

Chapter 2

THE RESTORATION OF ELK IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES

Elk have been restored to historic range in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina.

PENNSYLVANIA WAS FIRST²

Elk were restored to Pennsylvania in 1913 when fifty elk were brought by train from Wyoming. Half were released in Clinton County and the other half in Clearfield County. An additional 22 elk were purchased from a Monroe County preserve that same year. In 1915, ninety-five elk were purchased from Yellowstone and released in the counties of Cameron - 24; Carbon - 24; Potter - 24; Forest - 10; Blair - 7; and Monroe - 6. In 1923, Pennsylvania held their first elk hunt which continued until 1930 when only one bull elk was taken and it was determined the herd was at risk.

From 1930 – 1970, the herd dwindled to somewhere between 24 and 70, all located in Elk or Cameron County. This number grew in the mid 70's through early 80's to approximately 120 to 150 animals eventually reaching just over 500 in 2000. Elk hunts were started again in 2001 and continue today. *For more on Pennsylvania Elk Initiative, see Chapters 8 and Appendix C.*

In 2003, the State Wildlife Management Agency created a preference system for the elk license drawing. *“Under the new system, individuals who are not awarded either an antlered or antlerless elk license in an annual drawing will be granted preference – or increased opportunity – in future drawings. A preference point is awarded for each year a hunter has applied and has not been selected.”* Wyoming also offers a preference system but they have gone a step further. Individuals may buy preference points to increase their chances of being selected. The first suggestion is something Kentucky may want to consider implementing. Another change that occurred in 2003 was a discontinuation on the limit of nonresident licenses that may be awarded. This is not something that should be implemented in Kentucky at this time.

ARKANSAS RESTORED ELK IN 1981³

Arkansas native elk probably persisted no later than the 1840's. In 1933, the U.S. Forest Service released eleven Rocky Mountain elk in Franklin County's Black Mountain Refuge. These elk came from the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma and this restoration effort was not successful even though the herd increased to around 200 by the early 1950's. The elk herd was gone by the late 1950's likely due to illegal hunting, natural mortality and shrinkage of suitable range through natural ecological succession. Between 1981 and 1985, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, in cooperation with private citizens, brought in 112 Rocky Mountain elk from Colorado and Nebraska and released them in Newton County near the Buffalo National River. This restoration effort was successful.

Arkansas' elk range covers approximately 384,000 acres with 28% of the land in public ownership. Today, the elk herd has grown to approximately 500. In 1998 Arkansas' first modern-day elk hunt was established. Two hunts are normally held, one in

September and one in December. Approximately 7,000-8000 hunters enter a lottery each year. In 2007, 24 hunters were chosen. The selection is done at the annual Elk Festival held in Jasper, Arkansas, an event that was established ten years ago to celebrate the restoration of elk to Newton County.

Each year, the Arkansas State Elk Bugling Championships are held at the same time and sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.⁴ Winners move on to the regional contest in Atlanta. An added attraction at the 2007 festival was an on-site drawing for a bull permit. Individuals had to apply at the festival and had to be present to win. **This is something Kentucky might want to consider at their annual elk festival held in Hazard each year.**

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission operates the Ponca Elk Education Center which includes an exhibit room with full-body mounts of elk in natural settings, hands-on displays, a geology display, interactive computer quizzes, and a birding window. The Center opened in October 2002 at Ponca, Arkansas. In 2003, they had 8,187 visitors and now average 11,000 each year. They have had visitors from every state in the Union and the following countries: England, France, Africa, Japan, Germany, Canada, Ireland, San Salvador (U.S. Embassy), Norway, Croatia, Sri Lanka, Russia, El Salvador, Brazil, Korea, Switzerland, Pago Pago, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Peru, Wales, United Kingdom, South Port, Ecuador, Scotland, New Zealand, Zagreb, Australia, Italy, Kuwait, Venezuela, Argentina, Liverpool UK, Sweden, Czech Republic. In 2004, the Center began focusing on attracting school groups. Each year these numbers increase.⁵

