

THE BULLETIN

PENNSYLVANIA'S ELK NEWSLETTER

October 2025



Pennsylvania
Game Commission



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The Bulletin is the Game Commission's periodic update on all things elk. Our hope with this newsletter is to share current and interesting information on elk biology, behavior, and management in Pennsylvania. Each issue will cover a variety of elk-related topics, but we plan to keep the subsections similar from issue to issue. Under *Just the Numbers*, we'll provide up-to-date data on things like the overall population, the number of hunting licenses released, and estimates of people engaged in elk viewing, just to name a few. For more details on how those data are collected and used, check out the *Deep Dive* section, where we provide a more detailed explanation of some specific topics. In each issue, we'll provide a seasonal recap (*Fall & Winter Recap*) with summaries of pertinent events/activities, and we have to share at least a short blurb on elk biology under the *Biology Lesson*. Finally, we'll close out each issue with what to expect in the next issue under *Coming Up*.

Happy reading!



Summer Recap

Here's the short version of all the summer elk activities...



CALVING SEASON

Elk calves (young of the year) are usually born around the first week of June. Similar to how human babies are measured and weighed when they're born, we do this for elk calves as well. Each year, Game Commission biologists and game wardens capture a small sample of elk calves to gather data on overall health. We record weight, sex, and age for each. The entire process takes approximately two minutes and does not impact the calf's survival or cause abandonment. All the calves captured in June 2025 were healthy and within the ideal weight range (25-50 pounds, depending on how many days old they were). While annual calf survival (from birth to 1 year of age) depends on numerous factors, healthy birth weight is a good indicator of calf survival.

ELK EXPO

The Elk Expo took place on July 25-26 at the Elk Country Visitor Center, operated by the Keystone Elk Country Alliance. If you're unfamiliar, the expo is a weekend celebration of Pennsylvania elk with craft and food vendors, educational programs, and contests. But one of the main highlights is the reveal of the elk hunting license awardees for the upcoming season. Overall, the event was well attended even despite the rain that came through mid-morning on Saturday. One hundred and forty lucky hunters were awarded elk licenses for the 2025 elk hunting seasons. Of the 140 individuals, several were from communities near or within the elk management area including Beech Creek (1), Brockway (1), Cross Fork (1), Brookville (1), Dubois (5), Lock Haven (1), and St. Mary's (2).

ANNUAL REPORTS & SUMMARIES

Every year, we publish an annual report summarizing elk management data and activities. That report is publicly available on our website and includes information related to the annual population estimate, adult survival rates, non-harvest mortality, hunter harvests, and elk-related nuisance calls/complaints. The report is completed by July 1 of each year and typically available by October 1. See the table below in "Just the Numbers" for a snapshot of the annual elk harvest summaries/data.

DID YOU KNOW... THE GAME COMMISSION HAS THREE DEDICATED ELK VIEWING AREAS, ALONG WINSLOW HILL IN BENEZETTE.

- **Winslow Hill Viewing Area:** This location has a large parking lot with a covered picnic table. A short trail leads to a flattened overlook.
- **Woodring Viewing Area:** Named after the previous landowner, this location is just half a mile east of the Winslow Hill Viewing Area. It includes a parking lot and covered picnic table. The main viewing field is on the south side of the road.
- **Dents Run Viewing Area:** This location has a large parking area, picnic tables, and porta-potties. A stone wall on an elevated overlook provides visitors with a chance to see elk.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources also has several designated viewing areas including Hicks Run, Hoover Farm, and Miller Run Viewing Areas.

Just the Numbers

MORTALITY:

This is the number of elk reported or found deceased and the specific cause, excluding all hunter harvests (non-hunting related). Note: there are a number of deaths where a specific cause could not be determined (undetermined).

