunting can be a good warm up for later big game hunts.

Game Management Unit Summary

Primary Game Species/Hunting Month(s)

Elk	September, October, December
Pronghorn	October, November
Turkey	October

Secondary Game Species/Hunting Month(s)

Pronghorn	August, September
Tree Squirrel	October

Average # Permits in Past 5 Years

Elk	750
Deer	450
Turkey	400
Pronghorn	10

Climate Information

Month	Avg. Temp	Avg. Rainfall
September	Max 75°/Min 48°	1.79"
October	Max 64°/Min 29°	2.44"
November	Max 56°/Min 26°	2.51"

Other Climate Information

Be prepared for the possibility of heavy snow during the fall and winter months.

Cities, Roads & Campgrounds

Major Cities and Towns in or Near GMU and Nearest Gas, Food, and Lodging

Payson, Clints Well/Happy Jack, Winslow

Major Highways and Roads Leading To

From the East: State Hwy 87, Forest Rd 300 (Rim Rd)

From the West: State Hwy 260, Forest Hwy 3 (Lake Mary Rd), I-40

From the North: State Hwy 87, Forest Hwy 3 (Lake Mary Rd)

From the South: State Hwy 87



Developed Campgrounds

The Forest Service administers campgrounds at Blue Ridge off State Hwy 87, milepost 298; Rock Crossing, State Hwy 87, Forest Road 751; and Knoll Lake, Forest Road 295.

Undeveloped Campgrounds

The Forest Service administers a campground at Kehl Springs off Forest Road 300, milepost 9, east of State Hwy 87.

Terrain, Elevation, and Vegetation Description

Terrain and vegetation vary from the high elevation (7,800') mixed conifer at the south end Mogollon Rim area of the GMU to the lower elevation (4,800') pinyon/juniper/grassland to the north. Deep canyons run north to south draining into East Clear Creek.

Government Agencies and Phone Numbers

Arizona Game and Fish Department, Region II – [928-774-5045](tel:928-774-5045)

Coconino National Forest, Blue Ridge Ranger District – [928-477-2255](tel:928-477-2255)

Hopi Tribe Wildlife and Ecosystems Management Program – [928-734-3673](tel:928-734-3673) or [928-734-3671](tel:928-734-3671).