Arkansas also operates the Hilary Jones Wildlife Museum and Elk Information Center and Gift Shop in Jasper that offers interpretive information, exhibits including elk mounts, three freshwater fish aquariums and more. The center is very kid-friendly and attracts more than 8,000 visitors a year. In a phone interview with one of its staff, guest books kept on site indicate they have had visitors from every state and most countries.⁶ For more on the Center, visit their website at <http://www.arkansaselkcenter.us/>. **Kentucky needs centers such as these to help educate people on elk and other wildlife found in the eastern coalfields of Kentucky. See RECOMMENDATION - TASK 2.1.**

BOTH BISON AND ELK RESTORED IN WESTERN KENTUCKY⁷

Land Between the Lakes (LBL) buffalo herd was started in 1969 with 19 animals brought from the Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park in North Dakota. For over 20 years this herd flourished in LBL's Buffalo Range.

The elk at LBL originally came from Elk Island National Park in Alberta, Canada in 1996 when 29 elk were released into the Elk & Bison Prairie Demonstration Area. The herd has continued to grow to 74 today.



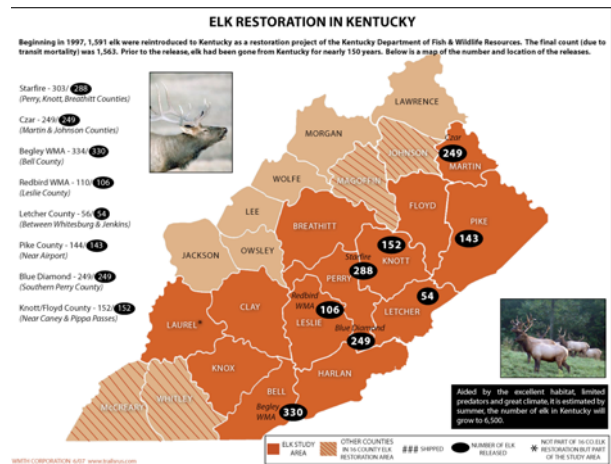
Elk being released in LBL in 1996
Photo: <http://www.lbl.org/EBElk.html>

The Elk and Bison Prairie is an enclosed 700 acres of restored native prairie habit. Both the elk and forty bison reside in this area. Visitors can take a self-guided driving tour of the site along a 3.5 mile paved loop featuring three interpretive sites. Over 130,000 visitors tour the Elk and Bison Range each year, generating a significant amount of funds for the initiative. See Chapter 9 - ELK VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES for more information on this subject.

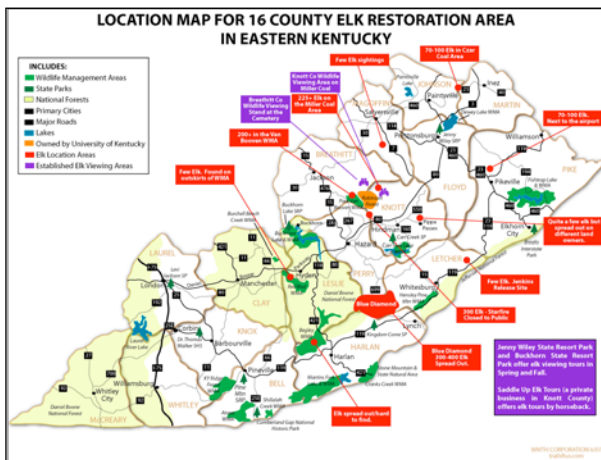
Since the elk are in a confined area shared with bison, the area can only sustain a limited number of animals. Already a portion of the herd has been exported to the Great Smokey Mountains and eastern Tennessee keeping the numbers of elk down to approximately 74 animals.

EASTERN COALFIELDS OF KENTUCKY⁸

Kentucky began restoring elk in the winter of 1997-98 to 16 counties in the eastern coalfields of Kentucky through a partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources. The 16-county elk restoration zone includes Bell, Breathitt, Clay, Floyd, Harlan, Johnson, Knott, Knox, Leslie, Letcher, Magoffin, Martin, McCreary, Perry, Pike and Whitley. From 1997-2002, approximately 1,550 animals were trucked in from Kansas, Utah, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon and Arizona.



