

# Survey of 2019 Kentucky Elk Hunters



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## **Purpose**

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) surveyed all recipients of a 2019 Kentucky elk permit to better understand the opinions and experiences of Kentucky elk hunters. Many of the 2019 survey questions are similar to those asked in previous surveys to assess potential trends. Beginning in 2018, Kentucky elk permit recipients have been required by law (301 KAR 2:132 Section 7 18(a)) to comply with the postseason survey requirement. Elk hunters who fail to comply with this requirement are prohibited from applying for KDFWR-administered quota hunts (i.e., waterfowl, deer, and upland game) the following year.

## **Methods**

The survey was provided to hunters in their MyProfile account. Elk hunters were reminded of this requirement via mail and email correspondence from the Department before, during, and after the 2019 Kentucky elk season. The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey® and available for hunters to take from September 14, 2019 – February 29, 2020 at midnight. The survey contained 35 questions (provided in this document) and took hunters an average of 12 minutes and 55 seconds to complete. KDFWR received 479 responses from the 655 elk permit recipients, which meets the minimum sample size threshold for statistical significance at a 95% confidence level.

## **Results: Responses to Survey Questions**

### **Question 1. Please enter your 11 digit customer ID number to continue (found at the top of your hunting license).**

Answered: 479                      Skipped: 0

The hunters' customer ID numbers are not provided in this report to protect the privacy of each hunter.

### **Question 2. What is your last name?**

Answered: 479                      Skipped: 0

The hunters' last names are not provided in this report to protect the privacy of each hunter.

### **Question 3. What year were you born?**

Answered: 479                      Skipped: 0

The average birth year of 2019 Kentucky elk hunters was 1975, so the average hunter age was 44.

### **Question 4. What type of permit were you selected for?**

Answered: 479                      Skipped: 0

Table 1. Number of survey respondents by permit type and availability.

Permit Type	Number of Respondents	Available Permits
Bull Firearms Week 1	61 (81%)	75
Bull Firearms Week 2	57 (76%)	75

Cow Firearms Week 1	92 (75%)	122
Cow Firearms Week 2	95 (78%)	122
Either-sex Archery/ Crossbow	139 (79%)	175
Youth	15 (60%)	25
Other Permit*	20 (33%)	61

\*Includes landowner-cooperator, voucher-cooperator, Commission, and elk restoration permits.

## Scouting

### Question 5. Did you make any trips to the elk zone to scout for elk before your hunt?

Answered: 478                      Skipped: 1

The majority of respondents (59%) made at least one scouting trip prior to their elk hunt.

### Question 6. How many days did you spend scouting?

Answered: 267                      Skipped: 212

Of the 267 respondents, the average hunter made 3.5 trips to scout prior to their elk hunt (reported range of 0 – 6+ trips). Only 2% (5) of respondents claimed to have not made any scouting trips prior to their hunt, while 24% (65) of hunters claimed to have scouted for elk at least 6 times.

### Question 7. Did you see any elk while scouting?

Answered: 278                      Skipped: 200

64% (178) of respondents saw no elk while scouting prior to their hunt. Those that did see elk on their scouting trips were asked to provide the number of elk they observed by sex. Hunters reported seeing more cows (791) than bulls (346) on their scouting trips, and the average hunter reported 3.5 bulls and 8 cows seen while scouting.

### Question 8. About how much money for the following expenses did you or your group spend while scouting for elk? (Please enter whole numbers with no dollar sign.)

Answered: 273                      Skipped: 206

Table 2. Scouting trip expenses.

Expense	Average Amount Spent	Total Reported Spent
Gas	\$187	\$50,985
Meals	\$122	\$32,335
Lodging	\$158	\$38,759
Equipment	\$225	\$52,596
Other	\$349	\$14,675

Of those that responded to the survey, the average 2019 Kentucky elk hunter and their helpers spent \$1,041 scouting before their hunt. Total amount of money spent by survey respondents scouting before their elk hunt was \$189,350.

