



## 2020 Minnesota Elk Harvest Report

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### Introduction

Legislation passed in 2016 (MN Statute 97B.516b) directed the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to “...not manage an elk herd in Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, or Beltrami counties in a manner that would increase the size of the herd, including adoption or implementation of an elk management plan designed to increase an elk herd, unless the commissioner of agriculture verifies that crop and fence damages paid under section 3.7371 and attributed to the herd have not increased for at least two years.” In response, DNR adopted a 4-year Interim Strategic Management Plan for Elk in 2016 that will maintain a status quo in elk numbers at the current population estimates. This plan set herd goals at 50 – 60 elk for the Kittson Central herd, 30-38 elk for the Grygla herd, and 150-200 elk for the Caribou Vita herd. Since then, we have added two more years to this plan. Plans will be made to update the Strategic Management Plan for Elk in the near future.

The DNR conducts an annual aerial elk population survey each winter using a fixed-wing aircraft to fly over survey blocks consistent with the range of each elk herd. Survey results are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 for the Kittson Central herd. Total elk recorded within the Kittson Central block was 102 and included 69 antlerless elk and 33 bulls. In the Grygla survey block, 24 total elk were observed including 10 bulls and 14 antlerless elk. A survey was not conducted over the Caribou-vita herd since Manitoba was unable to conduct a joint-survey at the same time.

For the 2019-2020 elk season a total of 44 elk licenses were offered to Minnesota hunters – the highest number of licenses ever offered - and this increased opportunity resulted in the highest elk harvest ever recorded for the state. There were two established zones open for elk hunting in Minnesota in 2020: 1) Zone 20 - Kittson Central and 2) Zone 30 - Kittson Northeast (Figure 2). Elk hunting in Zone 10 - Grygla, has been closed since 2013 because the population is below goal (Figure 3). To move the Kittson Central herd towards goal range, this year the number of seasons held in Zone 20 was increased to six regular season hunts. Another change in 2020 required hunters to apply for both the specific license type (either-sex, bull-only, or antlerless-only) and season dates. For the Zone 20 - Kittson Central there were 12 license/season date options : 1) Season A/G – August 22 through August 30, 2) Season B/H - September 5 through September 13, 3) Season C/I – September 19 through September 27, 4) Season D/J - October 3 through October 11, 5) Season E/K – October 24 through November 1, and 6) Season F/L – December 5 through December 13. There was one regular season hunt in Zone 30 – Kittson Northeast for two bull-only licenses: 1) Season M - September 5 through September 13. All of the seasons were 9 days in length, including two weekends. These dates were also chosen to avoid conflict with the Youth

Firearm Deer Season on October 15 through October 18 and the Regular Firearm Deer Season November 7 through November 15. Overall, hunter success rates were high this year.

### **Hunting season options and license lottery**

A total of 44 licenses were available and 4,425 individuals or parties (up to two hunters) applied for the opportunity to hunt elk in Minnesota (Table 2). Applicants were given the opportunity to select both zone and season in which to hunt. Seasons in Zone 20 were also split between either-sex and antlerless-only licenses. This allowed applicants to choose the type of license desired during their application.

The Minnesota elk lottery is a three-step process. First, a lottery for qualifying landowner applicants is held for Zone 20 (20% = 8 licenses offered). Once landowner applicants were selected, the second round was for applicants that had applied for 10 years or more (20% = 8 licenses offered). All remaining applicants not selected in the first two steps were then placed into the general drawing with all the other applicant names for the remaining elk licenses (60%) available in the zone and season they had selected on their application. Zone 30 only had two bull-only licenses available, so no landowner licenses or 10 year history licenses were offered.

### **Hunter orientation and elk sample collection**

All elk hunters are required to attend a mandatory orientation session, held virtually this year. At this session, DNR staff go over the logistics of the elk hunt and explain how to collect biological samples from their harvested animal. The Friday before a given hunt, DNR staff provide hunters with their license and a biological sampling kit. Field samples collected by the hunter include blood, hair with skin, muscle tissue, and the whole liver. Hunters must register their animal in person within 24 hours at the local DNR office and provide biological samples. DNR staff help map the harvest location, provide a possession tag, and take the hunter-collected biological samples. DNR staff also collect lymph nodes, the obex (brain stem), the whole brain (when feasible), and a tooth so an accurate age can be determined via cementum annuli. Alternative arrangements are made for the collection of some samples, if immediate collection would interfere with a hunter's planned taxidermy mount. DNR staff submit all biological samples to the DNR Wildlife Health Program for disease testing and other monitoring projects.

