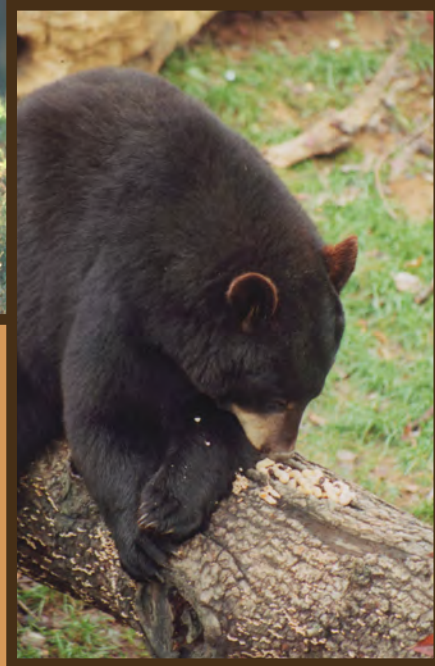


# 2007 STUDY OF THE ELK & WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL



FOR SOUTHERN & EASTERN  
KENTUCKY



A Study Commissioned by the  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
in Partnership with  
Southern & Eastern Kentucky Tourism  
Development Association.

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**Rocky Mountain  
ELK FOUNDATION**



2007



## INTRODUCTION: CAPITALIZING ON OUR ASSETS

### Introduction ACTION PLAN TO CAPITALIZE ON OUR ASSETS!

Pennsylvania has approximately 500 elk and most are located within close proximity to Benezette, a small rural community with a population of less than 300 people that offers a few hotels, B&B's, shops and restaurants and yet attracts over 75,000 visitors each year, primarily to view elk. 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". The state is investing \$5 million dollars leveraged with \$7.6 million dollars in private funding to build a 7,000 square foot facility in Benezette Pennsylvania which they anticipate will attract 160,000 visitors by the year 2016.

- Kentucky has over 6,000 elk within a 13-county area in Southeast Kentucky – That is OVER 10 times more elk than Pennsylvania!
- Kentucky has more elk than any other state east of the Rocky Mountains! In fact, in southeast Kentucky there are nearly three times more elk than all the other states COMBINED!
  - The other states have a combined total of 2,324 elk. Kentucky has 6,500 elk!
  - Also within these 13 counties in southeastern Kentucky there are 6 state parks; 4,000 lodging units; 862 campsites; 283 restaurants; 33 museums; 11 golf courses and 5 airports.

If Kentucky were to build a similar facility to what is being built in Pennsylvania and tie it in with elk tours, they could conceivably attract over 160,000 visitors by the second year of operation if properly marketed.

*Interesting Fact: Land Between the Lakes Elk and Bison Range in western Kentucky featuring 74 elk in a confined area attracts 130,000 visitors each year who pay \$5 per adult to drive through the area. The potential for southeast Kentucky with 6,500 elk to attract visitors is HUGE!*

Pennsylvania attracts people primarily from within Pennsylvania to view their elk. 92% of their visitors are from within the state. The other 8% come primarily from the surrounding states of New York, Ohio, Maryland and New Jersey.

- Kentucky could attract visitors from a much larger area but needs to develop a uniform tracking system to document where their visitors are coming from, how they heard about the elk, how much they are spending while in the area and develop a marketing strategy to draw people from further distances.

