

# Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Survey of the 2017-18 Season Elk Hunters



Prepared by Joe McDermott, Gabe Jenkins and Dan Crank

## Survey Purpose and Methods

To better understand the opinions and experiences of Kentucky elk hunters, KDFWR staff provided a survey to 2017 season elk hunters. The 2017 survey replicated many of the survey questions administered to elk hunters that were surveyed during the 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2016-17 seasons to provide insight and assess potential trends in hunter experiences. The most notable differences between these surveys is the addition of a relatively new hunter access area program, the Voucher-Cooperator Program, which was introduced to the survey in the 2016-2017 replication.

Surveys were sent to email addresses associated with drawn elk hunter applications. Over a 2-month survey window in January and February of 2018, we received 301 completed responses from the 663 hunters with valid emails. This was 45.4% response rate based on the number of valid email addresses to which the survey was sent, and met the minimum sample size thresholds for statistical significance at a 95% confidence level.

## Permit Allocation

The following information has been provided to help the reader put the survey responses into proper context.

<b>Permit Type</b>	<b>Hazard LEA</b>	<b>Straight Creek LEA</b>	<b>Prestonsburg LEA</b>	<b>Middlesboro LEA</b>	<b>Tug Fork</b>	<b>At Large</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Bull Archery</b>	8	8	1	1	1	81	100
<b>Cow Archery</b>	20	20	2	3	3	112	160
<b>Bull Firearms</b>	12	12	2	2	4	118	150
<b>Cow Firearms</b>	30	24	6	4	6	220	290
<b>Youth</b>	2	2	1	1	1	3	10
<b>Total</b>	72	66	12	11	15	534	710

## Responses to Survey Questions

### General Information

Q 1. 86.4% of respondents were Kentucky residents, and 13.6% were non-residents. A maximum of 10% of elk permits are awarded annually to nonresidents selected in the randomized Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing. In this survey, nonresidents responded at a slightly higher rate than residents.

Q 2. The majority of hunters (38.3%) stated that they chose their particular hunt type (bull archery, bull firearm, cow archery, and cow firearm) based on “overall odds of being drawn for any permit.” Weapon choice (27.5%) was the second most important factor in determining which permit type a hunter applied for, followed closely by the sex of the animal (20.8%). The remainder of the respondents stated that the “odds of being drawn for a particular elk hunt type” (8%) and “other” (5.4%) determined their application selections.

Q 3. 44.8% of respondents were selected for a cow firearms hunt, followed closely by bull firearms (26.5%), cow archery (15.7%), and bull archery (13%).

### Economic Impact of Elk Hunting in Kentucky

**NOTE:** the highest monetary expenditures reported for many of the following four questions (Q 6-7, 12-13) were related to guide/ outfitter services. As such, a summation of guide/ outfitter fees is presented as a standalone component. Considering only the data from hunters that reported a value for guides/ outfitters, the average guide fee was \$1,906 with a median expenditure of \$1,500. The lowest reported value was \$75, and the highest was \$6,000.

Q 6. The average elk hunter spent \$884 **outside of the elk zone** while scouting for elk. Monetary expenditures were classified as: \$174 on gas, \$77 on meals, \$107 on lodging, \$467 on equipment, and \$59 on other.

Q 7. The average elk hunter spent \$586 **inside the elk zone** while scouting for elk. Monetary expenditures were classified as: \$146 on gas, \$111 on meals, \$170 on lodging, \$71 on equipment, and \$88 on other.

Q 12. The average elk hunter spent an average \$1,031 **outside of the elk zone** while travelling to and from hunting, or after the hunt. Monetary expenditures included \$133 on gas, \$82 on meals, \$99 on lodging, \$289 on equipment, \$124 on meat processing, \$284 on taxidermy work, and \$20 on other.

Q 13. The average elk hunter spent an average of \$663 **inside the elk zone** during their hunt. Monetary expenditures included \$126 on gas, \$109 on meals, \$167 on lodging, \$56 on equipment, \$54 on meat processing, \$101 on taxidermy work, and \$50 on other.

During the 2017 season, the average hunter spent a total of \$1,915 **outside the elk zone** and \$1,249 **inside the elk zone** for elk hunting related expenses.

