

With the passage of [301 KAR 3:140](#) in October 2025, Kentucky joined a long list of states to regulate the use of unmanned aircraft, i.e. drones, by hunters and anglers in the pursuit of those and related activities. To guide users, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources has compiled this Q&A.

Can I use a drone to find game animals and direct myself or fellow hunters to those animals in order to harvest them?

No. Drones cannot be used to fish, hunt or take wildlife. “Take” includes pursuing, shooting, hunting, wounding, catching, killing, trapping, snaring or capturing wildlife in any way.

I – or a friend – shot an elk (or deer) and can’t find it. Can a drone be used to search for and help recover that animal?

Yes. Kentucky’s drone laws regulate “take,” not “recovery.” However, recovery involves an animal that is presumed to be dead. If a drone operator finds that an animal is still alive, even if seriously wounded, the further pursuit of that wounded animal is considered an act of “taking.” The drone can no longer be involved in pursuit of that animal. If the animal is found to be dead, however, the drone operator may direct the hunter to that animal so its carcass can be recovered.

Can I use a drone to drive, herd or push animals – such as elk, deer or ducks – to a particular spot or keep them in a certain area?

No. It is illegal to herd or harass wildlife in any way.

Can I attach a spotlight to a drone to search for wildlife or a wounded animal at night?

It is illegal to shine an artificial light on wildlife at night, unless exempted by KRS 150.395, which allows anyone involved in activities legitimate to their business, such as a legitimate deer recovery business.

Can I use a drone to scout terrain, even during a hunting season?

Yes. Kentucky’s statutes govern hunting, not scouting. However, drone operators should be careful not to cross the line into pursuing an animal. For example, it is illegal to hover a drone over a herd of elk while directing a hunter to those elk so one can be harvested.

Can I operate a drone at night that is equipped with infrared or thermal technology?

Yes.

Can I fly a drone on a Wildlife Management Area?

Yes – a drone can be flown on a WMA for personal use if the property is both operated and owned by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. If a WMA is operated by Fish and Wildlife but owned by another government agency – such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or the U.S. Forest Service – then drone use is governed by that agency. For

details about public lands open to hunting, see the [Public Lands Hunting](#) section of [fw.ky.gov](#).

Can a commercial drone operator fly a drone on public land or be hired to do so?

No. Commercial activity – including drone services – is prohibited on public land.

I shot a deer that ran onto a neighbor's land. Can I use a drone to search for it?

Yes, with caveats: One, you must adhere to FAA regulations related to airspace restrictions, altitude, visual line of sight, testing and registration. Two, to avoid the potential for complications and conflict, drone operators are strongly encouraged to seek permission or a waiver from the adjoining property owner before flying the drone over their property. Three, if the deer is observed to still be alive, even if wounded, the drone operator must back off – it is illegal to use a drone in the pursuit or take of a live animal. And four, if the deer is observed to be dead, a hunter or an assistant must obtain permission to physically enter that adjoining property to retrieve the deer.

Can a drone be used to take fish?

No. It is illegal to use a drone in the pursuit or catching of fish. However, drones can be used by commercial anglers looking for and removing invasive carp.

Can I fly a drone into a bear den or near a dened bear in order to observe it?

No. Using a drone to harass wildlife is illegal.

I'm hunting near a property line. My neighbor is using a drone to scare animals away. Is that legal?

No. It is illegal to use a drone to disrupt or interfere with a legal hunt.

What are the penalties for using a drone related to hunting and fishing in ways that are not permitted?

A violation of 301 KAR 3:140 is a criminal offense. Depending upon the circumstances, violators could be assessed fines and/or jail time if convicted. Game wardens will enforce the law as it is written, just like with other hunting and fishing regulations.

For additional information, the public may contact their local Kentucky Game Warden or the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Information Center at (800) 858-1549 or info.center@ky.gov, weekdays 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (Eastern), except holidays.