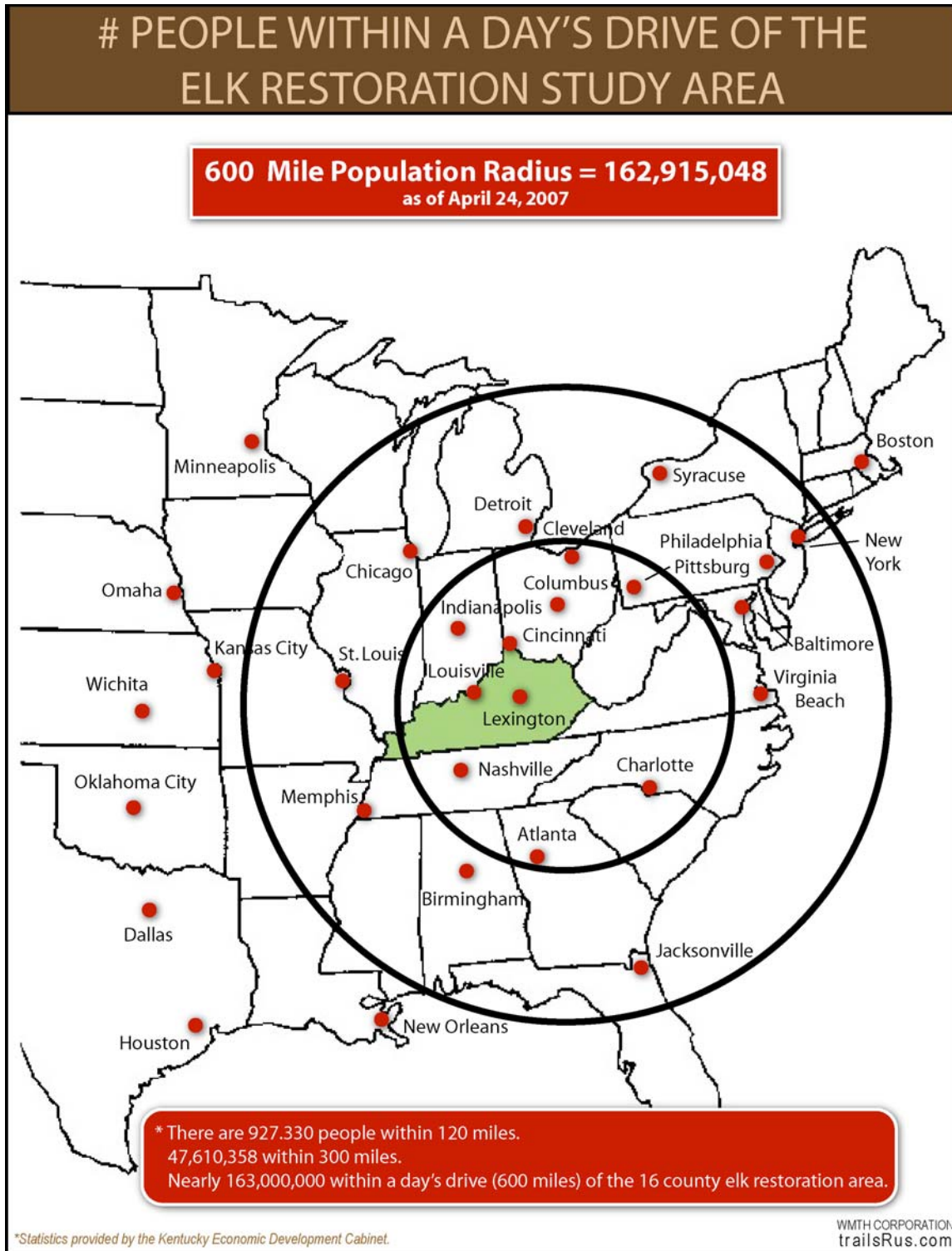
Pennsylvania has 46 million people within a day's drive.

- Kentucky has 47 million people within a half day's drive and 163 million (nearly 4 times more than Pennsylvania) within a day's drive.



Larger map on next page\*

## INTRODUCTION: CAPITALIZING ON OUR ASSETS



**The goal should be to develop a detailed plan for those within the 16-county elk restoration area of Kentucky to best capitalize on the elk and other wildlife viewing opportunities as they are doing in Pennsylvania, creating jobs and revenue for each of the counties involved.**

## INTRODUCTION: CAPITALIZING ON OUR ASSETS

*Interesting Fact: The average nature tourist spends on average \$138.45 per day.<sup>32</sup>*

In a 2002 study commissioned by Pennsylvania<sup>32</sup>, a detailed plan was developed to capitalize fully on the visitors coming to the region to view elk. The study stated, if the plan was fully implemented, by 2005 \$3.4 million would be spent in the area annually on food, transportation and lodging and that by 2012, this figure would grow to \$18.6 million.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is now developing elk viewing sites within a 12-county area to capitalize on this. 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 a loop between I-80's Penfield Exit 111 and Snow Shoe Exit 147.

