

GMU 3C

Region 1- GMU 3C: 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, Elk, Mountain Lion, Mule Deer, Merriam's Turkey, Dove, Tree Squirrel, and Waterfowl.

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Game Management Unit Boundaries

Beginning at Snowflake; westerly on State Route 277 to State Route 260; westerly on State Route260 to the Sitgreaves National Forest boundary with the Tonto National Forest and White Mountain Apache Tribe to State Route 60 (AZ State Route 77); northeasterly on State Route 60 (AZ State Route 77) through Show Low; northerly along State Route 77 to the intersection with AZ State Route 277 in Snowflake.

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.

Species Information

Pronghorn

Overview: Pronghorn are located in the more open areas of the unit lying north of Highway 260. Hunters should scout prior to the season to locate herds. Pronghorn generally have high fidelity to their home ranges in this unit, and, if located prior to the season, they will likely be close to the same area when the season opens.

Much of the pronghorn habitat in this unit is in the Lakeside and Black Mesa Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. A Forest map can be purchased at either District Office or at the Arizona Game and Fish Department regional office in Pinetop.

The pronghorn population in Unit 3C has declined in recent years. As a result, general permits have been reduced and an archery hunt is no longer offered in the unit. Population swings are not uncommon in this unit. With the right climatic conditions and continued wildlife habitat improvement projects, pronghorn numbers will likely respond in a positive manner

Land Status: There is some State Trust and private land throughout the pronghorn habitat. Most is open to hunting, although there are some private lands that are closed to hunting. Where gates are locked, permission must be granted prior to hunting. While four-wheel drive vehicles are not necessary to access most areas, if the roads are wet, they may be needed. Do not drive off-road on State Trust lands or on private lands.

Areas: Pronghorn habitat in the unit is primarily found north of Hwy 260. Hunters should concentrate from Hwy 77 to west of the Aripine Road (Forest Road 332). Look for pronghorn in any of the bigger natural openings and juniper pushes. Hunters should avoid the thicker juniper woodlands; although several herds have been using areas in the burn that were thick with pinyon, juniper and ponderosa prior to the Rodeo-Chediski fire. In order to familiarize yourself with the area, try driving Forest Roads 147 (north of Clay Springs) and 129 (from Taylor to Pinedale). Forest Roads 229, 133, 917, 218, 332, 220 and 221 also provide access to areas that regularly hold pronghorn. Take advantage of any high points and use binoculars to locate pronghorn.

Black Bear

Overview: Unit 3C ranges in elevation from 5,600 feet at Taylor to over 7,200 feet on the Rim. Weather can range from hot during the early fall to cold and wet as fall progresses. Snow is possible in October and likely during November and December. Hunters should be prepared with appropriate clothing and vehicles. Roads can become very slick when wet and have deep mud in some areas. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended in the late fall.

Historically, this unit has had a stable bear population, with most of the bears concentrated south of Highway 260. Bear numbers in the unit have decreased since the Rodeo-Chediski Fire in 2002 as a result of habitat

changes within the burn area. With the abundant Gambel oak stands now present in the burn area, bear numbers could increase seasonally in the unit during years with good acorn crops. Hunters should look for bear sign and feeding activity when determining where to hunt. Early in the season, taking a stand on a stock tank may prove successful. Hunters using hounds take most bears in 3C, but calling and still-hunting can also be productive.

Most of Unit 3C is bounded on the south by the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Your permit does not allow you to enter the Reservation to hunt or recover game. Do not trespass on the Reservation for any reason without tribal permission. If you shoot an animal that travels onto the Reservation, contact the White Mountain Apache Game and Fish Department to obtain permission to go after the animal. If hounds pursue a bear onto the Reservation, you may not cross onto the Reservation to recover dogs without tribal permission.

In addition to the fall bear hunts, there are also permitted and over-the-counter archery-only spring bear hunts in Unit 3C. Check the spring regulations booklet for hunt dates and information. Hunters are reminded that bear hunting with dogs is not allowed during the spring season.

