



DAVE BAKER PHOTO

## Hunting Access Areas

IT'S NOT UNUSUAL to see people from as far away as Alaska and Hawaii applying for a Kentucky elk hunt. Since Kentucky released its first elk into the wild in 1997 and followed with the first hunting season in 2001, approximately 100,000 people have entered the drawing for an elk hunt.

Elk have done more than provide a new hunting opportunity, however. They've also opened the door for more places to hunt.

In Eastern Kentucky, the Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources has lease agreements with several landowners to provide public access. For every 5,000 acres

leased, the landowner receives an elk permit good for a bull or cow.

These hunting access areas – which differ from the department's wildlife management areas – encompass more than 86,000 acres in Bell, Breathitt, Floyd, Harlan, Johnson, Knott, Leslie, Martin, Perry and Pike counties.

"These areas are open for any type of hunting, and it's a direct result of elk hunting and the elk program," said Gabe Jenkins, the department's deer and elk program coordinator. "It provides additional hunting opportunities for all our constituents, even those who aren't interested in hunting elk."

Hunting access areas typically feature reclaimed strip mine areas on top with forested valleys below. "Some of the areas are freshly reclaimed and have open grasslands," Jenkins said. "A lot of them were mined 10, 20 and even 30 years ago. Those are getting thick and wooly."

Hunting access areas generally consist of several properties scattered across one or more counties. To locate each tract, go online to the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife web-

site at [fw.ky.gov](http://fw.ky.gov) and search under the keyword, "map."

Here you'll find detailed maps of each area and how to get there. Because leased areas are subject to change due to mining and timbering activities, it's always a good idea to check the website before heading out to scout or hunt.

Hunters can start their scouting from the comfort of home using the department's interactive maps. These allow hunters to see satellite images of each property, and zoom in for a more detailed view.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife also offers a mobile app that allows smartphone users in the field to determine their location within an access area and the boundaries of each property. The app works for all the department's wildlife management areas as well. Hunters should still carry a map and compass in case the cell signal is blocked by the mountains.

Some properties fall within the at-large areas for elk. Others are located within elk limited entry areas. The department website details the rules for each property.

"All of the hunting areas will hold elk," Jenkins said. "The biggest tracts will hold them year round. The smaller tracts are not big enough to hold elk all the time, however."

Jenkins advises hunters not to overlook these smaller tracts. "While our elk don't move as much as they do out west, they still move some," he said. "Our elk seasons are long, and elk may move into an area where they weren't at the start of the season. So don't forget about these small, outlying areas." ■