## *Hunting*

### **Question 9. Did you go elk hunting in Kentucky during the 2019 season?**

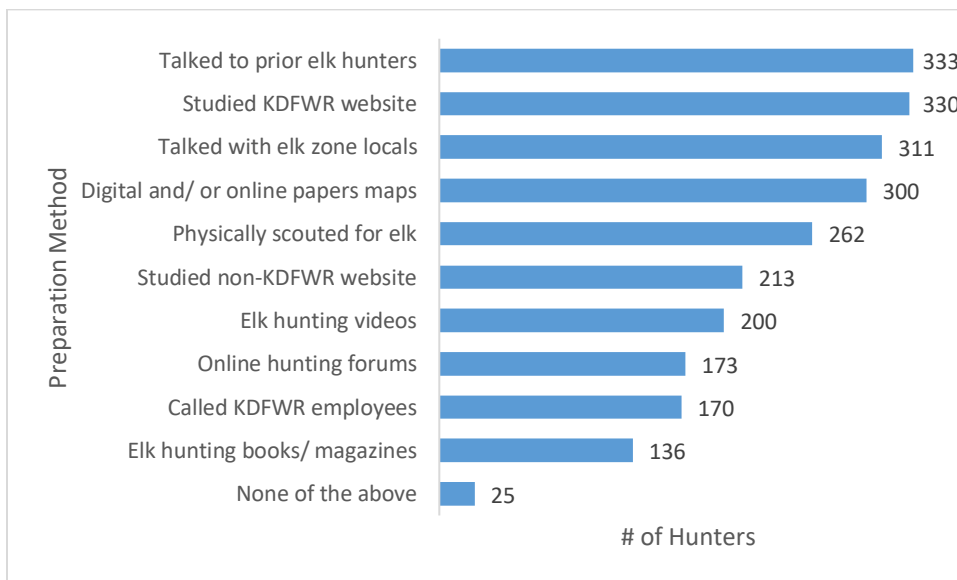
Answered: 477

Skipped: 2

The majority of survey respondents (92%) reported that they went elk hunting in 2019.

### **Question 10. How did you prepare for your elk hunt?**

Figure 1. Elk hunt preparation method.



### **Question 11. Which of the following best explains why you didn't elk hunt after being drawn?**

The 39 hunters who did not go elk hunting (see question 9 above) were asked to provide a reason that they didn't go. Hunters provided the following reasons for not hunting:

46% reported a reason other than those provided above. These included loss/ lack of hunting property, perceived lack of elk, poor weather, and lack of reliable mapping.

23% cited personal illness or illness of a family member

15% claimed work conflicts and/ or obligations

10% reported family conflicts and/ or obligations

3% reported cost and/ or financial obligations

3% were uninterested in hunting the sex of the animal they were drawn for

**Question 12. What area did you hunt?**

Answered: 437

Skipped: 62

Table 3. Elk hunter distribution and response rate.

Unit	Number of Respondents*	Available Quota Permits
2	55	88
3	92	129
4	95	126
5	72	90
6	73	87
7	50	74

\*Other permit

**Question 13. About how much money for the following expenses did you and your helpers spend during or after your elk hunt? (Please enter whole numbers with no dollar sign.)**

Answered: 421

Skipped: 58

Table 4. Kentucky elk hunt expenses.

Expense	Average Amount Spent	Total Reported
Gas	\$203	\$85,673
Meals	\$178	\$71,057
Lodging	\$293	\$102,912
Equipment	\$491	\$184,357
Guide/ Outfitter	\$1,454	\$496,150
Meat Processing	\$105	\$32,179
Taxidermy	\$255	\$75,285
Other	\$256	\$40,573

Of those that responded to the survey, the average 2019 Kentucky elk hunter and their helpers spent \$3,235 during their hunt. Guide/ outfitter fees were the largest single expenditure, and when removed from the sample, the average elk hunter spent \$1,781. Total amount of money spent by survey respondents during their elk hunt was \$1,088,186.