### Scouting

Q 4. A slight majority (54.2%) of elk hunters made at least one scouting trip prior to the start of their hunt.

Q 5. Elk hunters who scouted their hunt area prior to their hunt date made an average of 4 trips, with a reported range of 0-35 trips.

### Hunting Areas

Q 9. A large majority of respondents (69.4%) hunted within the At-Large area, followed by Hazard LEA (13.6%), Straight Creek LEA (10.1%), Tug Fork LEA (3.1%), Prestonsburg LEA (1.9%), and Middlesboro LEA (1.9%).

Q 10. Question 10 was an open-ended question that allowed hunters the chance to report why they **chose not to** apply for an LEA. Most of the responses can be categorized as follows:

- 28.7% felt the At-Large Area provided more or better options.
- 19.4% stated they intended to then forgot, or missed the deadline.
- 19.4% said they had an existing place to hunt.
- 14.8% stated they didn't have time to thoroughly research the LEAs.
- 10.2% said their guide/ outfitter advised them not to based on where they intended to hunt.
- 7.4% said they misunderstood the rules.

Q 11. Question 11 was an open-ended question that allowed hunters the chance to report why they **chose to** apply for an LEA. Most of the responses can be categorized as follows:

- 28.4% stated they felt an LEA gave them the best odds of harvesting an elk.
- 28.4% applied for an LEA per the recommendation of a guide/ outfitter.
- 15.7% said they wanted to narrow the scope of their hunt, or that the available public land led them to apply.
- 13.4% said they were either from the area, or had close connections with someone who did.
- 7.5% felt that an LEA meant less hunters and less pressured elk.
- 6.7% stated they knew of elk in that area.

Q 25. A minority of respondents (27.7%) reported signing up to hunt on a Voucher-Cooperator property.

Q 26. Question 26 was an open response question that allowed hunters that **were selected to hunt a Voucher- Cooperator property** to offer suggestions to improve the program. Most suggestions could be lumped into the following categories:

- 26.8% of respondents wanted better control of access points to prevent unauthorized users (non-voucher hunters, ATV and horse riders, etc.) from utilizing the property
- 17.9% wanted KDFWR to provide better maps or physically mark all property boundaries

- 17.9% of hunters asked KDFWR to enroll additional properties in the program
- 12.5% requested KDFWR remove properties with little elk sign
- 3.6% wished the process for signing up to hunt a voucher property was a secondary drawing similar to the LEA drawing system
- 3.6% of hunters wanted better opportunities for scouting/ speaking with landowners prior to hunt

Q 27. A slight majority of hunters (38.7%) hunted on public and private land, followed closely by public land only hunters (33.1%), and private land only hunters (including voucher properties [28.2%]).

### The Hunt

Q 8. A strong majority of respondents (93.1%) actually went elk hunting during the 2017 season.

Q 31. For those hunters that did not hunt elk after being drawn, 33.3% of hunters said it was due to work obligations, 16.7% stated it was due to monetary issues, 11.1% stated it was due to family obligations, 11.1% stated it was due to an illness, and 27.8% listed “other” as their reasoning.

Q 14. 44.8% of respondents stated they used a guide/ outfitter service during their 2017 elk hunt.

Q 15. Of those respondents that reported using a guide/ outfitter, 77.6% reported having a positive experience with their outfitter

Q 16. A majority of hunters (69.5%) stated that their primary hunting method was “spot and stalk on foot,” followed closely by “spot and stalk mostly with a vehicle” (49%). Other commonly reported methods were “blind or stand over a trail or travel corridor” (16.9%), “blind or stand over a water source,” (6%), and “blind or stand over a food source,” (6%). NOTE: percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents were given the option of entering multiple hunting methods.

Q 17. The average hunter reported spending 9 hours per day while elk hunting (Table 1).

Q 18. The average hunter reported spending 7 days hunting elk (Table 1).

Q 19. The average hunter had 2 people assisting with their elk hunt.

Q 20. Respondents stated that they shot at, but missed, an average of 0.1 elk.