### **Elk harvest results**

In 2020, a total of 37 elk were harvested in Zones 20 and 30 (Table 3), for an overall hunter success rate of 83% for Zone 20 and 100% for Zone 30. Although success rates were generally high, there was a gradual decrease in success rates for Zone 20 as the seasons progressed. Two antlerless elk and 15 bull elk were taken from hunters using either-sex licenses for Zone 20, and 18 antlerless elk were taken by hunters using antlerless-only licenses. One female elk was killed but not recovered in the Zone 20 - I Season, it is not reflected in the harvest totals. Long-term elk harvest for all zones is depicted in Tables 4, 5, and 6.

Table 1. Kittson Central (Zone 20) elk survey count, 2008-2020

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of bulls surveyed</b>	<b>Number of antlerless surveyed</b>	<b>Total number surveyed</b>
2008	14	46	<b>60</b>
2009	16	29	<b>45</b>
2010	NO SURVEY COMPLETED THIS YEAR		
2011	12	31	<b>43</b>
2012	NO SURVEY COMPLETED THIS YEAR		
2013	17	28	<b>45</b>
2014	17	20	<b>37</b>
2015	18	16	<b>34</b>
2016	18	34	<b>52</b>
2017	16	45	<b>61</b>
2018	18	57	<b>75</b>
2019	33	61	<b>94</b>
2020	33	69	<b>102</b>

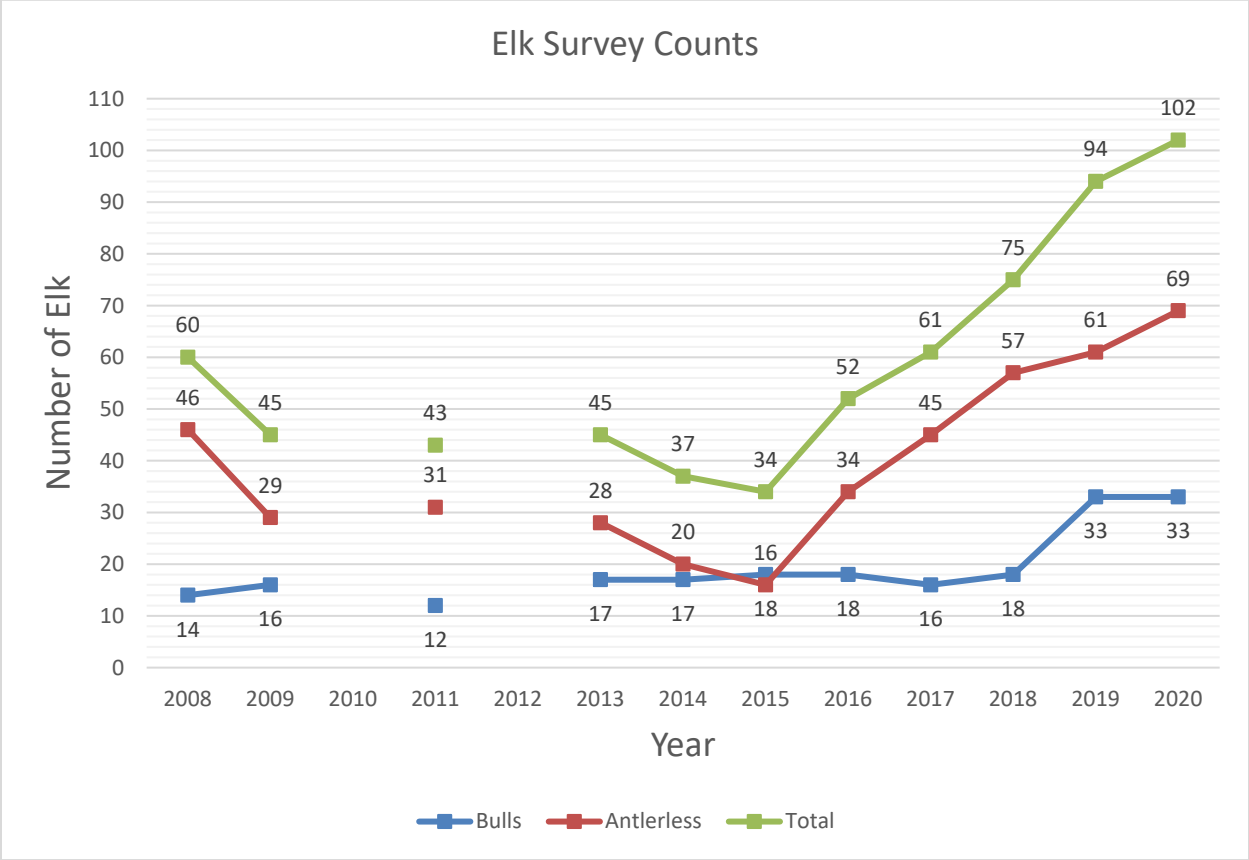


Figure 1. Kittson Central (Zone 20) elk survey count, 2008-2020

Table 2. License allocation and application numbers of the 2020 Minnesota elk seasons

