

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing



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Why doesn't Kentucky have a preference points system for the Elk Hunt Drawing?

Answer: A preference points system is not in the best interest of Kentucky elk hunt applicants. This is because there are many more elk hunt applicants than elk permits in Kentucky. Some hunters have recommended that the KDFWR use preference points, similar to some western states. However, some western states with preference point systems offer more permits to *nonresidents* than Kentucky has *total* elk permits. Consider the following illustration. If KDFWR used a preference point system, and 50,000 people applied (a realistic number given past application rates), and 1,000 permits were available each year, it would take *50 years* for everyone to receive a permit! In the second year of drawing under a preference points system, an applicant's odds at drawing a permit would be equal to the other 49,000 people who earned a preference point during the first year. In reality, odds under a preference point system would not even be as good as described above because this illustration makes three unrealistic assumptions: 1) no additional applicants ever enter the lottery, 2) the number of available elk permits never fluctuates, and 3) no one could ever be drawn more than once. The current drawing system provides the benefit of affording each applicant for a particular hunt type an *equal chance* of being drawn *every year*. It does not discriminate against or act as a deterrent to new hunters, seniors, youths, or anyone else who enters the drawing from having an opportunity to be drawn within a reasonable period of time. A preference point system would neither guarantee that an individual would ever be drawn, nor would it necessarily improve anyone's odds of being drawn during any given year. Although the issues above stem from Kentucky's relatively low elk permit quota (800-1,000 permits in recent years), preference point systems have not always worked in the interest of applicants in western states, either. Many western states have experienced "point creep" because an ever-increasing number of applicants enter their drawings, constantly pushing up the number of preference points (and thus years) required before one could *possibly* receive a permit.

Why has the Department increased the number of times a person could apply...is it "all about the money"?

Answer: KDFWR has increased the number of entries per individual primarily because of hunter interest and requests. Hunters communicated to KDFWR that they wanted to be able to apply more than once and be able to compete for the specific hunt types they wanted to pursue. Once the elk herd grew and could sustain a harvest of hundreds of animals, we diversified to four permit types (bull-firearm, bull-archery, cow-firearm, and cow-archery). We began the expansion of application opportunity with "pick two" in 2011 and to "pick four" in 2015 (individuals may apply for each of the hunt types if they so choose). This has allowed people to apply for the specific hunt types they are interested in, and it has helped generate more funding to secure additional public hunting access, to more adequately fund research and management of the elk herd, and to help develop related recreational opportunities. Most sportsmen and sportswomen are proud that KDFWR is user-funded and receives no General Fund state tax monies, and believe their application and license fees are well spent for the outstanding opportunities available in Kentucky.

Why does the number of elk tags sometimes vary from year to year?

Answer: The number of available elk hunt permits can change from year to year for several reasons. The most important reason overall is that KDFWR sets the total elk quota so that all Kentucky elk hunters have good opportunity for a quality hunt, which means adequate public hunting access and reasonable likelihood at harvesting an elk. A related reason is elk herd management in individual elk hunt areas. Each year, Kentucky's elk biologists evaluate harvest rates and elk population estimates in each unit and determine how many elk should be harvested the next year; depending on the year, some areas can withstand higher harvest and some may need to have the harvest decreased. Using this and other information, the permit quota is then set for the following year. Another important reason is the amount of public hunting access available to elk hunters each year. KDFWR owns or controls very little land in the elk zone; most property is owned by coal companies, federal agencies, and private landowners. Some land that is open for public hunting is sold and/or closed to public access each year, so KDFWR works hard every year to find new areas for public access and sometimes adjusts the elk permit quota based on total public access available. To help ensure that as

many drawn hunters as possible have quality hunts and a reasonable opportunity to harvest an elk, KDFWR takes the amount of public hunting lands and other factors into account when setting permit numbers. This provides a better hunting experience than simply maximizing the number of permits available without regard to available access.

Why hasn't the Department significantly increased the number of tags available in recent years?

Answer: Over the last several years, the number of elk permits has stabilized at 700-1,000. The number of elk hunt permits (or permit "quota") is designed to provide maximum sustainable opportunity while maintaining a quality herd. The Kentucky elk population appears to be stable at an estimated 10,000 animals, meaning that hunter harvest and other mortality factors are maintaining the herd at a sustainable level. If future population estimates indicate additional herd growth, KDFWR will likely seek to issue more permits. As mentioned in the answer to the previous question, public hunting access inside the elk zone is also an important factor in setting the elk permit quota.