**Question 14. Did you apply for a unit and/ or regulated area? (if no, why not)**

Answered: 437

Skipped: 42

KDFWR conducts a secondary drawing for elk hunting units (EHU) and/ or regulated areas (RA). During this drawing, hunters were given the option of selecting up to 5 preferences for their EHU and/ or RA. 387 (88%) hunters selected at least one preference, while 50 (12%) made no selections. Of those 50

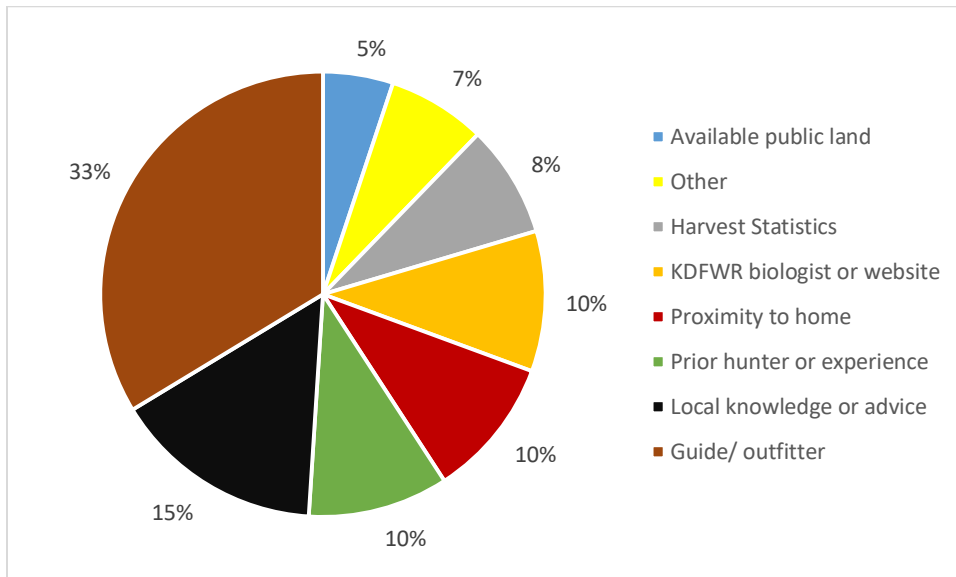
hunters, 26 provided a reason for why they did not make any preferences. Their reasons for not applying in the secondary drawing include: 27% said they didn't know about it, 23% didn't have the option (i.e., purchased landowner permit), 15% forgot or had other obligations, 15% said none were available (hunters who were in an elk hunting party are ineligible to apply), 12% had had other reasons for not applying, and 4% had no preference.

**Question 15. What helped you make your choice?**

Answered: 403

Skipped: 76

Figure 2. Elk hunting unit and regulated area selection.



The majority of respondents that made an EHU and/ or RA selection indicated that their guide or outfitter was the leading source of information to help select their preferences (33%). Respondents place a relatively high/ equal value on local knowledge (15%), previous hunters' or personal experience (10%), proximity to their homes (10%), and advice from a KDFWR biologist or the KDFWR website (10%).

