

DRAFT STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ELK 2016-2020



Elk in Minnesota

Elk are managed to maintain a free-ranging, wild population in northwestern Minnesota. Current elk population goals were established in the 2009 elk management plan, which the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources developed with local advisory groups. The 2016-2020 draft elk management plan reflects a priority to maintain and further increase landowner acceptance of elk while increasing the herd sizes in Kittson County and bringing the Grygla herd up to the population goal established in 2009. This draft plan includes input from elk advisory work groups made up of a broad spectrum of stakeholders in northwestern Minnesota.



Bull elk in snow near Grygla, MN.

Three distinct herds totaling approximately 130 animals roam portions of far northwestern Minnesota and comprise the state's entire elk population, according to the DNR's most recent population survey.

- The Caribou-Vita herd is Minnesota's largest herd. It is estimated at 120-150 elk that migrate between northern Kittson County and Manitoba. Seventy-nine elk were counted on the Minnesota side in the 2015 aerial survey. The current population goal is 150-200 elk inhabiting both sides of the border.
- The Kittson-Central herd is located near Lancaster in Kittson County and contains roughly 35 elk. The 2009 population goal was 20-30 animals; whereas the draft 2016 plan sets a new goal range of 65-75 elk.
- The Grygla herd in Marshall County has declined in recent years and is currently estimated to include about 20 elk. The 2009 population goal for the Grygla herd was 30-38 animals; the draft plan maintains that original goal.

Conservation and Management

There are several issues to consider when managing for the long-term survival of small elk populations, such as those found in Minnesota. Population dynamics, habitat availability and management, public acceptance, and risk of disease exposure and transmission are some of the many factors that must be taken into account when managing for elk population viability.

Due to the proximity of the Kittson County elk herd to the international border, coordination with the Manitoba Ministry of Natural Resources is also an important component of management for this herd.

The draft 2016-2020 Strategic Management Plan for Elk addresses elk population goals, landowner concerns, and opportunities to hunt and view elk.

DRAFT STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strategic Vision

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will maintain a free-ranging, wild elk population. The long term vision is to enhance the size and range extent of Minnesota's elk population and provide increased recreational opportunities, while maintaining positive coexistence with private landowners.

DNR envisions a healthy, self-sustaining, managed population that affords recreational (including regular hunting seasons) and economic opportunities for all state citizens, while actively addressing elk depredation situations. Habitats and herd structure are maintained for sustainable reproductive potential. Hunting is offered both as a recreational opportunity and as a tool to manage elk populations and reduce elk-landowner conflicts.

Continued growth of Minnesota's elk herd will include establishing enduring relationships with landowners to minimize elk damage and provide elk recreational opportunities to the citizens of Minnesota. Under the plan, habitat and herd structure will be maintained and hunting seasons will be used to help manage problem animals and herd size.



Bull elk near Grygla, MN.

2016-2020 Elk Management Plan Goals & Objectives

GOAL: Increase the size and range extent of Minnesota's elk population while maintaining positive coexistence with private landowners and provide increased recreational opportunities to the citizens of Minnesota.

OBJECTIVES: Nine broad objectives frame the elk management plan to help DNR reach its goal:

1. Maintain a socially acceptable and biologically sound number of elk in the three elk ranges of the state, including the Caribou-Vita subgroup, which is shared with Manitoba.
2. Work cooperatively with landowners and producers to identify private land management opportunities and prevent or minimize property damage caused by elk.
3. Continue to improve and maintain quality habitat on, and encourage elk use of, public lands that benefit elk.
4. Ensure the health and reproductive potential of the elk population.
5. Provide recreational opportunities for elk viewing and hunting.
6. Provide information to stakeholders.
7. Conduct and pursue funding for research that addresses known information gaps regarding elk management and recreational opportunities in Minnesota.
8. Support external research to evaluate the feasibility of elk restoration in northeastern Minnesota.
9. Inform and educate elected officials on elk management and legislative opportunities.

Strategies for achieving these nine objectives are contained in the plan at www.dnr.gov/elk.