Why is the Department providing elk to other states...can't we instead increase number of elk permits?

Answer: It is important to remember that Kentucky received about 1,500 elk from several other states from 1997-2002. If other states had not shared their elk with us, we would not have elk in Kentucky at all today! State fish and wildlife agencies have a long history of cooperating together on species restoration. This interagency cooperation is one reason we currently enjoy thriving populations of white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, and many species of important sport fish in Kentucky. These cooperation agreements usually involve a trade of desirable wildlife or related resources between the states, meaning that the sportsmen of each state benefit from the trades. In recent years, KDFWR has provided elk to Virginia and Missouri. Most recently, KDFWR has committed to provide up to 150 elk (25-50 animals per year over a period of 3-5 years) to Wisconsin, in return for financial assistance to improve Kentucky's ruffed grouse habitat. The elk used in these trades come from private lands where elk are causing damage and/or areas that are difficult for the public to gain access, and thus would have minimal impact on public hunting opportunity.

Why doesn't KDFWR allow the elk herd to expand outside the elk zone, so permit numbers can be increased?

Answer: When creating the foundation for the elk restoration program in the mid-1990s, KDFWR worked to develop a framework for mutual agreement with important stakeholders including the Kentucky Farm Bureau and other farm organizations, landowner groups, and state legislators. One of the terms of agreement was that KDFWR would manage the elk herd to keep it within the designated 16-county elk zone, where land use and vehicular traffic were most compatible. To meet this obligation, KDFWR allows individuals to purchase out-of-zone elk hunt permits "over-the-counter" to be used outside the 16-county elk zone. These tags help KDFWR maintain its original agreement to restrict elk to the restoration zone counties while also providing additional elk hunting opportunity.

Is the number of applicants drawn in each county proportionate to the number of entries per county?

Answer: Because the drawing is randomized, the number of tag recipients per county roughly corresponds to the number of applicants from each county. In any given year, applicant numbers and recipient numbers may not be exactly proportional, but they will more closely mirror each other over time. This occurs due to statistical probabilities. With each passing year, there is a greater likelihood that the "lifetime average" of a county's applications and permit recipients will become proportional.

How does the elk hunt drawing work, since applicants can apply for more than one hunt/permit type?

Answer: Applicants may apply for more than one elk hunt type, but they can only be selected for one permit per year. The computer program that performs the drawing first randomly selects applicants for a particular hunt type, then it proceeds to the next hunt type; as people are drawn, their names are removed from the drawing for the other hunt types. For example, an applicant who applied for all four permit types is kept in the drawing unless picked for a particular permit type, at which time he/she is removed from the drawing for the other permit types. The drawing begins with the youth-only permits, then proceeds to the largest applicant group (bull-firearms), then successively to the remainder of the drawings in order of volume of applications. Thus, those who applied for but were not drawn for a bull-firearm permit remain in the drawing for other permit types they applied for, along with everyone else who applied for each of the other permit types. Because the drawing is random, everyone in the drawing for a particular permit type has the same odds of being drawn in a given year.

For people who are drawn to elk hunt, is there a “waiting period” before they can apply again?

Answer: Yes, applicants drawn for a permit cannot apply for another permit for 3 years.

How do some people get drawn multiple times to elk hunt?

Answer: A very small percentage of elk hunt applicants. We recently analyzed application records and determined that about three-tenths of 1% (0.37%) of applicants had been drawn to hunt more than one time. At that time over 150,000 different people had applied for the drawing. It is possible for an individual to be drawn more than once because the drawing for each permit type is completely random, so each year the odds are the same for everyone who applies for a particular hunt type. This keeps the drawing completely fair and equitable, and affords each applicant opportunity to be drawn each year. However, those who are drawn are automatically blocked from applying for 3 years.

Are there any other ways I can get an elk tag?