**Question 16. Did you hire a guide/ outfitter for your elk hunt?**

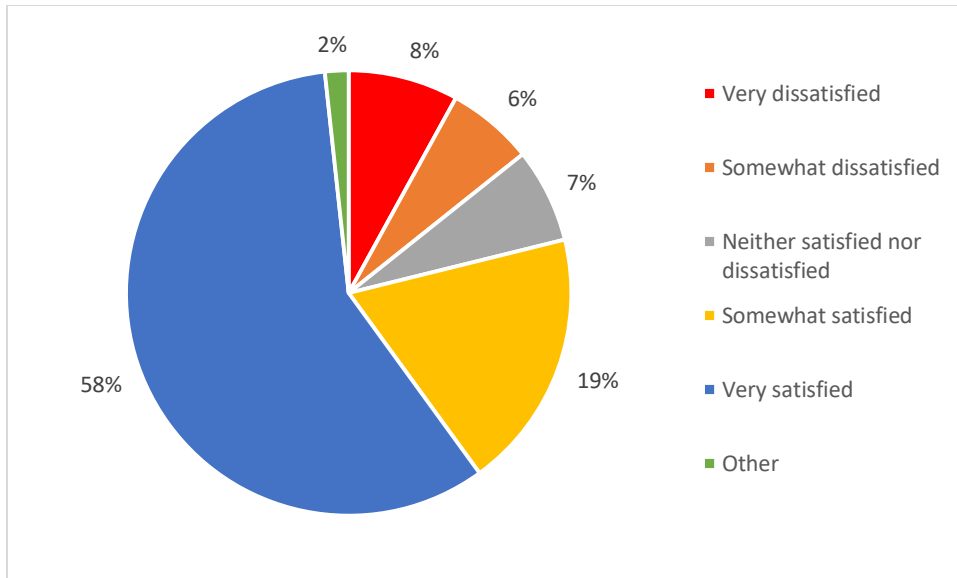
Answered: 437

Skipped: 42

The majority (60%; 262) of survey respondents reported they did not use a guide for their 2019 elk hunt.

**Question 17. How would you rate your guide experience?**

Figure 3. Guide/ outfitter satisfaction. Data from hunters who indicated they did not hire a guide/ outfitter were excluded from this analysis.



The majority of hunters that hired a guide/ outfitter (77%) expressed some level of satisfaction with the service they received.

**Question 18. How many different days did you spend elk hunting?**

Answered: 437

Skipped: 42

Of the respondents who hunted after being drawn, the average 2019 Kentucky elk hunter spent 5 days hunting elk (range: 1 - 20). Hunters that used a guide spent more time afield (5.1 days; range: 1 – 18) than hunters who didn’t use a guide (4.9 days; range: 1 – 20). Total number of man days spent afield hunting elk amongst survey respondents in 2019 was 2,188 days. Please see Appendix A for a more thorough analysis of this question.

**Question 19. Approximately how many elk did you see while hunting?**

Question 19 had two parts: one which allowed the reporting of cow observations, and one for bull observations.

Answered Cows: 412

Skipped: 64

Answered Bulls: 421

Skipped: 58

Table 5. Number of elk observed during the 2019 Kentucky elk hunt.

Sex	Average	Range	Total
Cows Seen While Hunting (n = 412)	4.2	0 - 66	1,768
Bulls Seen While Hunting (n = 421)	2.1	0 - 22	878

Please see Appendix A for a more thorough analysis of this question.

**Question 20. How many elk did you shoot at but miss?**

Answered: 429

Skipped: 48

The average 2019 Kentucky elk hunt survey respondent missed 0.08 elk during their hunt. The total number of elk hunters reported missing in this survey was 37, with a range of reported values of 0 – 3. Please see Appendix A for a more thorough analysis of this question.

**Question 21. How many elk did you hit and not recover?**

Answered: 437

Skipped: 42

The average 2019 Kentucky elk hunt survey respondent wounded 0.04 elk during their hunt. The total number of elk that were reported wounded in this survey was 19, with a range of reported values of 0 – 1. Please see Appendix A for a more thorough analysis of this question.

**Question 22. Did you harvest an elk during your hunt?**

Answered: 437

Skipped: 42

43% (186) of hunters in this survey were successful during their 2019 Kentucky elk hunt. Please see Appendix A for a more thorough analysis of this question.