Larger map on following page



See Chapter 10 for larger map.

Today, through proper management, southeastern Kentucky is home to about 6,500 free-ranging elk, the largest herd east of the Rocky Mountains. The goal is to reach a herd size of about 10,000 animals and maintain that population within the 16-county elk restoration zone.

In addition to the important achievement of returning a native wildlife species to Kentucky after a 150-year absence, this project offers hunting and viewing opportunities no living Kentuckian has ever had in Kentucky.

See Chapters 3, 5, & 9 for more on this.

In 2001, hunting was resumed in Kentucky on a quota basis only. This in itself has been a tremendous opportunity to increase the awareness of elk in Kentucky. In 2006, over 26,000 people paid \$10 each to enter the Kentucky Elk Hunt Lottery.

ELK RESTORATION IN KENTUCKY

Beginning in 1997, 1,591 elk were reintroduced to Kentucky as a restoration project of the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources. The final count (due to transit mortality) was 1,563. Prior to the release, elk had been gone from Kentucky for nearly 150 years.

Below is a map of the number and location of the releases.

Aided by the excellent habitat, limited predators and great climate, it is estimated, by summer, the numbers of elk in Kentucky will grow to 6,500.



Starfire - 303/ **288**
(Perry, Knott, Breathitt Counties)

Czar - 249/ **249**
(Martin & Johnson Counties)

Begley WMA - 334/ **330**
(Bell County)

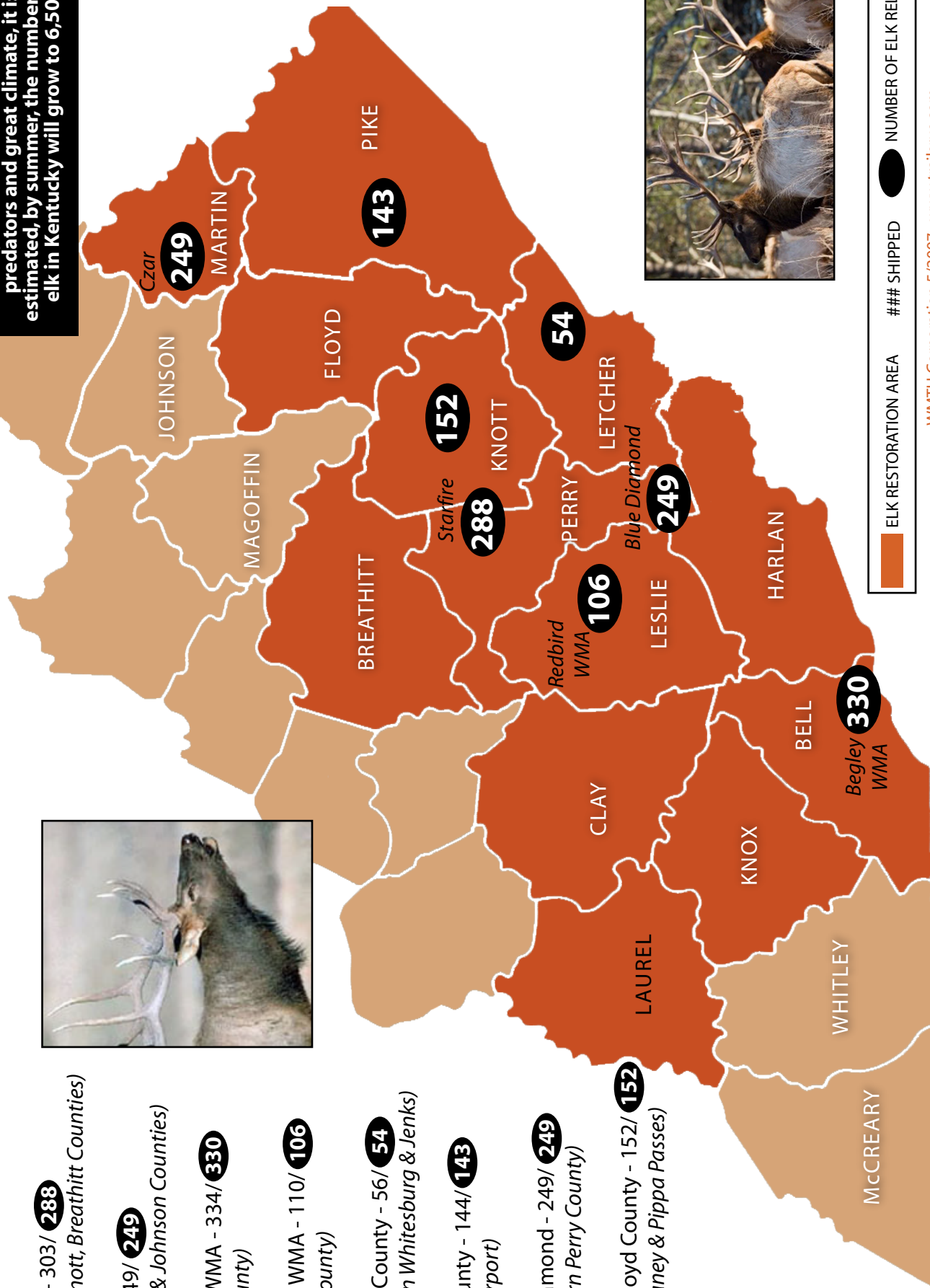
Redbird WMA - 110/ **106**
(Leslie County)

