

Chapter 9
ELK VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES AND ECONOMIC IMPACT
IN KENTUCKY

There are a couple of established elk viewing tour opportunities in Kentucky. They include the Land Between the Lakes in Western Kentucky, Jenny Wiley State Resort Park and Buckhorn State Resort Park, Saddle Up Tours, and, next fall, Pine Mountain State Resort Park will also be offering elk tours. Below is information on each and their economic impact.

ELK & BISON RANGE AT LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES³¹

On 700 acres in Land Between the Lakes (LBL) near the Kentucky/Tennessee border in western Kentucky, both elk and bison roam.

The Elk & Bison Range is open to the public from dusk to dawn 365 days a year. Visitors are charged \$5 per car or \$.50 cents per passenger for buses and commercial vans. Annually nearly 2 million people visit U.S. Forest Service’s Land Between the Lakes. On average, 130,000 of these visitors pay a fee specifically to visit the bison area, generating over \$130,000 in revenue each year.



Last year’s visitors came from 35 different states which included Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

As of July of this year, 99,601 people have visited the Elk and Bison Prairie at Land Between the Lakes, 2,021 more visitors than in July of 2006.



2000 KENTUCKY BUGLE TOUR SURVEY³²

In 2000, 350 people signed up and participated in Bugle Tours in eastern Kentucky. The tours lasted for seven weekends. During that time, Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources surveyed 117 of the participants. They came from Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia. 64% stayed overnight, spent an average \$77.30 on lodging with an overall average expenditure of \$258.11 for lodging, food, gas and equipment or miscellaneous expenditures for their entire trip with \$122.32 of those funds spent locally. The majority heard about the Bugle Tours through the newspaper or word of mouth.

JENNY WILEY STATE RESORT PARK ELK VIEWING TOURS³³

Jenny Wiley SRP offers elk tours for their guests. From September 2005 – March 6th 2006, seventeen elk viewing tours were offered plus a special elk night event. There were 591 participants generating \$15,162.69. \$3,001 in elk tours, \$6,518.83 for accommodations and \$5,642.86 for the Elk Night Event.

A breakdown is provided below.

<u>DATE</u>	<u># PARTICIPANTS</u>	<u>TOURS</u>	<u>LODGING</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Sept 20,21,27	71	\$746.00	\$1,868.51	\$2,614.51
Oct 4,11,18,25	101	\$920.00	\$1,978.12	\$2,898.12
Nov 1,15,22	46	\$405.00	\$573.88	\$978.88
Dec 6,13	18	\$170.00	\$232.39	\$402.39
Jan 17,24,31	35	\$403.00	\$868.68	\$1,271.68
Feb 14,21	24	\$278.00	\$796.50	\$1,074.50
<u>Mar 6,21</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>\$79.00</u>	<u>\$200.75</u>	<u>\$279.75</u>
TOTAL	302	\$3,001.00	\$6,518.83	\$9,519.83

In 2006, Jenny Wiley SRP offered 30 elk tours which averaged 20 to 22 in a group and generated \$7,500. People came from as far away as Germany and all the surrounding states. The four to six hour tours currently cost \$12 per adults and \$7 per child under 12 but will be going up to \$20 and \$10 respectfully. Included in the tour is a visit to an active surface coal mine reclamation area.

BUCKHORN STATE RESORT PARK ELK VIEWING PACKAGES³⁴

Buckhorn SRP has been offering elk tour packages for the past five year. Packages include dinner, one night’s lodging and continental breakfast. They offer tours to Robinson Forest and Little Buckhorn four weekends in the fall and four weekends in the spring, averaging 25 people per weekend for a total of 200 participants per year attracting people from Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Kentucky (outside the immediate area).

The cost per tour package is \$145 per night which includes dinner, one night’s lodging, a breakfast of biscuit, sausage, orange juice and coffee and a three to four hour tour to see elk which brings in \$2,900. Many people choose to stay an extra night that is discounted to \$45 for those who take the tour. These numbers do not reflect the visitors purchasing gas, lunch the day before and the day after the tour, purchases in the gift shop and other purchases they might make while in the area. Due to a recent article in the Courier Journal, the tours are more popular than ever.

PINE MOUNTAIN STATE RESORT PARK ELK VIEWING TOURS³⁵

Pine Mountain SRP will begin offering elk tours in the Fall of 2007. Their tours will begin September 22nd and go through January 19th. They will offer eight 4-hour tours the first year at \$20 person or \$10 for children 12 and under. Each tour will include a continental breakfast, a 28-minute drive to the viewing area and interpretation on elk and other wildlife. The evening before, a presentation will be provided on the history of elk restoration in Kentucky and on reclaimed mine sites.

