

Survey of 2016-17 Season Elk Hunters

Survey Purpose and Methods

To better understand the opinions and experiences of Kentucky elk hunters, KDFWR staff provided a survey to 2016-17 season elk hunters. The 2016-17 survey replicated many of the survey questions administered to elk hunters surveys from the 2013-14 and 2014-15 seasons to provide insights into potential trends in hunter experiences.

Surveys were sent to email addresses associated with drawn elk hunter applications. Over a 16-day survey window in June/July 2017, we received 343 completed responses. This was a 42% response rate based on the number of valid email addresses to which the survey was sent, and met minimum sample size thresholds for statistical significance at a 95% confidence level.

Responses to Survey Questions

General Information

- Q 1. 85% of respondents were Kentucky residents, 15% were out-of-state residents.
- Q 2. The overwhelming majority of hunters (44%) stated that they chose their particular hunt type (bull archery, bull firearm, cow archery, cow firearm) based on “overall odds of being drawn for any permit.” Roughly equal numbers (20%) regarded sex of the animal and choice of weapon as being most important, followed by the likely odds of being drawn for a particular elk hunt type (12%) and Other (2%).
- Q 3. The majority of respondents (42%) were selected for cow firearm permit, followed by cow archery (29%), bull firearm (17%), and bull archery (12%).

Scouting

- Q 4. A slight majority (53%) of elk hunters made at least one trip to the elk zone to scout before their season began.
- Q 5. Elk hunters who scouted visited the elk zone an average of 4 trips before their season began; median trips per hunter was 2.
- Q 6. The average elk hunter spent a total of \$625 **outside the elk zone** while **scouting**. By category, these expenditures were reported as equipment (\$269), gas (\$134), lodging (\$90), meals (\$81), and other items (\$51).
- Q 7. The average elk hunter spent a total of \$971 **inside the elk zone** while **scouting**. By category, these expenditures were reported as guide/outfitter

service (\$278), equipment (\$211), lodging (\$192), gas (\$126), meals (\$114), and other items (\$50). Considering data from only those elk hunters who used a guide/outfitter service, the average guide fee was \$1,139 with a median expenditure of \$900. The largest reported individual expenditure related to guide/outfitter services was \$3,600.

The Hunt

- Q 8. A strong majority (88%) of respondents actually went elk hunting after being drawn for a permit.
- Q 9. A majority of people (61%) who answered the survey hunted the At-large Area, followed by Hazard LEA (20%), Straight Creek LEA (10%), Tug Fork LEA (4%), Prestonsburg LEA (3%), and Middlesboro LEA (2%).
- Q 10. The average elk hunter spent a total of \$1,429 **outside the elk zone** during their **hunt**. By category, these expenditures were reported as guide/outfitter service (\$433), taxidermy and hide tanning (\$286), equipment (\$258), meat processing (\$134), gas (\$124), lodging (\$86), meals (\$78), and other items (\$30). Considering data from only those elk hunters who used a guide/outfitter service, the average guide fee was \$1,501 with a median expenditure of \$1,500. The largest reported individual expenditure related to guide/outfitter services was \$3,500.
- Q 11. The average elk hunter spent a total of \$1,431 **inside the elk zone** during their **hunt**. By category, these expenditures were reported as guide/outfitter service (\$697), lodging (\$202), equipment (\$147), gas (\$133), meals (\$100), taxidermy/hide tanning (\$54), meat processing (\$52), and other items (\$46). Considering data from only those elk hunters who used a guide/outfitter service, the average guide fee was \$1,448, with a median expenditure of \$1,200. The highest reported individual expenditure related to guide/outfitter services was \$4,000.

Hunting Methods and Hunter Effort

- Q 12. A majority of respondents (61%) did not hire a guide/outfitter service for the 2016-17 elk season.
- Q 13. Regarding hunting methods, a majority of survey respondents (63%) reported that they mostly spotted and stalked on foot, followed by spot and stalk mostly with a vehicle ((51%), blind or stand over trail or travel corridor (11%), blind or stand over food source (4%), and blind or stand over water source (3%). (Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could select more than one option).
- Q 14. Survey respondents reported hunting an average of 8 hours per day.

- Q 15. Survey respondents reported hunting an average of 5 days during the course of their hunt.
- Q 16. Survey respondents reported using an average of 2 helpers during the course of their elk hunt.