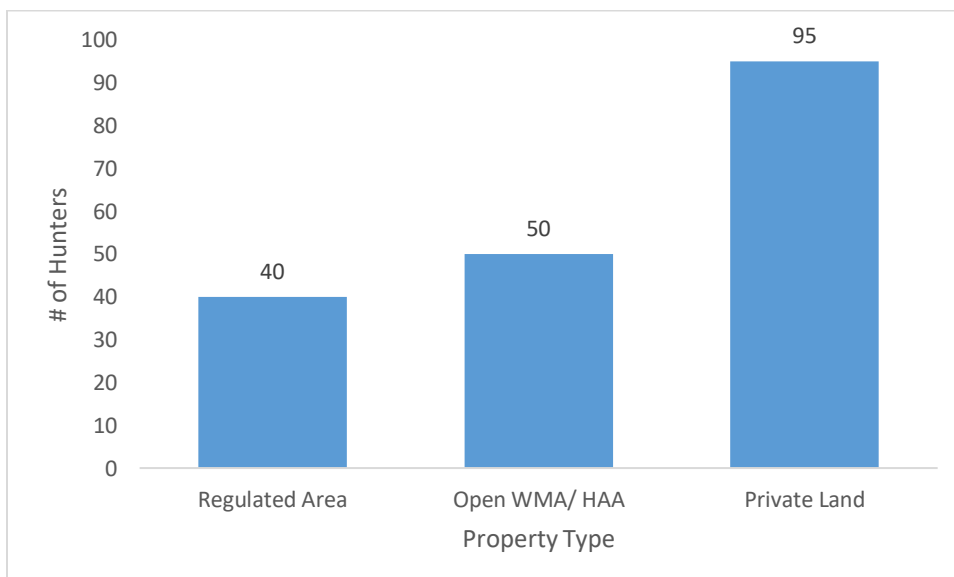
**Question 23. What type of land did you harvest your elk on?**

For this analysis, responses were considered from hunters that reported an elk harvest in Question 22.

Answered: 185

Skipped: 1

Figure 4. Elk Harvest by Property Type.





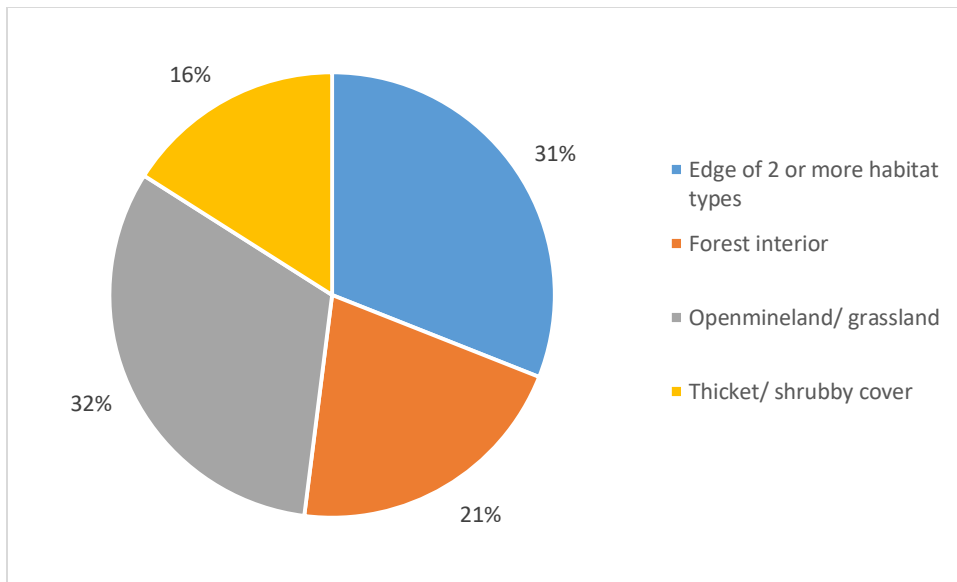
Slightly more than half of all successful hunters in this survey (51%; 95) harvested their elk on private property, followed by open access Wildlife Management Areas and/ or Hunter Access Areas (27%; 50), and Regulated Areas (22%; 40). The majority of the elk management zone is owned by private individuals or entities.

**Question 24. What habitat type was your elk in when you harvested it?**

For this analysis, responses were only considered from hunters that reported an elk harvest in Question 22.

Answered: 185                      Skipped: 1

Figure 5. Elk Harvest by Habitat Type.



**Question 25. How did you get your elk out of the field?**

For this analysis, responses were only considered from hunters that reported an elk harvest in Question 22.

Answered: 186                      Skipped: 0

Table 6. Game Retrieval Method.

Game Retrieval Method	Percent of Hunters
Whole directly into truck	44%
Whole directly into ATV/ UTV	29%
In parts packed out with backpacks	17%
In parts by ATV/ UTV	6%
Other*	4%

\*The responses within this category included in parts by truck, or hunters who recovered their elk multiple days after shooting it (i.e., found the elk they shot decomposing, removed head).

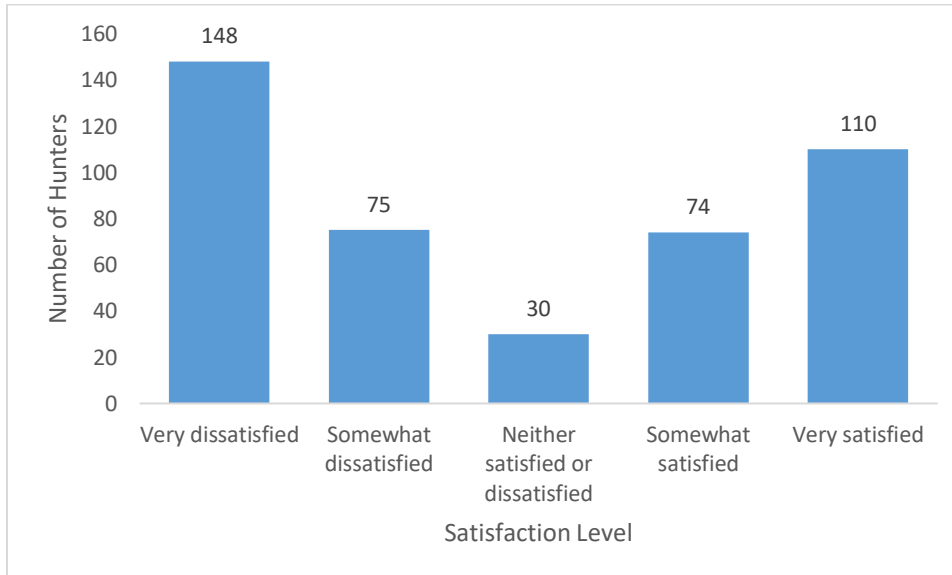
The majority of successful survey respondents (73%) indicated they were able to get their elk out of the field whole with either a truck or ATV/UTV.

**Question 26. Thinking back over your entire elk hunt, how satisfied were you with your elk hunt overall?**

Answered: 437

Skipped: 42

Figure 6. 2019 Kentucky Elk Hunter Satisfaction.



A slight majority of survey respondents (51%) indicated they had some level of dissatisfaction with their 2019 elk hunt. Interestingly, the number of respondents that reported some level of satisfaction with their hunt (184) is approximately equal to the number of respondents that reported a successful harvest (186; Question 22 above). Although not a new concept, these data suggest that for the 2019 Kentucky elk hunt, hunter satisfaction was strongly related to a successful elk harvest.

**Question 27. If you were selected for a regulated area, did you hunt on the regulated area you had access to?**

Answered: 242

Skipped: 257

69% of hunters that gained access to an RA (either in the initial or “leftover draw”) indicated they hunted the property.

Hunters that answered “no” to Question 27 (73) were asked to provide the reason they chose not to hunt the RA they were selected for.

Answered: 43

Skipped: 30

Of the 43 hunters that did not hunt the RA they were selected for:

35% reported little-to-no elk sign on the property or elk at lower densities.

23% found elk elsewhere (includes private and public land access).

9% claimed their guide/ outfitter did not want to go there.

7% expressed concern with other hunters in the area.

7% said the landowner removed access to the RA prior to their season.

7% said the terrain was too difficult.

7% were classified as “other” (i.e., did not fit into an established/ common category).

5% said online maps provided by KDFWR were insufficient, or boundaries not marked.

**Question 28. How many days did you hunt and scout on the regulated area?**

Only data from hunters that responded to Question 27 were used in this analysis. Two responses from hunters that answered “No” to Question 27 were omitted due to conflicting information.

Answered: 209

Skipped: 31

Table 7. Hunter Effort on Regulated Areas.

