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# STATE OF NEW MEXICO
# DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE

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5 November 2026

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Southwest Region
P.O. Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103

***RE: Draft revised recovery plan for the northern aplomado falcon, first revision, NMERT Project Number NMERT-6679.***

To whom it may concern,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is seeking public comment on the draft revised recovery plan (Document, USFWS 2026) for the northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*), an endangered grassland bird found in the southwestern U.S. and Mexico south to Central America. Overall, the New Mexico Department of Wildlife (Department) appreciates and concurs with the USFWS' efforts on the Document and the plans put forth within the Document. The Department submits the following comments for consideration in the next iteration of the Document to further provide for the recovery of the northern aplomado falcon, especially its Chihuahuan Desert population.

The Department would like to note that our staff was not notified regarding the creation and finalization of the northern aplomado falcon Recovery Implementation Strategy (RIS) and thus could not provide comments or input regarding this document. For future RIS creation, or similar USFWS documents that relate to species within the state of New Mexico, the Department would appreciate notification of these documents and any associated comment periods.

<u>Comments Regarding the Draft Revised Recovery Plan</u>

Drought, fire regime changes, land conversion, woody encroachment, and predation are the most likely threats to the recovery of the northern aplomado falcon within the Chihuahuan Desert of southern New Mexico. Human-related disturbance of areas that could constitute viable habitat are also a threat to the northern aplomado falcon in this area. Unsustainable grazing practices, which can be defined in terms of grazing timing and duration; drought; and direct disturbance due to construction may degrade habitat

and result in the loss of the ability of certain areas to support populations of northern aplomado falcons. The Department recommends the cumulative and compounding effects of historic and current grazing pressure, drought, and anthropogenic disturbances be analyzed within the Document.

Per lines 278-279 on page 19, the Department also requests clarification on whether the effectiveness of the installation of nest boxes in the Chihuahuan Desert to offset the loss of natural nesting sites has been tested; to our knowledge, all information on whether this approach increases northern aplomado falcon productivity has been collected in southern Texas.

Within Table 1, the recovery action summary table, on page 16, the Department recommends the recovery action of augmentation of populations through captive releases not be attempted until or unless sufficient suitable, high-quality habitat is available to support those released birds. Augmentation of populations through captive releases without sufficient high-quality habitat being present will likely not result in sustainable increases to the population, and the cost of these efforts would be better allocated to other methods of recovery.

Within Table 1, the recovery action summary table, on page 16, the Department wants to highlight the importance of the recovery action of “conduct[ing] research to understand species’ demography and ecology” and potential consideration of this action being moved upwards in priority level to level 2. Understanding the demography, ecology, and habitat needs of the northern aplomado falcon, especially as those topics relate to breeding, is crucial to the species’ recovery in the Chihuahuan Desert. Without this information, ‘sufficient breeder habitat’ as cited on line 422 of page 13 cannot be determined properly for the Chihuahuan Desert population. Increasing the priority of research to obtain this crucial information within the Chihuahuan Desert may allow for better recovery of this species. However, the Department acknowledges that this research may not satisfy the definition of priority level 2, that “an action must be taken to prevent a significant decline in species population/habitat quality”, especially since the Chihuahuan Desert population is already so small.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Document, and for your consideration of these comments. If you have any questions regarding terrestrial habitat or species, please contact Meredith Dalton, Terrestrial Habitat Specialist, at (505) 709-0671 or meredith.dalton@dgf.nm.gov.

Sincerely,

Virginia Seamster

Digitally signed by Virginia Seamster
Date: 2026.11.05 15:08:05 -07'00'

Virginia Seamster
Assistant Chief for Technical Guidance
Ecological and Environmental Planning Section

## References

[USFWS] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2026. Draft recovery plan for northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*), First Revision. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southwest Region, Albuquerque, Regional Office State, USA. <https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plan/NAF%20Draft%20Revised%20Recovery%20Plan_20261005.pdf>.