Missed Opportunities

- Q 17. A minority of respondents (13%) reported shooting at but missing elk. Survey respondents who reported shooting at but missing elk missed an average of 1.33 elk per hunter, with a median of 1 missed elk per hunter. The reported range of elk shot at but missed was 0 to 4.
- Q 18. A minority of respondents (1%) reported wounding by not recovering elk. Survey respondents who reported wounding but not recovering elk wounded an average of 2.75 elk per hunter, with a median of 1 wounded elk per hunter. The reported range of elk wounded but not recovered was 0 to 8.

Harvest Metrics

- Q 19. A majority (67%) of respondents reported harvesting an elk during their hunt.
- Q 20. Of the respondents who harvested an elk, a slight majority harvested them in open mineland/grassland habitat (41%), followed by edge of 2 or more habitat types (31%), forest interior (14%), and shrubby cover (14%).
- Q 21. A strong majority of respondents (81%) who harvested elk removed their elk from the field as a whole carcass, followed by quartered carcass (16%), and deboned carcass (3%).

Hunter Satisfaction

- Q 22. When thinking back over their entire 2016 elk hunt, a strong majority of respondents (51%) were very satisfied, 17% were somewhat satisfied, 5% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, 11% were somewhat dissatisfied, and 15% were very dissatisfied. It should be noted that the percentage of respondents expressing satisfaction with their experience (68%) corresponds nearly exactly with the percentage of respondents (67%) who reported harvesting an elk during their hunt (see question 19).

Voucher Cooperator Program

- Q 23. A minority (27%) of survey respondents were able to secure hunting access on a Voucher Cooperator Program (VCP) property.

Q 24. Question 24 was an open response question that allowed hunters **who had received access** to a VCP property to provide suggestions for improving the program. Most suggestions could be lumped into the following categories:

- Better control of access points to prevent unauthorized users (non-voucher hunters, ATV and horse riders, etc.) from utilizing the VCP property (31%)
- Increase the number of VCP properties (26%)
- Better maps/and or improved access to information about the VCP areas (21%)
- Remove VCP properties with low elk densities (10%)
- Streamline VCP system research and signup process (10%)
- Provide more scouting opportunity on VCP properties prior to signup day (2%)
- Provide direct access to VCP landowners (2%).

Breakdown of Hunting Property by Ownership Type

Q 25. A slight majority (39%) of respondents hunted on public property only, followed by people who hunted both public and private property (35%), and private property only (including VCP properties; 26%).

Previous Hunting Experience

Q 26. An overwhelming majority (90%) of survey respondents reported hunting big game (deer, elk, bear, moose, or caribou) prior to their 2016-17 elk hunt.

Q 27. However, most (64%) of survey respondents had never hunted elk prior to their 2016-17 Kentucky elk hunt.

Why Drawn Applicants Did Not Hunt

Q 28. As noted in question eight, 12% of survey respondents drawn for a permit did not hunt. The most prevalent reason respondents did not hunt was

- work conflicts/obligations (23%)
- cost/financial obligations (21%)
- illness (13%)
- family conflicts/obligations (10%)
- not interested in hunting the sex of animal for which they were drawn (3%)
- Additional responses included confusion regarding the Kentucky elk hunting process, unfamiliarity with the hunting location, hunting opportunities in other states that they preferred to their drawn Kentucky permit, and a perception that odds of harvesting an animal were too low.

Open Response

Q 29. Question 29 was an open response question that asked for any additional comments/recommendations that had not been covered in previous questions. Comments could be broken down into the following categories:

- Expressions of gratitude for the ability to hunt elk in Kentucky and/or appreciation of KDFWR staff (35%)
- Concerns regarding perceived lower elk numbers (7%)
- Complaints regarding guides/outfitters being allowed to operate on public property (7%)
- Various recommended changes to season structure (7%)
- Suggestions that a particular group should receive preferential odds in the elk drawing (6%)
- Dismayed at elk behavior and/or hunting conditions (6%)
- A contention that KDFWR conservation officers/local residents/guides told them that all animals had been trapped out of their hunting area and sent to other states (6%)
- A general lack of access to public property, and/or habitat conditions on the public property they hunted (4%)
- Requests for better maps of hunting areas (4%)
- Requests for a preference point system (3%)
- A perceived lack of law enforcement presence (3%)
- A desire to give away a permit for which they had been drawn but were unable to use (3%)
- Dismay at too many hunting seasons occurring simultaneously (2%)
- The contention that the program has turned into a money grab by KDFWR (2%)
- Reports of poor hunter ethics (1%)
- A general desire for KDFWR to provide more elk permits (1%).