CAUSE OF DEATH	COLLARS	COLLARS SEEN	TOTAL OBSERVED
ACCIDENTAL	8	2	4
CROP DAMAGE	2	13	21
DISEASE	6	3	2
VEHICLE COLLISIONS	16	13	8
UNDETERMINED	30	23	12
TOTAL	62	54	47

2025 ELK HUNTING LICENSE APPLICATIONS:

This is the number of applications received for each elk hunting season. Note: applicants can apply for one, two, or all three seasons.

SEASON	SEASON DATES
ARCHERY	29,075
GENERAL	47,205
LATE	28,712
TOTAL	104,992



Deep Dive: Being Elk Smart



If you enjoy outdoor recreation and spend time in nature, you've probably heard of some of the most popular outdoor educational campaigns: "A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear," "Leave No Trace," "Watchable Wildlife," and "Sometimes the Best Relationship is a Long-Distance Relationship." The U.S. Forest Service created Smokey Bear exclusively to help educate people on the dangers of wildfire with the timeless phrase, "Only YOU Can Prevent Wildfires." It's these tiny wisdoms that have helped reframe how many Americans think about wild places and the individual responsibility we all have to conserve them.

There are more than two million acres of public lands in Pennsylvania that are still largely pristine and undeveloped. This part of the state is appropriately referred to as the "PA Wilds" and serves as an outdoor mecca for many of the 13 million people who call Pennsylvania home as well as many out-of-state visitors.

It's also where our 1,400 wild elk live! This draws hundreds of thousands of

people to the area, with the hopes of catching a glimpse of an elk in the wild. Most of these visitors come during the months of September and October when the elk are rutting (breeding). When thousands of people seasonally migrate to the rural communities scattered across the PA Wilds, you have a setting ripe for problems. Congestion leads to frustration, which for some, seems to quickly spiral into downright bad behavior.

People approaching elk at unsafe distances, attempting to feed them, and trespassing on private property (for example, strangers standing in your yard to take selfies with elk) are increasingly becoming the norm during the autumn rut. Because this area is not encompassed by any sort of park, (state or national), there is no legion of rangers to counter these behaviors. Instead, state police officers and state game wardens, who cover large geographic areas, are responsible for responding to law enforcement needs. So, the responsibility is on YOU to ensure the wild essence of the area remains for the next generation to enjoy.



ELK SMART IS BORN...

As Elk Country and elk viewing have become more popular, we started brainstorming ways to educate and communicate with visitors about how to safely visit the area and view the wild elk herd. In the summer of 2020, the ELK SMART campaign launched.

What is ELK SMART and what does it mean? In short, it's recognizing we all have a responsibility to keep Pennsylvania's elk wild.

The goal is to remind people who visit and recreate in Elk Country to be mindful of their actions and understand their behavior matters. Modeled after the national "BearWise" campaign, ELK SMART consists of four simple points (shameless intentional pun).

GIVE ELK SPACE

Keep a distance of at least 100 yards (the size of one football field) between you and the elk. If you need a closer look, bring binoculars or use a spotting scope. If you enjoy wildlife photography, use a telephoto lens so you don't disrupt the elk while taking pictures. Giving the animals space helps keep their stress levels low and keeps everyone, both people and the elk, safe. Never approach them. Elk are wild animals that are unpredictable and sometimes aggressive, especially during the fall breeding season. Cows are also known to defend their young when they feel threatened.

NEVER FEED ELK

Not only is it illegal to feed elk in Pennsylvania, but it also teaches them to associate people, cars, and homes with food. This could cause elk to approach people looking for more. Feeding is positive reinforcement that causes animals to habituate to people. Habituated elk (those with less aversion to people) are more likely to be involved in human-elk conflict, such as elk eating a residential garden, elk-vehicle collisions, and in some cases, aggressive behavior toward pets and people. Feeding also promotes the spread of infectious diseases by having them unnaturally congregate into small areas. With chronic wasting disease (CWD) recently confirmed just west of Pennsylvania's Elk Management Area, it's more important than ever to take preventative action. We can limit disease transmission by not bringing elk close together through supplemental feeding.