Letcher County - 56/ **54**
(Between Whitesburg & Jenks)

Pike County - 144/ **143**
(Near Airport)

Blue Diamond - 249/ **249**
(Southern Perry County)

Knott/Floyd County - 152/ **152**
(Near Caney & Pippa Passes)



Over 4,000 of the elk tag applicants were from out-of-state with at least one person from every state in the Union except Hawaii and two people from Canada submitting an application. *See Chapter 4 -ECONOMIC IMPACT OF 2006 KENTUCKY ELK HUNT for more on this subject.*

TENNESSEE REINTRODUCED ELK IN 2000⁹

Through a partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Parks Canada, Campbell County Outdoor Recreation Association, Tennessee Wildlife Federation, University of Tennessee and the U.S. Forest Service, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and more recently the Safari Club International (SCI) and the Chattanooga Chapter of SCI, Tennessee introduced 167 elk into the state from 2000 to 2003.

Fifty elk came from Elk Island National Park in Alberta Canada and were released on the Royal Blue Wildlife Management area in Campbell County. Since that time, three other releases (2001, 2002, 2003) have taken place bringing the total to 167. The 2003 elk were obtained from the U.S. Forest Service Land Between the Lakes in Kentucky but they too originally came from Elk Island Canada. All releases have taken place in the Royal Blue and Sunquist Wildlife Management Area.

An “elk restoration zone” has been established consisting of 670,000 acres located in the North Cumberland Mountains of eastern Tennessee. The zone includes portions of five counties (Morgan, Scott, Campbell, Anderson, and Claiborne). The goal of the project is to grow a herd of 1,400 to 2000 elk but at this time, because of meningeal worm infection and other issues, the herd numbers less than two hundred.

In 2003, the Hatfield Knob Elk Viewing Area was developed by Terry Lewis and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency allowing people to park and walk ½ mile to an elk viewing site. A 20-foot high covered tower was added in 2005. Signage directing people to the area was recently installed. Interpretive wayside exhibits and park benches on both elk and other wildlife will be added soon along the trail. This is Tennessee’s first and only public viewing area for elk at this time.⁹ A survey of the visitors was conducted in 2006. *See Chapter 8 – ELK VIEWING STUDIES for an overview of the findings from this study.*

