



Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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How many Kentucky elk hunting permits are available?

500 general permits are currently available through the Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing each year. These 500 permits are broken down into the following four (4) permit types:

Bull Firearm = 140

Cow Firearm = 164

Either-sex Archery/ Crossbow = 170

Youth only = 26

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

Each applicant may submit one application for each desired elk permit type. Permit types include bull firearm, cow firearm, and/or either-sex archery crossbow. There are also special youth-only permits that applicants 15 and younger may apply for, which have special benefits that allow for either sex of elk to be taken with any legal equipment in season. However, an applicant can only be selected for one permit type any given year, regardless of how many permit types they apply for. 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 firearm), then successively through the remainder of the permit 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.

What is the Loyalty Redraw, and how does it work?

The Loyalty Redraw is a secondary drawing of leftover (unpurchased) permits and is used to reward long-time applicants in the Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing who have never received an elk permit. Typically, 15 to 25 permits awarded through the general Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing remain unpurchased each year; these are then made available to the annual pool of Loyalty Redraw applicants in a secondary, random drawing. Applicants who have applied the most total years without ever being drawn

are automatically entered each year into the Loyalty Redraw to receive permits that go unpurchased by the June 15 deadline. These long-time applicants must apply in the current year to be eligible for the Loyalty Redraw that year. Loyalty Redraw winners are notified of their selection in their My Profile accounts at fw.ky.gov and are offered a permit for that same year. If Loyalty Redraw winners choose not to purchase their permit offered or simply do not respond, they forfeit their “loyalty years” and start over with accumulating loyalty years for eligibility in future Loyalty Redraws, but do not have to sit out from the general Elk Hunt Drawing for 3-years.

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

Yes -- applicants drawn for a permit cannot apply for another elk permit through the Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing for 3 years. After this sit-out period, they may reapply.

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

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 500 permits were available each year, it would take 100 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. 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. For a more detailed explanation of why the department doesn't use a points system, visit our website [here](#).

Elk Hunt Loyalty Redraw

Instead of creating a points system, the Loyalty Redraw was established to reward those who have applied consistently over time. Through the Loyalty Redraw, those who have applied the most years without ever being drawn are placed in this secondary drawing for leftover permits—those that remain unpurchased by the June 15 deadline each year. Typically, <5% of permits go unpurchased, creating this special Loyalty Redraw opportunity for loyal applicants.

Why isn't the drawing a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity, so everyone can have the chance to hunt elk in Kentucky?

The Department has surveyed both applicants and those drawn to hunt elk in Kentucky multiple times regarding their opinions and preferences, and few support a **once-in-a-lifetime** elk hunting restriction. The waiting period most supported (including among those who have never been drawn) is 3 years; this is why the sit-out period for those who are drawn for any permit was set at 3 years. Moreover, even if a lifetime ban was put in place on those who had been drawn, it would not guarantee anyone that they would be drawn in the future; there are simply too many applicants for the limited number of permits available each year for there ever to be a "guarantee" of being drawn.

Why do we have a drawing for elk permits? Why not sell elk permits “over the counter”?

Simply put, each year there is a very large number of applicants (tens of thousands) compared to the much smaller number of available elk permits (a few hundred). Without a drawing, the sheer number of elk hunters in the field each year would create undesirable conflicts between elk hunters; in addition to managing for a sustainable herd of elk, managing hunter opportunity so hunters' experiences are as positive as possible is an important consideration. The amount of land that is open to public access is also a major concern, as well as the distribution of public access lands across the entire elk zone. These are all important reasons for establishing and utilizing elk hunting hunts within the elk zone, to distribute hunters and hunting pressure across the elk zone.

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

A very small percentage of elk hunt applicants have been drawn more than once. Those who are drawn are automatically blocked from applying for 3 years, but after this sit-out period these applicants may again enter the drawing. The department has analyzed application records and determined that less than 1% of applicants have ever been drawn to elk hunt more than one time. The number of people who have been drawn more than twice is a fraction of a percent. More than 200,000 different individuals have applied for the drawing since 2001. Tens of thousands apply each year, and with a few hundred permits are available per year a small percentage of applicants are drawn any given year. 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, affording each applicant who enters the drawing the opportunity to be drawn each year the same as anyone else.