Number of Days Scouting and Hunting	Did not Hunt the RA (n = 71)	Did Hunt the RA (n = 169)
1	23	18
2 – 5	15	88
6 – 10	1	44
11+	1	19
Blank*	31	0

52% of respondents who hunted an RA spent between 2 – 5 days scouting and hunting the property. Of those who answered the question, it appears that the majority (58%) of hunters that did not hunt their drawn RA only spent 1 day scouting the property.

**Question 29. Approximately how many total elk did you see on the regulated area while hunting and scouting?**

Only data from hunters that responded to Question 27 were used in this analysis. Two responses from hunters that answered “No” to Question 27 were omitted due to conflicting information.

Answered: 221

Skipped: 19

Table 8. Number of Elk Observed while Scouting and Hunting on Regulated Areas.

Number of Elk Seen Hunting and/ or Scouting	Did not Hunt the RA (n = 71)	Did Hunt the RA (n = 169)
0	45	63
1 – 10	7	84
11 – 20	0	0
21 – 30	0	18
31 - 40	0	0

41 – 50	0	1
50+	0	3
Blank*	19	0

Approximately 50% of respondents that hunted an RA observed between 1 – 10 elk on the property.

**Question 30. Did you harvest an elk on the selected regulated area?**

Only data from hunters that responded “Yes” to Question 27 were used in this analysis.

Answered: 169                      Skipped: 0

33% of respondents that hunted an RA reported they were successful on their 2019 elk hunt.

**Question 31. How can KDFWR improve the regulated area program?**

This was an open response question where respondents were given the opportunity to comment on the RA program. Although not every hunter had the opportunity to physically hunt and/ or scout an RA, answers from all survey respondents were examined to get a better understanding of consumer satisfaction and understanding of the RA program.

Answered: 437                      Skipped: 42

When asked how KDFWR can improve the RA program, survey respondents shared the following answers:

- 20% had no comments or suggestions for way to improve the RA program
- 13% wanted more spots (including more hunters allowed on individual properties and for KDFWR to acquire more property to hunt)
- 13% asked for properties with more elk on them
- 8% of responses were classified as “other” as there was no common theme with other responses
- 8% requested better maps, marked boundaries, or access point information
- 8% wanted to reduce other uses on the property (i.e., ATVs, other hunting, landowner conflicts, better enforcement of non-RA hunters, etc.)
- 7% indicated they like the RA program “as is”
- 5% asked for better habitat management on RAs
- 5% asked for more information and/ or data, including communication between KDFWR and hunters
- 5% provided a response not related to the RA program
- 3% suggested better field observations or abundance estimates for elk on the property
- 2% requested less restrictions on the properties

2% wanted to remove the program to make all of the land public

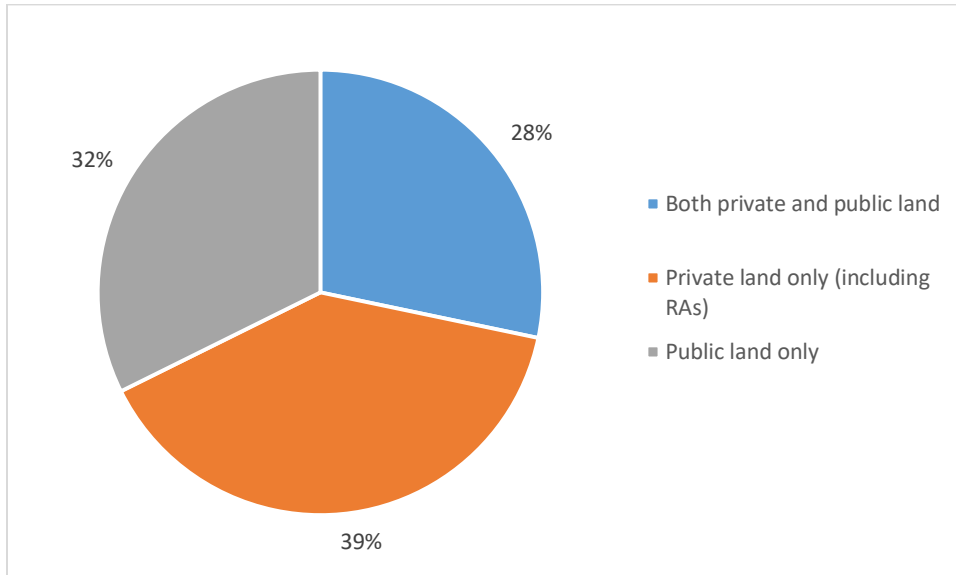
2% wanted to prohibit guiding on RAs and/ or public property