Zone	Season Dates	Bull-Only	Either-Sex	Antlerless-Only	Total	Total Applicants
Zone 20	A: Aug 22-30	0	3	0	3	489
Zone 20	G: Aug 22-30	0	0	4	4	56
Zone 20	B: Sept 5-13	0	3	0	3	730
Zone 20	H: Sept 5-13	0	0	4	4	65
Zone 20	C: Sept 19-27	0	3	0	3	875
Zone 20	I: Sept 19-27	0	0	4	4	95
Zone 20	D: Oct 3-11	0	3	0	3	673
Zone 20	J: Oct 3-11	0	0	4	4	117
Zone 20	E: Oct 29-Nov 1	0	3	0	3	275
Zone 20	K: Oct 29-Nov 1	0	0	4	4	83
Zone 20	F: Dec 5-13	0	3	0	3	316
Zone 20	L: Dec 5-13	0	0	4	4	144
Zone 30	M: Sept 5-13	2	0	0	2	507
OVERALL	TOTAL	2	18	24	44	4,425

Table 3. Distribution of the 2020 Minnesota elk harvest.

**Kittson County Central Hunt  
Zone 20**

Season	Either-Sex Licenses	Antlerless Licenses	Bulls taken	Antlerless taken	Total elk taken	Success rate
Season A & G (Aug 22-30)	3	4	3	4	7	100%
Season B & H (Sept 5-13)	3	4	3	4	7	100%
Season C & I (Sept 19-27)	3	4	3	3	6	86%
Season D & J (Oct 3-11)	3	4	1	5	6	86%
Season E & K (Oct 24-Nov 1)	3	4	3	2	5	71%
Season F & L (Dec 5-13)	3	4	2	2	4	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>83%</b>

**Kittson County Northeast Hunt  
Zone 30**

Season	Bulls-only Licenses	Antlerless Licenses	Bulls taken	Antlerless taken	Total elk taken	Success rate
Season M (Sept 5-13)	2	0	2	0	2	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4. Grygla (Zone 10) elk harvests, 1987-2012

Year	Total Bull or Either-Sex Licenses	Total Bulls Harvested	Total Antlerless Licenses	Total Antlerless Harvested	Total Harvest	Hunter Success Rate
1987	2	1	2	1	2	50%
1996	2	2	7	6	8	89%
1997	5	1	5	2	3	30%
1998	4	2	0	0	2	50%
2004	1	1	4	2	3	60%
2005	1	0	4	0	0	0%
2006	2	2	6	2	4	50%
2007	0	0	6	6	6	100%
2008	2	2	10	6	8	67%
2009	2	2	12	12	14	100%
2010	2	1	5	3	4	57%
2011	2	2	3	0	2	40%
2012	2	1	3	0	1	20%

Table 5. Kittson Central (Zone 20) elk harvests, 2008-2020

Year	Total Bull or Either-Sex Licenses	Total Bulls Harvested	Total Antlerless Licenses	Total Antlerless Harvested	Total Harvest	Hunter Success Rate
2008	1	1	10	10	11	100%
2009	12	9	4	5	14	88%
2010	1	1	3	3	4	100%
2011	2	3	6	4	7	88%
2012	3	3	13	3	6	38%
2013	6	4	15	6	10	48%
2014	7	4	0	0	4	57%
2015	5	3	0	0	3	60%
2016	5	3	0	0	3	60%
2017	6	5	2	1	6	75%
2018	4	3	16	12	15	75%
2019	4	4	21	10	14	56%
2020	18	15	24	20	35	83%