- Kentucky needs to develop a similar plan that includes marketing materials, a website, interpreted wayside exhibits and an elk viewing loop, ideally capitalizing on the Hal Roger Parkway as the gateway road to Elk Country from the west and Hwy 80 as the gateway from the east then travel southwest on Hwy 119, through Pike, Letcher, Harlan and Bell with side trips to Bad Branch Falls and other natural features along the route, ending up back on the Hal Rogers Parkway. Other similar wildlife loops should also be created throughout the 16-county elk restoration area featuring different wildlife viewing opportunities such as a bear trail loop, an eagle watch and a trail to view migratory songbirds.



*There are over 20 wayside exhibits and interpretive signs at Fish Pond Lake in Letcher County. Every community should have similar signs installed throughout their county.*

- Wayside exhibits and interpretive signs featuring wildlife need to be installed in each of the counties; scenic driving tours and nature walks developed; and brochures created that highlight the wildlife and unique natural features one might see when they come to southeast Kentucky. *See RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY at the end of this chapter.*

*Interesting Fact: The average elk hunter in Kentucky stayed in the area 2.3 days and spent \$342.99 for transportation BEFORE the hunt ever started.*

Kentucky is one of the few states east of the Rocky Mountains that offer elk hunting opportunities. This helps to manage the herd as well as provide hunters with a unique and wonderful experience while providing revenue for both the elk restoration program and the communities. *See Chapters 4 and 5 for more on this.*

- Through survey analysis, Kentucky is attracting hunters from every state in the Union (except Hawaii) as well as Canada with 83% of those who actually hunted responding that they plan to come back to Kentucky specifically to view elk. Kentucky needs to capitalize on this!

## STUDY OF ELK AND WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL FOR KENTUCKY

## INTRODUCTION: CAPITALIZING ON OUR ASSETS

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

**#1 – Survey of Kentucky elk hunters should continue to better understand the true economic value hunters have to the Commonwealth and to the region.**

**#2 – Develop a similar survey instrument for businesses that provide elk tours.**

*A few of the questions that need to be addressed...where people came from, how they heard about it, how long they stayed in the area, what other activities did they do while in the area and how much money they spend on food, lodging, transportation, activities and shopping.*

**#3 - Conduct a more in-depth analysis of other states' efforts and successes and how best for Kentucky to capitalize on these ideas.**

**#4 – Conduct a more in-depth analysis of each of the 16-counties within the elk restoration area for wildlife viewing opportunities.**



*Every county should have detailed maps and brochures developed that include both driving tours and nature walks highlighting the wildlife viewing opportunities within each of the counties.*

*Each county also needs a signage plan developed specifically for their area to add directional signs, wayside exhibits and interpretive signs featuring wildlife viewing opportunities.*

**#5 Construct a detailed plan similar in concept to the Pennsylvania plan\* to both develop and market the 16-county elk restoration area.**

*\*Pennsylvania has developed 23 sites along a 127-mile loop for its 12-county region.<sup>31</sup>*

**#6 – Establish visitor information centers that are visible and easily accessible to the traveling public along the major highways similar in concept to the state welcome centers but providing information specific to the region.**

*These site locations would provide maps, brochures and information of the opportunities for wildlife viewing and elk tours as well as other tourism offerings for all 16 counties in southeast Kentucky.*



*Possible building on Hwy 80 that could serve as one of the welcome centers for the region.*

**#7 – The Commonwealth of Kentucky should develop a partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to develop a similar elk watching and conservation center in eastern Kentucky similar to what is being built on Winslow Hill in Benazette Pennsylvania.**

*An excellent location would be the Beech Fork area located just off Hwy 80 in Knott County near the Perry County line. The land is owned by Kentucky River Land Company and is currently used by Saddle Up Elk Tours to view elk that are plentiful.*

**#8 - A strategic plan that includes a timeline and responsible parties to implement the recommendations of this study needs to be developed.**

See OVERVIEWS & RECOMMENDATIONS for more suggestions and ideas.

# STUDY OF ELK AND WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL FOR KENTUCKY

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*\*The majority of the photos used on the cover are from a statewide photo contest held in 2003.*

***A STUDY COMMISSIONED BY THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION,  
SOUTHERN & EASTERN KENTUCKY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION  
AND APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION***