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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR <u>Wirth/Hamblen</u>	LAST UPDATED <u>3/11/2025</u>	ORIGINAL DATE <u>2/28/2025</u>
SHORT TITLE <u>Beaver Population & Management Plan</u>	BILL NUMBER <u>Senate Memorial 3/aSRC/aSCONC</u>	
ANALYST <u>Gaussoin</u>		

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT* (dollars in thousands)

Agency/Program	FY25	FY26	FY27	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
EMNRD, NMDA, NMED	Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal		Nonrecurring	General Fund
DGF	Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal		Nonrecurring	Game Protection Fund
SLO	Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal	Indeterminate but minimal		Nonrecurring	Land Maintenance Fund

Parentheses () indicate expenditure decreases.
 *Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

Relates to an appropriation in the General Appropriation Act

Sources of Information

LFC Files

Agency Analysis Received From

State Land Office
 Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

Agency Analysis was Solicited but Not Received From

Department of Game and Fish

SUMMARY

Synopsis of SCONC Amendment to Senate Memorial 3

The Senate Conservation Committee amendment to Senate Memorial 3 adds language asking that the work group consult with representatives of soil and water conservation districts, acequia associations, farmers, ranchers, and other stakeholders.

Synopsis of SRC Amendment to Senate Memorial 3

The Senate Rules Committee amendment to Senate Memorial 3 adds the New Mexico Department of Agriculture and the Environment Department (NMED) to those agencies being asked to work on a statewide beaver management plan.

Synopsis of Senate Memorial 3

Senate Memorial 3 asks the Department of Game and Fish (DGF), Forestry Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), and the State Land Office (SLO) to work jointly on a statewide beaver management plan and present their findings to the appropriate legislative committee or committees by October 1, 2025.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Memorials contain no appropriation, but studies can represent a cost to state agencies. The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department indicates it would need additional staff to work on the management plan, including legal counsel, while the State Land Office reports it can absorb the additional staff time within its existing budget. The Department of Game and Fish, which has existing staff with wildlife expertise, did not provide analysis. It is likely that all the agencies can develop a management plan within existing resources.

The House version of the General Appropriation Act includes \$10.5 million from the government results and opportunity fund to be spent over three years on the conservation of species, including the American beaver.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Department of Game and Fish includes the American beaver on its list of “species of greatest conservation need” in the draft of the 2025 *State Wildlife Action Plan* because it is a keystone species with an important impact on environment and is threatened by climate change and declining populations.

North American beavers, which disappeared from many New Mexico areas because of extensive trapping in the 1800s, contribute to healthy ecosystems and watersheds through dam building and associated wetlands, which the memorial says increases groundwater percolation and raises groundwater tables and storage. The memorial says beaver ponds and their wetlands mitigate erosion from heavy rainfall, filter out contaminants, enhance riparian zone resiliency, and support plant, fish and wildlife populations.

The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department suggests a management plan may be unnecessary because of the beaver’s inclusion in the action plan: “Beaver management provisions may be incorporated into this plan, in subsequent revisions, which may not require a stand-alone beaver management plan.”

Further, the department notes, while the Forestry Division operates under a 10-year Forest Action Plan that includes consideration of watershed health and restoration, scheduled to be revised in 2030, wildlife management is not within the scope of the division. It notes both the Environment Department (NMED) and the Office of the State Engineer have roles in water source protection and management and should be considered as partners in developing a beaver management plan: “Notably, NMED has extensive experience with beaver and beaver dam analogue projects, developing technical expertise that balances the ecological benefits of beaver activity with human and infrastructure needs to maximize restoration outcomes.”

The SRC amendment adds NMED and the state Department of Agriculture as partners in the project.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

While the State Land Office manages 9 million surface acres of trust land, the agency reports it has very few tracts that support beavers or their habitat. While it considers its role as a consulting agency appropriate, it suggests it should not be the lead agency.

The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department reports its Forestry Division is already stretched thin with its wildfire prevention and response duties and it “does not currently have the capacity or technical expertise from existing staff to coordinate this effort.” The department also raises concerns about producing the report by the October deadline because the wildfire season is expected to extend into the fall.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

SM3 relates to an appropriation in the House version of the General Appropriation Act, which includes \$10.5 million from the government results and opportunity fund to be spent over three years on the conservation of species, including the American beaver.

ALTERNATIVES

EMNRD indicates the memorial is not needed because beaver management could be part of the Department of Game and Fish’s 2025 *State Wildlife Action Plan*, and the state already has a Forest and Watershed Advisory Board that recommends high-priority forest and watershed restoration projects that include water source protection and fish and wildlife habitat conservation:

Furthermore, [the Forestry Division] hosts the State Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group, a multi-stakeholder body comprised of federal, state, tribal, local governments, nongovernmental organizations, forest and watershed collaborative groups, private industry and other watershed and associated forest and habitat related stakeholders. This robust stakeholder group represents approximately 50-80 different agencies, organizations, governments, entities, and stakeholders to provide guidance and collaborative statewide strategies to collectively mitigate forest and watershed health concerns and prioritize and implement fire hazard reduction and watershed restoration work across the state.