Answer: There are five different ways people can obtain an elk permit: 1) the [Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing](#), 2) [Out-of-Zone Elk Permits](#), 3) [Landowner-Cooperator Elk Permits](#), 4) [Special Commission Elk Permits](#) (10 per year), and 5) the new [Voucher Cooperator Elk Permits](#). Out-of-zone Elk Permits may be purchased “over the counter” and used by licensed hunters to hunt elk outside of the elk zone counties. The number of Landowner-Cooperator Elk Permits varies annually depending on number of landowners and acreages enrolled in program; one permit is provided to a participating landowner in return for each 5,000 acres of public access provided in the elk zone. Special Commission Elk Permits are awarded to organizations doing conservation-related work in Kentucky, who typically sell or raffle the permits to help fund their [programs](#). The new Voucher Cooperator Elk Permits allow landowners with a minimum of 100 acres to build up credits toward an elk permit by allowing elk hunting access and elk to be harvested on their property; more info on this program is available [here](#). Landowner-Cooperator Elk Permits, Special Commission Elk Permits, and Voucher Cooperator Elk Permits are transferrable (may be given or sold by the recipient to another individual). Offering different types of permits as incentives for landowners to allow public access and setting aside a very limited number of special permits for fundraising opportunities to benefit the state’s people and conservation efforts is a common practice among state fish and wildlife agencies across the United States.

How do TV personalities and other public figures get elk tags?

Answer: Public figures and outdoor personalities do not receive preference in obtaining elk hunt permits; they are required to obtain an elk permit in the same manner as any other member of the general public. Some are invited guests or clients of Landowner-Cooperators, and some purchase their permits from the organizations that receive Special Commission Elk Permits.

How do we know the drawing isn't "rigged" ...why isn't it broadcast or otherwise publicized?

Answer: The Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing is currently conducted by the Commonwealth Office of Technology (COT, the state Information Technology agency). COT is a third party that is totally independent of KDFWR. KDFWR provides the list of all applicants by permit type to COT, which in turn uses a computer program to randomly select applicants for each hunt type. Once the list of drawn applicants is returned to KDFWR, the results are uploaded without changes and applicants are provided appropriate notifications in their "My Profile" based on whether they were selected in the drawing. KDFWR previously conducted the drawing using a computer program equivalent to COT's; this program was reviewed in multiple external audits and shown to be free of any impropriety. Despite the additional cost, KDFWR decided to contract with this agency to conduct the drawing to demonstrate that the drawing is random and impartial, since it is conducted by an outside entity. When the Elk Hunt Drawing was very small (less than 100 permits), the drawing was manually conducted, recorded and televised. As the number of permits and applicants grew over the years, however, it became necessary to transition to a computer-aided drawing system.

Why isn't the list of drawn applicants published for public review?

Answer: Names of successful applicants are not released in order to protect their privacy. When names of elk permit recipients were publicly released in the past, many of them were actively and aggressively contacted by guide services and media representatives. Some elk hunters told KDFWR that the unsolicited contacts bordered on harassment, and requested that the names of future recipients not be made public. KDFWR protects the privacy of its customers, not only for the elk quota drawing but also for other drawings such as the quota deer, small game and waterfowl quota hunts on Wildlife Management Areas. The lists of drawn applicants are still subject to open records requests, per state law, but customer contact information is not released.

Why don't people who live in the elk zone get more permits...we have to live with the elk and sometimes experience crop or other damage from them, so why shouldn't we benefit more from them?

Answer: Elk, like all other free-ranging fish and wildlife, are a public resource. KDFWR is legally obligated to regulate and manage these wildlife populations for the benefit of all citizens. As a result of this public-trust responsibility, KDFWR seeks to provide the same opportunities to everyone. In the case of elk hunting, this is accomplished through the Elk Hunt Drawing. KDFWR staff has worked hard to help residents experiencing conflicts with elk to resolve those issues using a variety of management strategies.

What are my odds of being drawn if I apply?

Answer: The odds of being drawn vary from year to year and by hunt type. This occurs because the number of people applying for each hunt type fluctuates from year to year. Historically, bull permits have been more competitive than cow permits, and firearm permits have been more competitive than archery permits. There is no way to predict what the odds of *future* drawings will be, but KDFWR does report number of applicants and number drawn by county each year after the drawing is conducted. This is available at fw.ky.gov on the "[Elk Info](#)" page under the heading "Elk Draw 2017 Stats."

How many elk hunt permits are awarded to nonresidents?

Answer: Nonresident applicants receive no more than 10% of the total elk hunt permits in the drawing. Thus Kentucky residents receive 90% or more of the total permits awarded. In a given year, if the drawing reaches 10% of nonresidents selected, nonresidents are removed from the drawing at that point. About 35% of total

applicants in the past have been nonresidents, so odds of being drawn are significantly lower for nonresidents. The nonresident quota percentage for Kentucky's elk hunt is similar to that of other states with limited-opportunity drawings that include nonresidents.