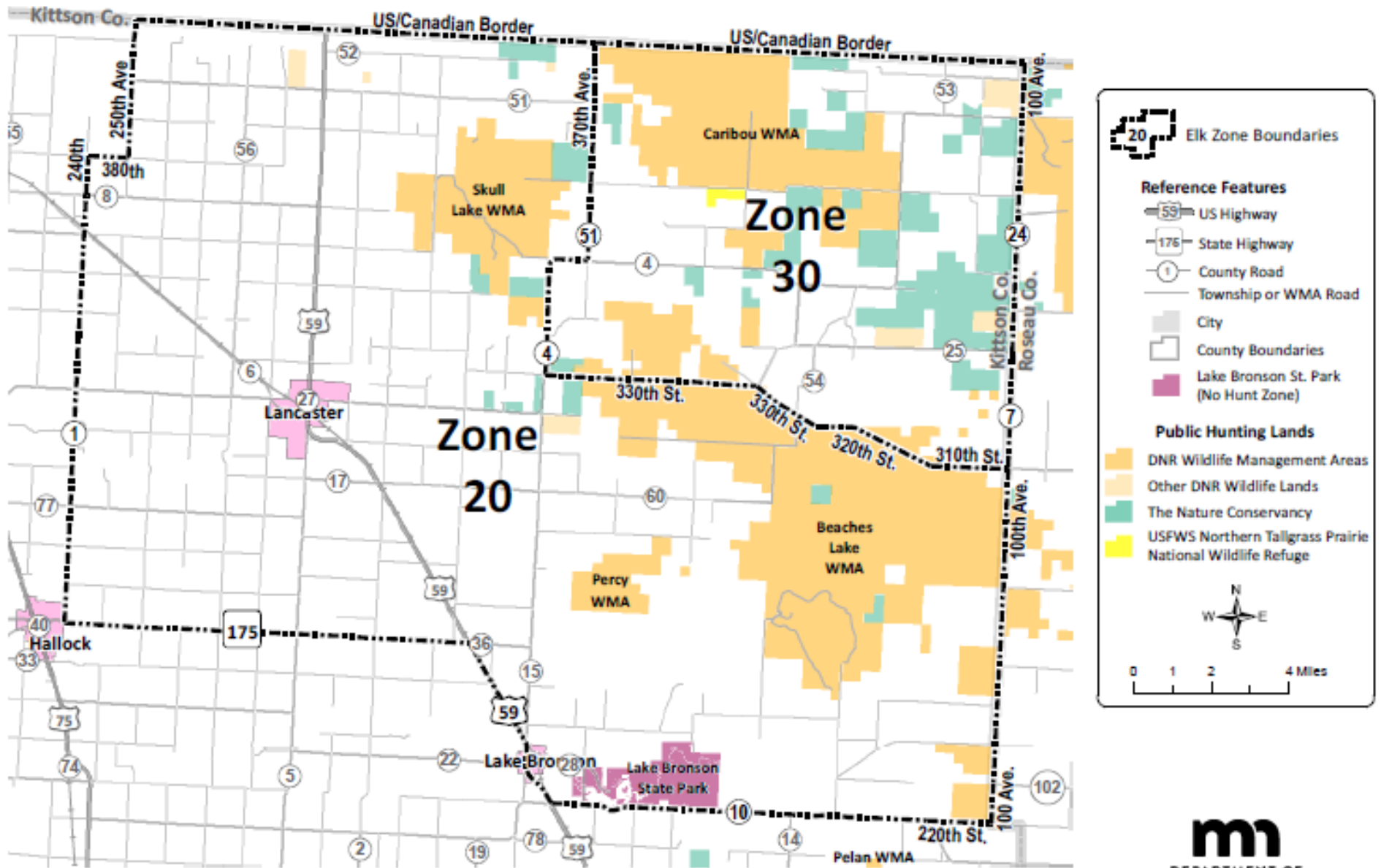


Table 6. Kittson Northeast (Zone 30) elk harvests, 2012-2020

Year	Total Bull Licenses	Total Bulls Harvested	Hunter Success Rate
2012	2	1	50%
2013	2	2	100%
2014	2	2	100%
2015	2	2	100%
2016	2	2	100%
2017	5	4	80%
2018	2	2	100%
2019	2	1	50%
2020	2	2	100%

Figure 2. Kittson County Elk Hunt Zones.

## Minnesota Elk Hunt Zones



**20** Elk Zone Boundaries

**Reference Features**

- US Highway
- State Highway
- County Road
- Township or WMA Road
- City
- County Boundaries
- Lake Bronson St. Park (No Hunt Zone)

**Public Hunting Lands**

- DNR Wildlife Management Areas
- Other DNR Wildlife Lands
- The Nature Conservancy
- USFWS Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge

0 1 2 4 Miles

Figure 3. Grygla Elk Hunt Zone.