Land Status: The majority of the unit is within the Lakeside and Black Mesa Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. A Forest map can be purchased at any Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests District Ranger Office or at the Arizona Game and Fish Department Region I office in Pinetop. There are District Ranger offices in Overgaard and Lakeside. Although there is private land throughout the unit, most of the bears are located on Forest Service land. Check for fire restrictions during early fall and late spring.

Areas: Hunters should concentrate efforts south of Hwy 260 in the pine, pine/oak, and pine/Douglas fir habitat types. The Douglas fir areas are found along the Mogollon Rim (Forest Road 300) and in canyons in the western portion of the unit. Because of the mobility and territoriality of bears, they will be dispersed throughout the unit.

Scouting is an important factor in locating bears. Look for certain food sources, such as acorns, which may concentrate bears in some areas. Higher densities of bears may be found along the Mogollon Rim and in the western portion of the unit; however, hound hunters may wish to avoid the Rim because of the possibility of dogs chasing a bear onto the Reservation. To find bears, look for canyons with thick stands of timber or rough, rocky country with adjacent cover. Also look for likely feeding areas, particularly heavy Gambel oak acorn crops. Other signs of bear activity are rolled rocks and torn up logs where bears have been foraging for insects.

Bear hunters should be familiar with the following laws and regulations prior to going bear hunting (see current regulations under Commission Order 9). Female bears with cubs are not lawful for harvest. Care must be taken to look for the presence of cubs with all bears considered for harvest.

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.

Elk

Overview: Elk can be found throughout Unit 3C in both the pine forest and pinyon/juniper woodlands. Elevations range from 5,600 feet in Taylor to over 7,200 feet on the Mogollon Rim. Elk densities are higher south of Highway 260 than north of the highway. Generally, the highest elk density in the unit is south of Highway 260 and west of Decker Wash, but this can change, depending on precipitation patterns.

This unit has a moderate number of antlered permits available each year, and, since the Rodeo-Chediski Fire, has had high numbers of antlerless permits. The early season antlered tags in Unit 3C are highly coveted by hunters. Land status: The majority of the unit is situated within the Black Mesa and Lakeside Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, consequently access to hunting areas is not a problem. A Forest map can be purchased at any Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest District Office, located in Overgaard, Lakeside, Springerville and Alpine, or at the Arizona Game and Fish Region I office in Pinetop.

On the early hunts, check to make sure that there are no fire restrictions in effect. In addition, residential developments and homes are scattered in the unit. Remember that you must be at least ¼ mile from any building before discharging a firearm.

On early hunts, weather can range from moderately hot to wet. Because of warmer temperatures on early hunts, it is suggested that you locate a meat processor or butcher who will provide a location to hang and cool meat before going hunting. There are game processors in Taylor and Lakeside.

On late hunts, weather ranges from moderate to severe, with snow and cold temperatures likely. Be prepared for winter conditions by bringing appropriate clothing and vehicles. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended on the late hunts because of potential snow and very muddy roads. Please help minimize damage to wet roads. You are liable for any damage or ruts you create. This is considered habitat damage by the Forest Service and the Game and Fish Department.

The unit is bounded on the south by the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Your permit does not allow you to enter the Reservation to hunt or recover game. Do not trespass on the Reservation for any reason without tribal permission. If you shoot an animal that travels onto the Reservation, contact the White Mountain Apache Game and Fish Department to obtain permission to go after the animal.

Pre-season scouting is important to locating animals, especially on later hunts when bulls are not bugling. Success on the late bull hunt is largely dependent upon scouting. Mature bulls are still available on the late hunt,

but they are much more difficult to locate.

During the rut hunts, use an artificial bugle to locate bulls (this isn't necessary if they are already bugling), and then stalk until you are within range to shoot or set up and use cow calls to entice the bull within range. Watching stock ponds and wildlife drinkers may also be productive, especially in dry years. In more open areas, glassing can be an effective technique if high points are located prior to hunting. On the antlerless hunts, take enough time to positively identify your target and triple check to make sure the animal you intend to harvest does not have antlers.

Areas: Elk populations in Unit 3C are scattered throughout the entire unit. However, since the Rodeo-Chediski Fire, elk densities are higher south of Highway 260 (which bisects the unit). For antlered and antlerless elk, good hunting areas the past few years include: Telephone Lake and White Lake just north of Show Low (accessed from State Route 77), Juniper Ridge (FR 143) west of Show Low/Linden, Pinedale Ridge (FR 132) south of Clay Springs, near Deer Springs (FR 107, 161 and 145) Lookout Tower, the Aripine area (FR 332), the area between Phoenix Park Wash and Decker Wash (FR 146), the area around the Gentry Lookout Tower, and anywhere near Black Canyon Lake (accessed via FR 86 or from State Route 260). Scouting is critical to locating animals for your hunt.

A number of ranchers and farmers in the Linden, Burton, and Show Low areas will allow access to their private land to hunters, but you need to obtain permission first.

Mountain Lion

Overview: The lion population in this unit is not dense, but there are a number of lions harvested each year. Occasionally, a lion is taken by a hunter who happens to see one while hunting other species, but by far the most popular method is hunting with hounds. Mountain lion tags can be purchased over the counter. Legal lions are any lion except spotted kittens or females accompanied by spotted kittens. Although lions may be found throughout the unit, most are taken south of State Route 260. Hunters should look for tracks crossing roads and scratches. Hound hunting is the most successful method, but calling can also be effective, especially if the hunter knows a lion is in the area.

The unit ranges in elevation from 5,600 feet at Taylor to over 7,200 feet on the Mogollon Rim. Weather can range from hot during the early fall too cold and wet as fall progresses. Snow is probable during late fall and winter, and hunters should be prepared with the appropriate clothing and vehicles. Roads can become very slick when wet and there's deep mud in some areas. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended in the late fall and winter. Some areas will receive enough snow so that vehicle access is not possible.

Land status: Most of Unit 3C is within the Lakeside and Black Mesa Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. A Forest map can be purchased at any National Forest office (there are offices in Overgaard and Lakeside) or at the Arizona Game and Fish Department regional office in Pinetop.
Unit 3C is bounded on the south by the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Your permit does not allow you to enter the Reservation to hunt or recover game. Do not trespass on the Reservation for any reason without tribal permission. If you shoot an animal that travels onto the Reservation, contact the White Mountain Apache Game

and Fish Department to obtain permission to go after the animal. If hounds pursue a lion onto the Reservation, you may not cross onto the Reservation to recover dogs without tribal permission.

Please help minimize damage to wet roads. You are liable for any damage or ruts you create. The Forest Service and the Game and Fish Department consider this habitat damage.

Areas: Mountain lions are found throughout Unit 3C. Generally lions will be found traveling through areas of high game concentrations. Look for areas with deer and elk in rougher terrain. Lions have a large home range and are never easy to find, but persistence under the right conditions (snow for example) should pay off for a hunter with trained dogs. Avoid running lions near the Reservation boundary and houses.

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. 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. A premolar tooth will be removed during the inspection.

Mule Deer

Notice: The 201 archery only deer hunt in Units 3A and 3C is a permitted (draw) hunt. These units are not open to hunting with an over-the-counter archery deer tag.

Overview: Hunt permits for mule deer in Unit 3C are also valid in Unit 3A (see Unit 3A mule deer for more information). This unit has an early season permitted archery hunt and a general firearms hunt in October/November. Unit 3A/3C deer hunt permits are valid for any antlered deer, but historically there are very few white-tailed deer in the unit.

The mule deer population has been increasing since the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. The highest densities are found south of Highway 260 in the burn area. In 2012 the Arizona Game and Fish Commission changed the deer management to alternative status in Units 3A/3C. Alternative mule deer hunt objectives are designed to be considered in specific units to provide more abundant, older-age class deer. This results in a more conservative harvest and provides for a population that will provide greater opportunity to harvest an older-age class buck. The unit ranges from 5,600 feet in elevation at Taylor to over 7,200 feet on the Mogollon Rim. Weather can range from hot during the archery hunt to cold and wet during the general firearms hunt. Snow is possible during the general hunt, and hunters should be prepared for winter conditions with appropriate clothing and vehicles.

Roads can become very slick when wet, and some areas have deep mud. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended on the late hunt.

Land status: The majority of the unit is situated within the Lakeside and Black Mesa Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. A Forest map can be purchased at any National Forest District Office (there is an office in Overgaard and in Lakeside), or at the Arizona Game and Fish Department Region I office in Pinetop. Although there is private land throughout the unit, most of the deer are located on National Forest lands.

Unit 3C is bounded on the south by the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Your permit does not allow you to enter the Reservation to hunt or recover game. Do not trespass on the Reservation for any reason without tribal permission. If you shoot an animal that travels onto the Reservation, contact the White Mountain Apache Game and Fish Department to obtain permission to go after the animal.

Deer-hunting techniques that can be successful include still-hunting and taking a stand on or near water sources. Spot and stalk techniques have been productive, especially in many of the burned areas that provide opportunity for glassing. Tracking may also prove successful on snow or with the right conditions.

Areas: Hunters looking for the highest deer densities should concentrate their efforts south of State Route 260. Forest roads (FR) 139 and 132 can access the Cottonwood burn area. FR 143 accesses Juniper Ridge, another good bet. Other good areas are along the Rim, south of Pinedale (FR 130, 263 and 131), and from the Deer Springs Lookout west to the Young Road (FR 512). Be careful not to slip over the Rim into Unit 23. The area surrounding Black Canyon Lake (accessed via FR 86) and to the east (accessed via FR 50 and 51) can also provide good hunting.

Pre-season scouting is a major contributor to success. Without spending some time learning the area, it can be difficult to find mature bucks.

Merriam's Turkey

Overview: The Unit 3C turkey population has decreased to some extent since the peak that occurred about five years after the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. There will be a permitted fall limited weapon-shotgun shooting shot only (LWSSS) turkey season offered in October in addition to the over-the-counter fall archery-only hunt, which coincides with the archery deer season. Spring hunts are also limited weapon-shotgun shooting shot only and include a youth-only opportunity. Archery turkey tags for the fall can be purchased over the counter at any license dealer. The turkey bag limit remains one turkey per calendar year. Check the current regulations for season dates.

The unit ranges in elevation from 5,600 feet at Taylor to over 7,200 feet on the Mogollon Rim. Most of the unit is situated within the Lakeside and Black Mesa Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. A Forest map can be purchased at any Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest Ranger office or at the Arizona Game and Fish Department Region I office in Pinetop. There are District Ranger offices in Overgaard and Lakeside.

Unit 3C is bounded on the south by the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Your permit does not allow you to enter the Reservation to hunt or recover game. Do not trespass on the Reservation for any reason without tribal permission. If you shoot an animal that travels onto the Reservation, contact the White Mountain Apache Game and Fish Department to obtain permission to go after the animal.

Areas: Hunters should concentrate south of State Route 260. There are some turkeys north of the highway, but there are far more birds to the south. All of the major drainages south of the highway can hold turkeys. The key is locating birds by looking for tracks, roost sites, droppings, and feeding activity. Anywhere along the Rim road (Forest Road 300) is a good bet.

Dove

Overview: Dove hunting in Units 3A & 3C is fair, although sometimes the birds cooperate and hunting becomes good. The harvest is entirely mourning doves. Hunters should check current regulations for legal bag limits, hunting times, and other special regulations. Often late summer storms move many birds south prior to the season opener.

There is very little grain farming in the area, but birds generally concentrate near farms. Because most dove hunting is done relatively close to human development and other hunters, safety is very important. Check the area you intend to hunt and avoid shooting within ¼ mile of houses and buildings. Also, avoid shooting at low flying birds, and be aware of where other hunters are located near you.

Areas: Agricultural areas near Linden, Burton, and Taylor can be productive. Hunting water sources such as stock tanks and the Little Colorado River can also be good.

Tree Squirrel

Overview: There is a fair population of Abert's squirrels in Unit 3C. The unit ranges in elevation from 5,600 feet at Taylor to over 7,200 feet on the Mogollon Rim. Weather can range from hot and dry to cold and wet during the fall. In November, snow is possible. Hunters should be prepared with appropriate clothing and vehicles.

Land status: Most of the unit is situated within the Lakeside and Black Mesa Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. A Forest map can be purchased at any National Forest district office or at the Arizona Game and Fish Department Region I office in Pinetop.

The majority of Unit 3C is bounded on the south by the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Your hunting license does not allow you to enter the Reservation to hunt or recover game. Do not trespass on the Reservation for any reason without tribal permission.

Areas: Hunters should concentrate in unburned pine stands south of Hwy 260. Any place that mature Gambel oaks are found in conjunction with mature pines should be productive. Hunters should look for squirrel sign, such as freshly cut pine branches and chewed up acorns. The impact of the fire on the unit's squirrel population appears to be minimal.

Waterfowl

Overview: Unit 3C has limited, but fairly high quality waterfowl hunting available. The majority of waterfowl will be ducks, although some geese are taken every year. On the better duck marshes, there is generally some hunter congestion, especially early in the season and on weekends. Hunters should consider the method they will use to retrieve downed birds. By far the most effective method is a trained retrieving dog, although small boats, float tubes and chest waders may also be used. Some water is too deep for waders. If wading is your only retrieval method, limit your hunting to water that you know is not too deep. The weather during the waterfowl season can be very comfortable or downright nasty, with wind, precipitation, and cold temperatures. Be sure to check current waterfowl hunting regulations, and have both State Migratory Bird Stamp (included with a youth license) and Federal Duck Stamps affixed to your license if you are age 16 or older.

Areas: The Redhead Marsh-Ned Lake-Telephone Lake complex is a popular duck hunting area. It is accessed off of State Route 77, just north of Show Low. The turn-off to the west is immediately north of the sewage treatment plant. There are also numerous stock ponds throughout the unit that can hold birds (generally puddle ducks). Cruising back roads and jump-shooting off of tanks can be effective, especially when migrating birds are coming through. A map of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests will be helpful in locating additional areas to hunt.

Game Management Unit Summary

Primary Game Species/Hunting Month(s)	
Elk	September - December, April/May (Spring)
Turkey	October (Fall)
Mule Deer	August/September (Archery), October/November (Rifle)
Secondary Game Species/Hunting Month(s)	
Black Bear	August & October (until sow quota fills)
Average # Permits in Past 5 Years	
Elk	> 500 (Combined with 3A)
Pronghorn	> 200
Turkey	> 200 (Combined with 3A)
Black Bear	> Sow quota

Climate Information

Month	Avg. Temp	Avg. Rainfall	Avg. Snowfall
August	Max 82°/Min 51°	3.0"	0.0"
September	Max 77°/Min 44°	2.1"	0.0"
October	Max 68°/Min 33°	1.5"	0.2"
November	Max 55°/Min 23°	1.5"	3.9"
December	Max 48°/Min 17°	1.9"	11.4"

Other Climate Information
Always check weather conditions during fall hunts and be prepared for winter conditions. Heavy snow may lead to road closures. During late hunts, animas tend to stay at lower elevations in pine/juniper mix or just juniper.

Cities, Roads & Campgrounds

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

Major Highways and Roads Leading To
Major Highways and Roads Leading To
From the East: State Routes 77, 260, 277
From the West: State Routes 260, 277
From the North: State Routes 77, 377
From the South: State Routes 260 from Payson, State Route 60 from Globe

Developed Campgrounds
Woods Canyon Recreation area; Willow Springs; Lewis Canyon, south of Pinedale; Black Canyon and Gentry, both southwest of Heber.

Undeveloped Campgrounds
Camping is allowed on Forest Service lands throughout the Unit (14-day limit).

Brief Description of Terrain, Elevation and Vegetation
Elevations range from 5,000' to 8,000'. Vegetation is ponderosa pine/mixed conifer forests transitioning to juniper grasslands in the north.

Government Agencies and Phone Numbers

Arizona Game and Fish Department, Region I – 928-367-4281
Apache-Sitgreaves Natl Forest, Black Mesa Ranger District – 928-535-7300
Apache-Sitgreaves Natl Forest, Lakeside Ranger District – 928-368-2100