Recommendations: Both the naturalist at Jenny Wiley SRP and the naturalist at Pine Mountain SRP said the visitors they had met thus far were as interested in reclaimed mine sites, the technique used to withdraw the coal and the “before” and “after” of some of these location which warrants interpretative information being provided on this as well as the elk. See RECOMMENDATION: TASK 1.9. The Pine Mountain SRP naturalist also expressed deep concern about the growing number of elk and the limited lands available to actually hunt them. This issue is addressed more thoroughly in Chapter 4 and is included in RECOMMENDATIONS: TASKS 1.2 - 1.4.

SADDLE UP ELK TOURS³⁶

The newest elk viewing tour operation opened in the Spring of 2007 in Knott County, Kentucky. It is a private business that offers visitors the opportunity to view elk and other wildlife by horseback. The business operates both Spring and Fall but not during the hot summer nor cold winter months when weather and the chance to see elk diminish. One of the owners works as a conservation officer for the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources. The other owner works for the U.S. Corps of Engineers and both are knowledgeable of both the area and the wildlife.

Their first season had inquiry calls coming in from Big Stone Gap Virginia, Ashland, Lexington, Natural Bridge and the surrounding counties in Kentucky. Thus far they have provided 10 tours for 27 people from Hazard, Richmond, Ashland, Paintsville, Johnson City Tennessee, Big Stone Gap Virginia, and several small towns close to Cincinnati and Dayton Ohio.

Tourist saw elk on every ride, with the first ride in April seeing a herd of forty or more to the last ride in which only four elk were seen. Other wildlife included turkey, rabbits, quail and a number of song birds. People were also very interested in the coal and strip mines and they, themselves became a tourism draw.



Elk Viewing via horseback



Getting a closer look



One of the groups Spring 2007

Recommendations: The owners of Saddle Up Elk Tours suggested that signs were needed, joint marketing, local workshops on loans, liability, taxes and other information an entrepreneurial business would need to know to get started; customer service training for local tourism auxiliary businesses such as gas stations and restaurants, and increased advertising both within the area and outside the region. See RECOMMENDATIONS - TASKS 5.3-5.6

CLOSED BUSINESS

Elk Safari, a private business in Perry County offered elk viewing tours through the Lost Mountain reclaimed mining site from 2005-2006 although it does not appear to be in business any longer. The cost was \$25 person with shuttle pick up at local hotels.¹⁵

OTHER ELK INITIATIVES

CALF TAGGING

In the spring of each year, rangers with the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources go into the field and check the calves born that season. Each one is caught, weighed, given a shot, given an identification tag and logged into the system. This is done with helicopters to locate the animals and separate them from their mothers and a ground crew who captures the baby, checks it and then lets it go. Each year a hundred or more people have participated in this activity.



A calf in the wild

David Ledford (RMEF Coordinator) and his son watch as a helicopter circles the area seeking elk.



Students watch as KDFWR processes a calf.



The animal is then set free to rejoin his mother.

STUDY OF ELK AND WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL FOR KENTUCKY

ELK HUNTS BRING NEW JOB OPPORTUNITIES TO THE AREA

Each fall, hunters from all over Kentucky and throughout the U.S. selected in a lottery come to the reclaimed coalfields of east Kentucky to hunt elk. Last year, 200 hunters were selected and this year there will be 300.

As noted in Chapter 6, 84 of the 118 hunters who hunted in 2006 and completed a survey scouted one to as many as 20 days before the actual hunt, spending on average \$342.99 or a total of \$28,811.50 in the region.



A hunter and her father scouting before the 2006 Hunt

And during the actual hunt, hunters spent on average \$308.96 on food, lodging, transportation, guide services and land leasing for a total of \$36,457.00 in the region.

Both the scouting and the hunting opportunities in southeastern Kentucky has already brought new dollars into the region while creating many new business opportunities such as guide services, increased lodging needs and other auxiliary services. In the 2006 Hunter Survey, twenty-one of the 118 hunters surveyed hired a guide with six paying guides anywhere from \$40 to \$600 for the service. Over \$70,000 was spent on equipment and supplies by the hunters and over \$32,000 in processing and taxidermy services.

It is anticipated that the herd will grow to 10,000 within the next few years. If this happens, the number of elk tags issued could increase to 1,500, causing the economic impact to the region for both scouting and hunting will increase dramatically. *See Chapter 4 – ECONOMIC IMPACT OF KENTUCKY ELK HUNTS for more information and statistics.*



Hunters come to the area weeks and even months in advance to get familiar with the area, determine where the elk are located and where might be the best location to hunt.

Please note: Ninety-eight (83%) of the 118 hunters surveyed said they planned to come back to the area to view elk and 86 planned to come back to hunt turkey or other game, view the scenery or visit friends they made during the hunt.

STUDY OF ELK AND WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL FOR KENTUCKY