

**Chapter 8**  
**ELK VIEWING STUDIES IN OTHER STATES**  
**A Review of Literature**

**VALUE OF ELK HUNTING AND ELK VIEWING – One study’s estimate**

A 1994 USDA Forest Service general technical report by Natalie Bolon estimated the value of elk in the Blue Mountains of Oregon and Washington.<sup>23</sup> The average elk hunter expenditures in northeast Oregon were \$23 per hunter day averaging \$10 million annually. Data for elk viewing was more difficult to obtain. Per-day values from compiled studies ranged from \$13 to \$48 per activity day for non-consumptive wildlife use state-wide. The study indicated that if just one of the eight trips taken for non-consumptive use were to view elk then the worth of elk viewing in Oregon would range from \$11.5 to \$42 million or an average of \$22 million per year and that \$2.5 million on average could be attributed to the elk viewing site in the Blues if the four viewing sites in that area were improved.

**2007 ELK RESTORATION VISITOR ANALYSIS IN TENNESSEE**

Through a partnership with Department of Forestry Wildlife and Fisheries, University of Tennessee Knoxville and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), an Independent Study in Elk Restoration in Tennessee was conducted August 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 – October 31<sup>st</sup> of that same year by Prescott Weldon and the findings published in May 2007.<sup>24</sup> During that time, 468 people who visited the Hatfield Knob Elk Viewing area were interviewed with 317 actually providing their state of residence. Ninety-one percent of those who responded were from Tennessee. 1.6% from Kentucky, 1.3% from Illinois. Other states noted were Ohio, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, and West Virginia. The study did not note whether or not the primary purpose of being in the area was to view elk. It did note that 26% heard about the viewing site from family/friends, 18% from word of mouth, 23% from newspapers and 4% from TWRA.

The study stated the herd has grown with 20 calves being recorded in 2003, 26 in 2004, 38 in 2005 and 35 in 2006. A contact with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency noted the total number of elk in Tennessee as of Summer 2007 to be somewhere between 180 to 200.<sup>8</sup> A representative with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation agreed with these numbers but indicated that a better system needed to be developed to accurately count the number of elk in Tennessee.<sup>25</sup>

An article written by Richard Simms posted Dec 13, 2006 on Chattanooga.com noted the Tennessee Elk Hunt won't happen before 2008 when the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Commission hopes to issue five permits.<sup>26</sup> In a phone interview with Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, they agreed.<sup>8</sup> The article also noted that the Rocky Mt Elk Foundation had already provided over \$750,000 to the Tennessee elk restoration project. The elk are primarily in the Royal Blue Wildlife Management Area on the Cumberland Plateau.

**CATALOOCHEE AREA INCREASE IN VISITATION BUCKS TREND**

As noted earlier in this study, fifty-two elk were imported from the Land Between the Lakes Recreational Area to the Cataloochee area of the Great Smoky Mountains over a two-year period (2001-2002) 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.

Prior to the introduction of elk in the Smokies, visitation in the Cataloochee area was 69,745 in 1999 and 65,493 in 2000. Going back numerous years, visitation seemed to consistently stay between 65,000 – 70,000. In 2001, after the first elk were released, visitation increased to 124,844 and reached its highest visitation in 2003 with 214,000 visitors. Those numbers now stay somewhere between 112,000 to 130,000 which is nearly twice what the numbers were before the introduction of elk.<sup>12</sup>

Considering that visitation to the Great Smoky National Park peaked in 1999 and has now dropped a full million to 9.2 million and no other major changes were made in the Cataloochee area over that same time period, numbers would indicate that elk have had a significant impact on attracting more visitors to the park.<sup>12</sup>

The Cataloochee area has also beat the national trend. Visitation to all National Parks peaked in 1987 with 287,200,000 visitors. By 1999, they had dropped by 100,000 visitors. By 2000, the numbers dropped 1.2 million and by 2003, this number had dropped even further to 21.2 million less people visiting national parks than had visited in 1987. This number raised a little bit in 2004 but began dropping again in 2005 and even further in 2006.<sup>27</sup>

From 1999 to 2006, national parks overall saw a 14.5 million decrease in visitation; Great Smoky Mountain National Park saw a decrease of 1.1 million; while the Cataloochee area showed an increase of 60,354, nearly doubling their numbers.