**Question 32. Which of the following types of lands did you elk hunt on?**

Answered: 432

Skipped: 47

Figure 7. Elk Hunting by Land Ownership.



**Question 33. Have you ever hunted elk before your Kentucky elk hunt?**

Answered: 475

Skipped: 24

68% of survey respondents indicated they had never hunted elk prior to the 2019 Kentucky elk hunting season.

**Question 34. Have you ever hunted, or been a part of an elk hunt in Kentucky before?**

Answered: 473

Skipped: 26

76% of survey respondents had never hunted or been a part of a Kentucky elk hunt prior to the 2019 Kentucky elk hunt.

**Question 35. If you have additional comments or recommendations, please enter them in the box below.**

Answered: 311

Skipped: 168

When asked if they had any additional comments or suggestions, survey respondents shared the following:

18% expressed their frustration with low elk observations during their hunt, or requested more elk in Kentucky

16% had no suggestions for improving the elk hunt, or liked it “as is”

10% wanted to have longer elk seasons

9% suggested KDFWR do away with the EHU system

7% expressed the desire to close elk season for several years in one way or another (mainly including cow hunting, but some advocated for the closure of all elk hunting in Kentucky)

7% expressed their desire for more public land elk hunting opportunities

5% suggested the need for better habitat including removal of feral livestock

5% want KDFWR to stop trapping and translocating elk

5% asked for the ability to defer their permits, or be drawn again without a waiting period (particularly if the hunt was unsuccessful)

5% expressed frustration with guiding services and asked for better regulation of these services, or to prohibit them from utilizing public land

5% of responses were classified as “other” as there was no common theme with other responses

4% requested better mapping of properties or access points

3% wanted more law enforcement to stop poaching and prevent illegal uses of properties

**Appendix A.**

Permit Type	Guide?	Days Hunted	Elk Observed		Elk Missed (per hunter)	Elk Wounded (per hunter)	Harvest
			Cows	Bulls			
Bull Week 1	Guided (n = 26)	3.4	2.1	1.3	0.11	0.03	54%
	Unguided (n = 33)	3.5	1.7	1.2	0.03	0	45%
Bull Week 2	Guided (n = 28)	4.3	1.6	1.0	0.07	0	39%
	Unguided (n = 26)	4	2.1	1.1	0.04	0	31%
Archery	Guided (n = 56)	7.8	4.7	2.8	0.17	0.23	29%
	Unguided (n = 70)	7.6	3.8	2.3	0.17	0.01	37%
Cow Week 1	Guided (n = 30)	3.3	6.6	2.9	0.1	0	57%
	Unguided (n = 47)	3.4	3.3	1.5	0	0.02	43%
Cow Week 2	Guided (n = 21)	2.8	4.2	2.3	0.05	0	65%
	Unguided (n = 65)	3.4	7.5	2.6	0.06	0.03	38%
Youth	Guided (n = 5)	3.8	5.3	1.4	0	0	60%
	Unguided (n = 9)	8.2	5.5	2.3	0	0	56%
Other Permit	Guided (n = 8)	8.1	0.6	1.9	0	0	50%
	Unguided (n = 12)	7.2	7.4	3.5	0.08	0.08	75%

Summary results for 2019 Kentucky elk hunt survey respondents. Data used in these analyses were derived from survey questions 16 and 18 – 22. Only respondents that answered question 16 were included in this dataset to allow for comparisons between guided and unguided hunters. Data are provided for reference only. Elk Program staff receive numerous requests regarding the necessity for a guide and/ or the ability to be successful as a “do it yourself” hunter.