ELK COME TO THE SMOKIES

In 2001, 25 elk were imported from the Land Between the Lakes Recreational Area to the Great Smoky Mountains as part of a five-year experimental project through a partnership between the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Parks Canada, Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, Friends of the Smokies, the U.S.G.S. Biological Resources Division, and the University of Tennessee. In 2002, the park imported another 27 animals. Over the next few years, the herd grew very slowly and had a higher than anticipated mortality rate due mainly to parasites and bear predation on calves.¹⁰

In 2006, the National Park Service started a predator management initiative in an effort to evaluate its impacts on newborn elk calf survival.¹¹ Throughout the peak of the 2006 and 2007 calving season, late May through early July, bears were trapped in and around Cataloochee Valley, radio collared, and relocated to the Twenty Mile area located in the western portion of the Park in North Carolina. History of bear management has shown

that most nuisance Park bears relocated within the Park return to the capture site. Using this knowledge it was believed that by the time the relocated bears return to Cataloochee the young calves would be mobile enough to travel safely with their mothers. Several of the bears relocated this year made the 40-mile journey back in as little as 11 days.

While it is disheartening to lose any of the newborn calves, some mortality is expected, and considering the amount of predation documented since elk were released, both 2006 and 2007 appear to be above-average years for calf survival in the Smokies. In 2006, thirteen calves were born, 11 of which survived. In 2007, there were 17 confirmed births with 12 surviving. This is good news considering the survival of newborn elk calves jumped from approximately 30% in 2005 to approximately 85% in 2006 and about 70% in 2007.¹¹ The current number of adult elk in the Smokies elk herd is approximately 75 adults (1 year of age and older), in addition to the newborn elk calves born in 2007.

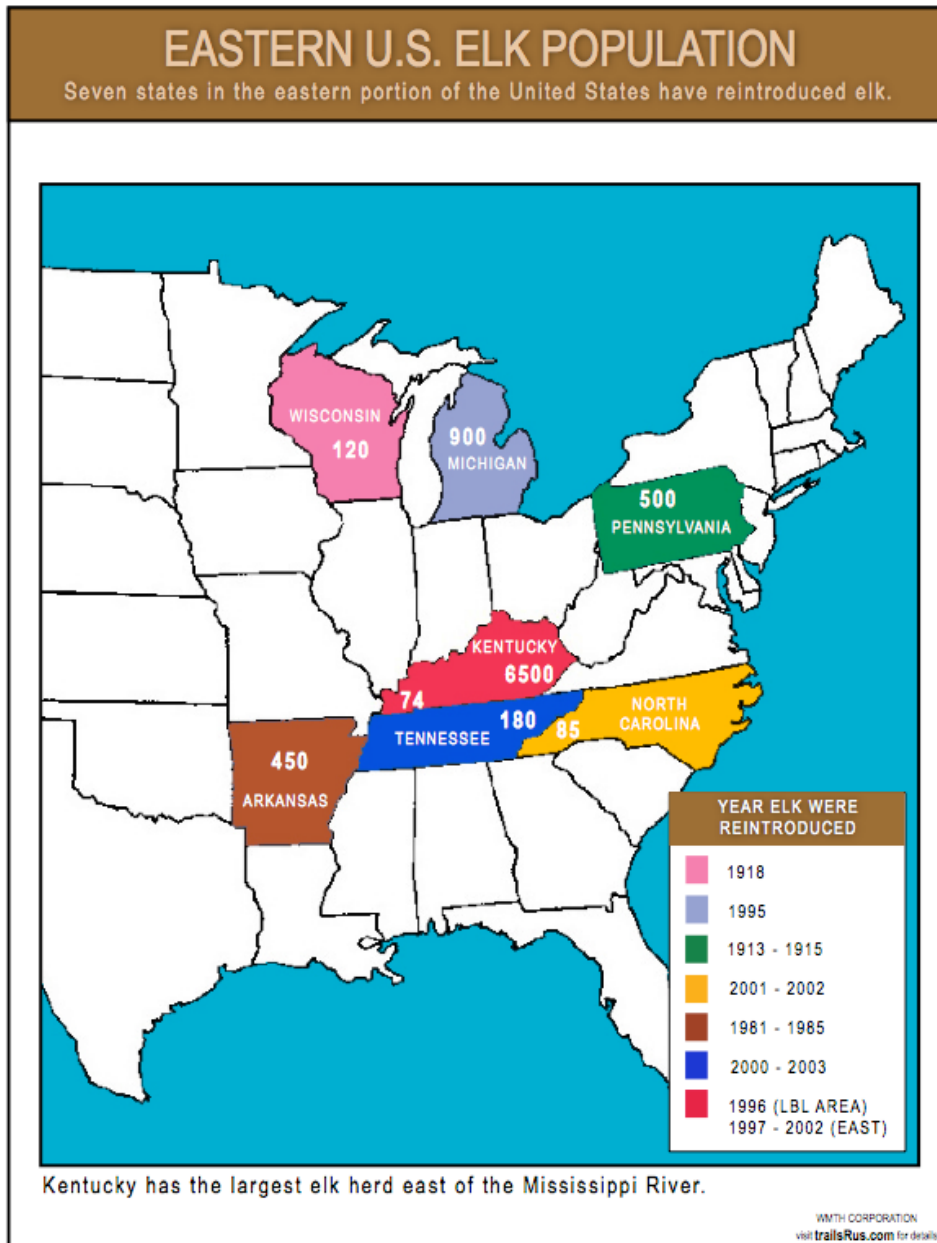
Elk are not the only thing growing in numbers. A significant increase in visitation has occurred at the park since the elk were introduced.¹² *See Chapter 8 - ELK VIEWING STUDIES for more on this subject.*