DON'T NAME ELK

This is the point where some people skeptically raise an eyebrow. What's the harm in naming an elk? This is always challenging to articulate. The short answer is: because they're not pets. We name our pets, and most of us treat our pets as family members — sometimes better than human members of the family. Elk are wild animals and must be treated as such. Characterizing elk, or any wildlife, by naming them degrades their wild essence. The very reason people are drawn to the elk is their unaltered independence from humans. Personifying elk as humans takes away from their truly wild nature.

Elk are also a highly coveted game species in Pennsylvania. Last year, more than 53,000 people applied to hunt elk in the Keystone State, and we'll likely surpass that number this year. For 2025-26, there are three unique elk hunting seasons, archery, general and late, with 140 licenses. When an elk is legally harvested by a hunter, it can (and has) created a highly contentious environment. Differences in our values and opinions toward public resources, like elk, are normal and expected. The goal is to maintain a mutual respect for those with different values and balance the different forms of elk-related recreation. If you're only interested in elk viewing, be respectful of the hunter who wants to harvest one with their bow. If you've applied for an elk hunting license every year since elk hunting began in 2001, recognize the person who drives three hours one way just to watch elk in their natural habitat and loves them as much as you. By not naming the elk, you're taking one simple step in preventing needless contention among people with different values AND preserving the elk's wild essence.

DO YOUR PART

The campaign can't succeed without YOU, and it's a collective effort to make it work. The welfare of the elk herd is a shared responsibility. If you see someone being disruptive or careless, whether intentional or not, kindly ask them to stop or report it to the Pennsylvania Game Commission by calling 1-833-PGC WILD. We all have a duty to ensure the safety of people and the long-term welfare of the elk.

LET WILDLIFE BE WILD

Over the last 50 years, humans have become increasingly separated from nature and the natural world, and the pressures on remaining wild lands will only increase. Tourists, hunters, and every outdoor enthusiast should have an attitude of preservation and a universal appreciation for wild places and wild things. We all have a responsibility to keep Pennsylvania's elk free and preserve their unfettered wild spirit. While visiting Pennsylvania's elk country, remember to be ELK SMART and let wild be wild.

Biology Lesson #3

ANTLERS ARE AWESOME!

For some reason, antlers have fascinated people for centuries. Maybe it was their utility for early civilizations or just the beauty they add to an already amazing animal, but antlers are cool!

Antlers grow and then shed annually. This distinguishes them from horns, which are permanent and grow throughout an animal's lifetime. Bull (male) elk usually start growing their antlers in May. During growth, antlers have a velvet covering that contains blood vessels supplying the antlers with the nutrients needed for growth. Elk antlers are some of the fastest growing in North America, adding up to an inch per day. By mid-August, the antlers are fully grown, and the shortening day length (photoperiod) causes an increase in testosterone that prompts the antlers to harden and the velvet to dry and drop off. Most biologists assume the drying velvet is itchy and uncomfortable, as bulls will actively try to remove it by rubbing their antlers on trees/vegetation. By late August, antlers are hardened, free of velvet, and ready to serve their primary purpose — combat! As the rut (breeding season) winds up in early September, bulls use their antlers to spar and fight for breeding rights. Bull elk will keep their antlers until March, when they shed (naturally fall off). This is later than white-tailed deer that usually shed in late January or early February. Shed hunting is popular in Pennsylvania and legal on state-owned land (state forests and game lands). Shed hunters must have permission from the owners to pick up sheds on private property.



Coming Up...

In the next issue of the Bulletin, we'll be through the all the hunting seasons and the annual population estimate (aerial survey). We'll summarize the hunting seasons, winter elk capture/collaring, and the annual population estimate. As always, we sincerely thank you for your interest in Pennsylvania's elk and your passion for wildlife and wild places.