<u>CATALOOCHEE</u> <sup>12</sup>	<u>GREAT SMOKY MT NP</u> <sup>12</sup>	<u>ALL NATIONAL PARKS</u> <sup>27</sup>
1999 69,745	10,300,000	287,100,000
2000 65,493	10,200,000	285,000,000
2001 124,844 Year elk were introduced	9,200,000	279,900,000
2002 142,039	9,200,000	277,300,000
2003 214,000	9,200,000	266,000,000
2004 112,919	9,200,000	276,900,000
2005 127,114	9,200,000	273,500,000
2006 130,099	9,200,000	272,600,000

A study by Loomis and Caughlan provides strong support for why the five-year experimental program at Cataloochee should continue and why Kentucky needs to continue their elk restoration initiative. See summary of study on following page.

**LINK BETWEEN ELK AND BISON NUMBERS AND VISITATION NUMBERS.**<sup>28</sup>

John Loomis with the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Colorado State University and Lynne Caughlan, U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Division in Fort Collins Colorado conducted a study in 2004 determine if reducing the numbers of animals would have a negative effect on visitation. Park visitors to the National Elk Refuge and adjacent Grand Teton National Park were asked if they would change their number of visits if the number of bison were reduced by 1/3 the current population (200 bison) and about half the elk population. Results indicated visitors would reduce their numbers of visits by 20% resulting in an 11.3% decrease in employment in Teton counties of Wyoming and Idaho.

**ELK IN PENNSYLVANIA**

Since 1991, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has spent nearly a quarter of a million dollars on interpretive signage for visitors, television shows, youth outdoor days, school programs, brochures, videos, radio shows and interpretive kiosks at viewing areas to promote the elk in Elk Country which encompasses five counties in Northeast Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania now plans to build a \$7 million 7,500 sq ft Elk Visitor Center in Benezette Pennsylvania, a town of 227 people. They anticipate 160,000 people will visit the site by 2016.<sup>29</sup>

Along with the Elk Visitor Center, Pennsylvania is also developing a 127-mile route through that region of the state. Twenty-three viewing sites are being established to promote safe and easy viewing, providing parking, interpretive information and information on other animals one might see while in the area such as eagles, bears, raccoons etc.<sup>29</sup>

*The Economics of Elk Country*<sup>30</sup>

*Dollars from elk viewers are rippling through the elk country economy. “We’ve gotten people here from Maine, New York, Connecticut, and Tennessee,” says Ken Rowe, who runs the Elk Country Store, an attractive gift shop along Route 555. “As a business owner, if you’re smart you try to keep tabs on the elk, keep a map handy so you can help people find them. If you do, they may stop back and buy something.”*



*Elk Country Store in Medix Run Pennsylvania*

*Ben and Janet Robert own the Benezett Store and Restaurant, Benezette’s recognized social hub... “We’ve had people from Australia, Germany and*

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yesterday South Africa in here,” Ben Robert says. “We employ 18 people, and without elk there wouldn’t be a one”.

“Elk bring people here,” says Kelly Gambino, who runs Elk Path Barbecue in Benezette. “It used to be just deer hunting for a couple of weeks. Now it’s elk for the summer and fall. Elk are the reason we started this business five years ago. Sometimes I get a chance to see someone see an elk for the first time. That makes you remember why people come.”



*Elk Path Barbecue*

### **TWO PENNSYLVANIA STUDIES**

A study conducted by Penn State<sup>31</sup> over a two-year period of the economic impact of elk viewing in Pennsylvania determined the following:

- There were approximately 52,000 visitors in 1997 and 72,000 visitors in 1998 showing a 30% increase in visitation in one year.
- The majority of the visitors (64%) visited in the fall during the elk rutting season (September – November) although the numbers of visitors increased by 30% in June, 67% in July and 84% in August over other months indicating the possibility of extending the elk viewing season through increased marketing during these times.\*

*\*Please Note: Kentucky’s primary elk viewing season tends to be from September through the end of May due to our mild winters and the tendency of Kentucky elk to enjoy the open pasture area of the reclaimed mine properties where the grasses and other food sources they seek are in greater abundance rather than the dense forests where viewing is more difficult.*

- Average attendance at the peak of the season specifically in the Winslow Hill area of Benezette Pennsylvania was 1,300 visitors per day on weekends (400 to 600 cars per day to contend with, find parking and deal with traffic). On weekdays, the number of visitors averages 600 per day. For a community with a population of less than 250 people with primarily one way in and one way out, traffic during this time has become a major concern.<sup>29</sup> See Appendix C – “It’s Not An Elk Problem – It’s a People Problem” for more on the subject.
- Nearly 92% of the visitors were Pennsylvania residents with 10% being locals from within the two-county area. Only 8% were from out-of-state primarily from southwest New York, northeast Ohio, northern Maryland and New Jersey.
  - Over 85% of total visitors were within a 2 ½ hour one way travel time.