“Beginning in May, the first Elk Bugle Corps began its duties within Cataloochee Valley. These volunteers have dedicated their time to assisting and educating visitors about the Great Smoky Mountain elk herd. They patrol the Valley weekday afternoons and all day on weekends answering questions and giving informal “elk talks” to interested and curious visitors. The volunteers carry an “Elk Education Trunk” that was donated to the Park from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The Trunk has elk antlers, animal skins, skulls, scat and other tools that allow visitors a hands-on approach to learning more about elk and other wildlife. This enthusiastic group has been a great help in improving visitor education with regards to the elk. They also assist in ensuring that visitors stay a safe distance from elk, bears, deer and other wildlife. To date, they have contacted over 11,000 visitors and worked over 1,000 volunteer hours.”¹¹ **This is a program that needs to be implemented in within the 16-county elk restoration area in Kentucky. See RECOMMENDATIONS - TASK 5.12.**

OTHER RESTORATION STATES

Today, the Great Lakes States of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin each have elk herds ranging from 120 to over a thousand animals. In 1918, seven western elk were released near Wolverine Michigan.¹³ The herd has now grown to over 900. Twenty-four elk were released to the wild in Wisconsin in 1995 through a partnership between the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Management responsibility of the herd was transferred from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in May 1999. Those numbers have now grown to nearly 120.¹⁴

All three states have partnered with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and developed the Great Lakes Conservation Initiative (GLCI) for long-term protection and stewardship of the lands within each state’s elk range. Each state has a clearly defined elk range in which the Elk Foundation can focus their efforts to ensure that each project undertaken by the GLCI will have a direct and long-lasting benefit to local elk populations.¹⁵



To the left is a map of the number of elk reintroduced in each of the state within the past 100 years.

A breakdown is provided below along with the number of elk each of the states have today.

HISTORY OF REINTRODUCTION OF ELK IN THE U.S.

Year	State	Restored	Today
1913-1915	PA	167	500
1918	WI	7	900
1981-1985	AR	112	450
1995	MI	24	120
1996	KY (LBL)	29	74*
1997-2002	KY (East)	1,500	6,500
2000-2003	TN	+167	180
2001-2002	NC	52	70-100

*Fifty-two (52) of the LBL elk were sent to the Great Smoky Mountains and 29 to eastern Tennessee to help start herds in those areas.

STUDY OF ELK AND WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL FOR KENTUCKY