Q 21. 9 respondents (4%) reported wounding an animal without recovering it.

Q 22. A majority of respondents (54.2%) reported harvesting an elk during their hunt.

Q 23. Of the respondents that harvested an elk, 33.3% reported harvesting an elk in the edge of two or more habitat types, 32.6% in open mine lands/ grasslands, 22.2% in the forest interior, and 11.9% in thickets or shrubby cover.

### Hunter Satisfaction

Q 24. When thinking back over the 2017 elk season, a majority of hunters were very satisfied (39.4%), 16.5% were somewhat satisfied, 5.6% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 15.3% were somewhat dissatisfied, and 23.3% were very dissatisfied. It should be noted that the percentage of respondents expressing satisfaction with their experience (55.9%) corresponds well with the percentage of respondents that reported harvesting an elk (54.2%).

### Other Hunting

Q 28. A vast majority of respondents (91.1%) stated that they had hunted other big game species before (deer/elk/moose/caribou/bear) their 2017 elk hunt.

Q 29. Although most hunters reported hunting other big game species, 60.5% of respondents stated they had never hunted elk before.

Q 30. The majority of respondents (57.8%) said that no one in their hunting party pursued other big game species while on their Kentucky elk hunt. Those that reported hunting other big game species indicated they pursued: deer modern firearms (31.8%), deer archery/ crossbow (30.7%), deer muzzleloader (22.9%), bear modern firearms (6.3%), and bear archery/ crossbow (2.6%).

### Closing Thoughts

Q 32. Question 32 was an open-ended question that allowed hunters the chance to provide additional comments or recommendations for Kentucky elk management. The bulk of the comments can be grouped into the following categories:

- 36.7% of respondents expressed concern in the perceived elk numbers. Concerned hunters overwhelmingly stated that “guides and locals” said that elk sightings were down, or stemmed from hunters who had been in the area in the past (typically 5+ years; reported range 2-9) and hadn’t seen elk in the same places they did originally.
- 24.3% expressed their pleasure in having the opportunity to hunt and provided no further comment.
- 14.2% of hunters requested KDFWR to acquire, purchase, and better manage the habitat on public properties. Some hunters also expressed frustration in the preseason loss of KY Fuels WMA.
- 14.2% reported that they didn’t see many elk on their hunt, so they contested that elk numbers must be down.
- 10.1% expressed discontent for guiding services/ outfitters primarily running drawn hunters off of public property, or leasing up any available ground.
- 6% of hunters were upset with the current season structure and timing. Most common complaints were too many other uses (e.g., small game and deer hunting) on public properties that caused overcrowding.

- 5.3% of respondents expressed additional frustration with the Voucher-Cooperator Program. Most frequently, hunters were dissatisfied with the amount of non-hunter traffic, and in particular, the drawing process.
- 4.7% of respondents stated their frustration with the recently implemented three year wait period after drawing a cow permit. Many of these respondents said they would not have applied for a cow permit if they knew it would prohibit them from entering the drawing for a bull in subsequent years.
- 3.6% were requests for KDFWR to forego trapping and translocation efforts to other areas.
- 3% requested additional law enforcement on public areas to curtail illegal use of properties.
- 3% of hunters requested to be eligible for the following years' drawings when unsuccessful in filling their permit.
- 1% of respondents expressed the desire to make the elk hunt only for Kentucky residents.

**Tables:**

Table 1. 2017-2018 Elk Hunter Effort.

Permit Type	*Number of Respondents	Average Days Hunted	Range of Reported Days	Average Hours Hunted per Day	Range of Reported Hours
Bull Archery	35	14.1	1 – 50	8.9	1 - 12
Bull Firearms	67	4.1	1 – 7	8.4	2 - 15
Cow Archery	34	8.4	2 – 36	8.7	5 - 12
Cow Firearms	111	3.7	1 – 7	8.2	1 - 14

\*Reported hunter numbers for each permit type do not add up to the total number of respondents that took the survey. Some reports had to be omitted due to a lack of data, or inaccurate reporting.

\*\*There is no data provided for the youth permit. Youth hunters either did not respond to the survey, or skipped the questions relating to permit type and hunter effort.