How do we know the drawing isn't “rigged”? Why isn't it broadcast or otherwise publicized?

To assure the drawing is fair and impartial, the Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing is conducted by the Commonwealth Office of Technology (COT, the state's Information Technology agency). COT is a third party that is totally independent of KDFWR. After assigning a unique customer number to each applicant to the drawing in a given year, KDFWR provides the anonymous list of all applicants by permit type to COT, which in turn uses a computer program to randomly select applicants for each hunt type. After the drawing is completed, names are merged back with applicants' records using their unique identifying numbers. As a further step of transparency and accountability, the Department contracts with a separate private accounting firm to audit and certify the

drawing and its results each year. Once the list of drawn applicants is produced by COT, the auditor obtains the sealed results and delivers them securely for public announcement to the host of each year's public results revealing event. A copy of the results are next provided to the department for uploading into applicants' My Profile accounts at fw.ky.gov, 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 COT to conduct the drawing to demonstrate that the drawing is random and impartial, and 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.

Drawing results are announced each year at a public revealing event, which is livestreamed from both the Department's Facebook and the host organization channel(s).

Are there any other ways I can get an elk permit in Kentucky, besides the Elk Hunt Drawing?

There are several 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),
5. the [Voucher Cooperator Elk Permits](#) and the new
6. Bluegrass Bonus Big Game Hunt Drawing.

Most available permits are awarded randomly through the general Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing.

Open to drawing applications beginning in August 2025 at fw.ky.gov for the 2026-2027 big game hunting seasons, the new Bluegrass Bonus Drawing offers several unique "super tag" opportunities to harvest elk as well as bonus deer, bear and turkeys

along with sponsored prize packages. Permits will be included in the price of entry for the winners. Elk permits awarded through the special Bluegrass Bonus drawing will allow recipients to hunt in any elk unit(s) with any legal method during any open elk season.

Applications will be received at fw.ky.gov from August 1 through May 31 each year; any applicant who also receives a permit through the general Elk Hunt Drawing that year may defer their special Bluegrass Bonus permit to the next year or transfer the permit to a family member to hunt in the same year! All proceeds from this special drawing will be used to support the Department's conservation and recreation programs.

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; because relatively few elk occur outside the 16-county elk zone, opportunities to harvest an elk with this permit type are very limited. 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](#). 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 our conservation efforts and help create new opportunities is a common practice among state fish and wildlife agencies across the United States.

Do I have to hire a guide if I'm drawn?

No -- licensed guides are available to assist elk hunters, but the department does not require use of a guide. Approximately 40-60% of Kentucky's elk hunters do not use a guide; many of them report having great hunts, and harvest rates are still among the top in the nation for elk states. A variety of factors weigh into do-it-yourself hunter

success, with top factors being time and effort put into 1) research and scouting in the designated elk hunting unit, and 2) the actual hunt itself. Some hunters (especially those pursuing cows) put in a relatively low amount of time and effort into their hunts, and their harvest rate reflects that. The department does not endorse particular guides, but rather encourages hunters considering use of a guide to thoroughly research their options, including online reviews and references. Hiring a guide does not guarantee a certain quality of experience nor does it ensure a harvest. Guides often book up available hunt slots soon after the drawing results are announced.

Is there public land in every unit to hunt?

Yes, although the amount of public land in elk hunting units varies. The department owns and controls a small percentage of the total acreage within the elk zone, and thus depends on federal lands and landowners in the elk zone who allow public access to hunters via agreements with the department. Because some of the land in the elk zone changes hands (is bought/sold) each year, and land management activities such as mining or forestry practices also change over time, public land acreage varies somewhat year to year. Maps of public land in the elk zone are posted (and updated as needed) on the department's website here: [Game Maps - Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife](#)

Is the Department currently providing elk to other states?

No -- the Department is not currently sharing elk with other states and hasn't since 2019. In total, 322 elk were provided to 3 other states (Missouri, Virginia and Wisconsin) over a period of 10 years, concluding in 2019. Because of the substantial size and geographic scope of Kentucky's elk population, conservative elk permit quotas over time, and steady growth in our elk herd, the number of elk previously shared with other states is relatively inconsequential to our population.

