

Hunting Elk in Pennsylvania

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Hunting and Conservation

Hunting has been an intrinsic part of human history since our beginning. Initially hunting was a necessary tactic for survival and acquiring food. However, with advancement of agriculture in first world countries, the purpose of hunting has changed. There are a variety of reasons people choose to hunt nowadays. Some hunters feel that hunting connects them nature and provides them with knowledge of the land around them. Some hunters use hunting as a tool to escape the stress of everyday life while others may solely hunt for sport.

No matter the reason that people chose to hunt, hunting is a key tool used to manage the elk population today. The Pennsylvania elk hunt is primarily used to help manage the elk population and helps with disease control. In Pennsylvania less than 1% of mortality is due to predation because there are hardly any predators of elk in the state. When prey animals lack predators, over population of the prey species is likely, exceeding carrying capacity. Carrying capacity is basically the number of individuals of a species the environment can sustain. Once carrying capacity is exceeding resources become limited, ultimately causing population numbers to decline, often due to starvation. By using hunting as a tool to control population numbers we can ensure that we prevent exceeding this limit keeping our elk herd healthy.

History of the Pennsylvania Elk Hunt

During the early nineteenth century Eastern Woodland elk roamed Pennsylvania statewide. Due to overhunting and loss of habitat from European expansion, Eastern Woodland elk population numbers dropped drastically throughout the state. By the late 1870's Eastern Woodland elk were completely extirpated from the state. It would appear that Pennsylvania elk would just fade into a distant memory.

However, with the establishment of the Pennsylvania Game Commission in 1895 Pennsylvania elk would only be gone for a short period of time. From 1913-1926, the Pennsylvania Game Commission reintroduced a total of 177 Rocky Mountain elk to Pennsylvania. In order to help preserve the elk population, there initially was a hold on an elk season until the fall 1923. During the first hunting season 23 bulls were taken. Hunting continued for a few years until poaching and overharvesting depleted the elk herd forcing the Pennsylvania Game Commission terminate the elk hunt season. It wasn't until the fall of 2001 that the elk hunting season would be reopened for the public.

Source:

Kosack, J. 2017. *History of Pennsylvania Elk*. Retrieved from <http://www.pgc.pa.gov/Wildlife/WildlifeSpecies/Elk/Pages/HistoryofElkinPA.aspx>.

Pennsylvania Elk Hunt

In 2001, a total of 30 elk hunt tags were issued for the season. Since then the number of tags allotted for the elk hunt have increased, with a total of 124 tags being issued for the 2016 season. The number of tags allotted varies based on the elk hunt zone your tag falls in. There are 13 elk hunt zones in which elk tags are allotted each year. These elk tags are awarded by a lottery system and preference points are given to individuals each year that apply for the drawing but fail to receive a tag. Basically, in order to receive a tag you must pay a small \$10.90 fee to have your name “put in the hat” in order to receive an elk tag. Elk tags are drawn every year at the Elk Country Visitor Center in August during the Elk Expo. If your name is not “pulled out of the hat”, it stays in there for the next year increasing your chances of receiving a tag (i.e. preference points). If you are one of the lucky individuals to receive an elk tag you must then buy an elk license from the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Residents may purchase a license for \$25.00, while nonresidents may purchase a license for \$250.00.

FAQ About the PA Elk Hunt

You can't hunt Pennsylvania elk if you are a non-resident? The Pennsylvania elk hunt is open to both residents and non-residents of Pennsylvania. There is no preference to residents over nonresidents. Nonresidents have equal chances to be drawn each year as residents do. Yes, every year there is a proportionately larger number of Pennsylvania residents that receive tags compared to nonresidents. However, these numbers are most likely due to a larger sum of residents putting their name in the hat each year over nonresidents.

If I receive an elk tag, do I have to hunt with an elk hunting guide? While it is highly encouraged you utilize an elk hunting guide it is not required. Pennsylvania elk hunting guides are an excellent resource to help improve your chances of filling your tag, especially if you are a nonresident.

If I receive an elk tag, do I have to use a rifle to hunt? Pennsylvania elk hunters may use either a firearm or bow to harvest their elk. If using a bow, the minimum draw weight is 45 lbs.

Keystone Elk Country Alliance Elk Tag

Starting in 2014, the Pennsylvania Game Commission allotted the Keystone Elk Country Alliance one bull tag to raffle off each year. All proceeds from the raffled bull tag go directly

into elk habitat management in Pennsylvania and conservation education efforts. Since 2014, all three winners of the KECA bull tag have successfully taken 400+ class bulls. Winners of the KECA elk tag are provided with an extended hunting season, ability to hunt in any elk hunt zone, a free hunting guide for the regular hunting season, and more. KECA will start selling raffle tickets for this tag online on April 1, 2017. For more information on the KECA elk tag please visit experienceelkcountry.com.