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- 71% stated their primary purpose for visiting the area was to view the elk.
- Two-thirds of those surveyed were family groups with an average of 3.1 persons per vehicle.
- Visitors within the two-county area averaged 14.9 visits per person per year while the non-residents (both from Pennsylvania and outside the state) tended to visit 4.4 times per year.
- In other words, the 72,000 visitors in 1998 actually resulted in a total of 15,000 unique visitors, the majority of which visited in the fall spending on average \$16 per person per day.

Total regional expenditures by nonresidents were \$900,000 in 1997 with a regional economic impact of \$1.2 million primarily in retail trade and service sector. In 1998 the total regional expenditures were \$650,000 with a regional economic impact of \$872,000.

In a follow-up study by FERMATA, Inc.<sup>32</sup> in 2002, a detailed plan was developed to capitalize fully on the visitors coming to the region by developing specific elk viewing areas in strategic locations within a 12-county area of Pennsylvania. It was anticipated that if the plan were implemented, the revenue per visitor would increase from \$16 per day to \$48.70 by 2005 and to \$197.40 by 2012. The 2012 figure being the current daily expenditure per nature tourist of \$138.45 at the time of the study adjusted for inflation. FERMATA anticipated that by 2005, \$3.4 million would be spent annually on transportation, food and lodging and by 2012, this figure would grow to \$18.6 million.

In 2003, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania committed to implement the recommendations of the plan. They also agreed to develop a strong Website presence and a detailed guide booklet to the 127-mile Elk Scenic Drive, highlighting 23 points of interest along the loop between I-80's Penfield Exit 111 and Snow Shoe Exit 147.<sup>33</sup> The goal is to capitalize on the 46 million Americans, approximately 16 percent of the nation's total population who reside within a day's drive of the Elk Region.\*

In 2007, the Governor of Pennsylvania announced a partnership between the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the State of Pennsylvania to "create the largest elk watching and conservation education center in the eastern United States in Benezette Township, Elk County".<sup>34</sup> *See press release in its entirety on the following page.*

*\*Note: According to the Kentucky Department of Economic Development, Kentucky has 47 million Americans within ½ a day's drive and nearly 163 million within a day's drive if one includes Canada.*



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**March 20, 2007**

**GOVERNOR RENDELL ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH ELK  
FOUNDATION FOR NEW VISITOR CENTER  
IN PENNSYLVANIA WILDS**

*\$5 million State Investment Leverages  
approximately \$7.6 million in Private Funding*

*STATE COLLEGE, Centre County – Governor Edward G. Rendell today announced that a partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation will create the largest elk watching and conservation education center in the eastern United States in Benezette Township, Elk County.*

*“Pennsylvania’s wild elk herd, the largest in the Northeast, brings more than 75,000 visitors to the Pennsylvania Wilds each fall,” Governor Rendell said. “This new center will give us additional opportunities to reach out to new visitors, give them a wonderful outdoor experience and share the story of the conservation efforts that have restored the elk herd, and many other natural and wild areas in Pennsylvania.”*

*Governor Rendell said the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources signed a 30-year partnership agreement with the foundation, one of the country’s premier conservation organizations, for construction of the 7,000-square foot facility that will include interpretive exhibits, wildlife trails and viewing blinds, year-round restrooms and parking for cars and buses.*

*The Pennsylvania Wilds regional strategy to encourage the growth of nature-based tourism in northcentral Pennsylvania is being touted as a national model for mobilizing and coordinating the wide array of conservation, tourism promotion, economic development, and community revitalization interests.*

*Under the partnership agreement with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the commonwealth will provide \$5 million in Public Improvement Project funds for construction of the center. The foundation will initially invest \$2 million for the land purchase and the center’s exhibits in addition to committing an estimated \$5.6 million over 30 years for the operation of the facility.*