The Department does live-capture and release elk within the elk zone for research and management purposes, such as for attaching tracking transmitters, to collect health and reproductive data, and sometimes to distribute elk within the elk zone. Most recently, the Department relocated several elk to Daniel Boone National Forest in McCreary County, the last county in the elk zone that did not have consistent use by elk. Reproduction has subsequently been documented at this new restoration site, where

elk continue to use Beaver Creek WMA and expand into other areas in McCreary County.

Also, 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 fishes in Kentucky. These cooperative agreements between states usually involve a trade of desirable wildlife or related resources between the states, meaning that the sportsmen of each state benefit from the trades. The elk that were used in sharing small numbers each year came from private lands where elk were causing damage and/or areas that had no or very limited public access, and thus had minimal to no impact on public hunting opportunities..

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

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, local government officials, and state legislators. One of the terms of agreement was that KDFWR would manage the elk herd to keep it within the designated elk zone, where land use and vehicular traffic were most compatible. To fulfil 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 maintain the elk within the restoration zone counties while also providing additional elk hunting opportunities in surrounding counties as elk wander beyond the boundaries of the elk zone.

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

Yes, the number of people drawn per county in Kentucky is approximately proportional to the number of applicants per county, on average. Because the drawing is randomized, the number of permit 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 do TV personalities and other public figures get Kentucky elk permits?

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 landowners or organizations that receive Special Commission Elk Permits. Please see the question and answer above, “Are there other ways I can get an elk permit?”

Is the list of drawn applicants published by the department?

Names and locations of the applicants who are drawn are publicly announced each year at a special public event that is also livestreamed for public viewing. The department does not publish a printed list of applicants with contact information in order to protect their privacy. When names of elk permit recipients were published early in the history of the drawing, many of them were contacted by guide services or media representatives. Many elk hunters advised KDFWR that these unsolicited contacts were undesirable and requested that the department no longer publish this information. KDFWR protects the privacy of its customers, not only for the Elk Hunt Drawing but also for other drawings such as the quota deer, and waterfowl quota hunts on Wildlife Management Areas. The lists of drawn applicants are still subject to Kentucky’s open records law, but customer contact information is not subject to disclosure.

What are my odds of being drawn if I apply?

The odds of being drawn vary from year to year and by hunt type. This occurs because the number of people applying and the makeup of those 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 Stats.” Because the drawing is random, each applicant has the same odds of being drawn any another who applies for the same permit types, so we encourage everyone to apply for the types of hunts they’re interested in. *You can’t win if you don’t apply!*

How many elk permits go to nonresidents?

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. For example, with a total annual elk permit quota of 500 permits, no more than 50 of these permits go to nonresidents. This percentage allotment of permits to nonresidents is similar to what many other states afford nonresidents in their big game drawings.

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 obviously 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. For transparency, the department publishes the total number of applications and number of nonresidents selected in the drawing each year here.

Why not limit the drawing to residents only?

Although only one-tenth of elk permits are available to nonresidents, this opportunity is important for several reasons. One reason is that many Kentuckians hunt and fish in other states, and our residents expect to have such opportunities; states allowing nonresidents to share in their hunting and fishing opportunities is a desirable and mutually beneficial relationship for wildlife recreationists, who are increasingly mobile and may choose to participate in more than one state any given year. Another reason is that nonresidents have contributed financially and in other ways to historic fish and wildlife restoration and management activities across states and in Kentucky through their user fees such as nonresident licenses and permits. This is certainly true for the elk hunt program, which was funded by both resident and nonresident hunting license

dollars. In addition, well over \$1 Million in initial funding for relocation of elk in Kentucky was supplied by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, which comes from donations of hunters from all across North America and the world. Yet another reason for providing opportunities to nonresidents is their close ties to Kentucky. Our surveys of customers indicate that most nonresidents have direct connections to Kentucky, such as having family and friends who currently reside in the commonwealth and/or themselves being natives of Kentucky.

Why don't people who live in the elk zone get more permits?

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 random 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. Thankfully today the instances of elk causing property damage are very uncommon.

Are Kentucky's elk permits transferrable?

No -- elk permits awarded through the Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing are only valid for the applicant selected through the random drawing. This ensures that the drawing is fair and equitable for all applicants.

Is it possible to apply as a group?

No -- applicants must apply for the Kentucky Elk Hunt Drawing as individuals; thus applicants are treated independently in the drawing, which further ensures fairness for everyone who applies.