*“Our work in the Pennsylvania Wilds has enabled us to leverage state money with private dollars,” Governor Rendell said. “The partnership with RMEF is expected to save the commonwealth approximately \$5.6 million in operation costs over the life of the agreement.”*

*“The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation recognizes the need for individuals to experience wildlife and wild places,” said Peter J. Dart, president and CEO of the Montana-based Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. “The new visitor*

*center will provide the opportunity to educate a broader audience about habitat conservation and Pennsylvania’s wild elk. All of us at the Elk Foundation value our partnership with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and look forward to continuing our work in Pennsylvania’s elk country.”*

*During the past year, site planning and market feasibility studies for the center were completed. Completion of the center’s design is expected by the end of this year. Construction completion is projected for spring 2009.*

*The Governor made the announcement at the conclusion of the three-day Governor’s Outdoor Conference in State College, designed to explore solutions to keeping people connected with nature.*

*One early action project in the Pennsylvania Wilds was the completion of the Elk Scenic Drive, a 127-mile corridor passing through Cameron, Clinton, Clearfield, Centre and Elk counties. Two state scenic byways - Route 144 and Route 120 - are part of the drive, which takes travelers through three state forests and three state game lands. The drive runs along a spectacular loop between I-80’s Penfield Exit 111 and Snow Shoe Exit 147.*

*In addition to maps and directions, a guide to the Elk Scenic Drive provides write-ups for 23 locations that note the history of the area; natural features; elk viewing areas and wildlife to be on the lookout for; recreational opportunities such as hiking and fishing; and other tidbits of information.*

*The Pennsylvania Wilds covers Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, Lycoming, McKean, Potter, Tioga and Warren counties.*

**EXAMPLES OF PENNSYLVANIA’S WILDLIFE VIEWING AREAS**

Below and on the following pages are examples of a few of Pennsylvania’s elk and wildlife viewing sites and initiatives:



*Map of one of the elk driving tours*



*One of the properties purchased for wildlife viewing.*



**VIEWING AREAS AND INTERPRETIVE SIGNS**



*One of the elk viewing areas in Pennsylvania*



*Examples of a few of the interpretive signage*



*One of the shelters on site used for on-site "classroom" presentations.*





Two of the elk viewing stands. The one on the left serves as a blind overlooking a plowed field soon to be planted.

*This wildlife viewing area is actually a blind.*



Two other wayside exhibits along the route providing information on elk.



Directional signage to the elk viewing area

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**MORE INTERPRETIVE SIGNS, AND INFRASTRUCTURE**



*Interpretive signage for other wildlife in the area along the designated route.*



*Signage noting other unique natural features along the route.*



*Public restroom facilities for elk viewers and other visitors to the area.*

For more information on the Pennsylvania Wilds, visit [www.dcnr.state.pa.us](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us) and select PA Wilds under “Hot Topics.” More information about the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is available at [www.rmef.org](http://www.rmef.org).



*Directional signage*

***STUDY OF ELK AND WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL FOR KENTUCKY***



**NEW BUSINESSES HAVE OPENED AND OTHERS  
ARE THRIVING DUE TO THE ELK**



GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR SOUTHERN & EASTERN KENTUCKY

- Pennsylvania only has 500 elk and most are located within close proximity to Benezette. Kentucky has over 6,000 elk within a 16-county area in Southeast Kentucky.
- Pennsylvania has 46 million people within a day's drive. Kentucky has 163 million (nearly 4 times more than Pennsylvania) within a day's drive if one includes Canada.
- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has a plan to develop elk viewing areas within a 12-county area. They are also developing a strong Website presence and a detailed guide booklet to the 127-mile Elk Scenic Drive, highlighting 23 points of interest along the loop between I-80's Exit 111 and Exit 147.

The goal is to determine how best for those within this 16-county area of Kentucky to capitalize on this as they are doing in Pennsylvania, creating jobs and revenue for each of the counties involved. **A more in-depth analysis of Pennsylvania's efforts and successes compared to the potential for Kentucky needs to be conducted. See Chapter 12 - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY #3.**

**Kentucky should seriously consider developing a partnership with the RMEF to develop a similar elk watching and conservation center in eastern Kentucky. See Introduction - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY #4**

**For more on this, see Introduction – ACTION PLAN and Appendix C – IT IS NOT AN ELK PROBLEM.**