



## 2024 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 an *Interim Strategic Management Plan for Elk* that set elk population goals in line with the 2016 population estimates. In 2024, an amendment to the existing statute ([Chapter 116, Sec. 56](#)) allowed DNR to increase the population limit for one of the three elk herds, Kittson Central, to allow for genetic diversification and herd health. These statutes set the following population goals for each herd:

- Kittson Central herd: up to 98 elk (previously set at 50-60 elk in 2016).
- Caribou-Vita herd: 150-200 elk
- Grygla herd: 30-38 elk

DNR typically conducts an [annual aerial elk survey](#) using a fixed-wing aircraft to obtain minimum counts of the population by herd. These annual surveys influence the number of licenses allotted during the subsequent hunting season. However, to maintain consistency in observation success between years, certain conditions are required to complete the aerial survey, including a minimum of 8” of snow. During winter 2023-2024, the mild conditions and lack of snow cover prevented an aerial survey from being conducted. As a result, the surveys for all three elk herds were last completed in February 2023 and the minimum counts were as follows: Grygla herd = 29 elk; Kittson Central herd = 75 elk; and Caribou-Vita herd (both Minnesota and Manitoba sides of the border flown) = 227 elk. There are plans to conduct the aerial survey for all three herds in Jan/Feb 2025.

The Red Lake Band of Ojibwe began holding off-reservation tribal elk hunts within the 1863 Old Crossing Treaty Area in 2022 and has voiced plans to conduct annual hunts. This treaty area encompasses the range of all three elk herds in northwestern Minnesota. Red Lake Band has set their big game season for tribal hunters within the ceded territory as Sept 15-Dec 31 each year and harvest is not restricted to specific zones. MNDNR will communicate each spring with the Red Lake Band about shared harvest opportunities, based on aerial survey results.

Due to the lack of updated elk population information, as the aerial survey was not conducted, DNR took a conservative approach for the distribution of state elk hunting licenses. In 2024, there were two established zones open for state-licensed elk hunting: Zone 20 - Kittson Central and Zone 30 – Caribou-Vita (Figure 1). Elk hunting in Zone 10 - Grygla, has been closed to state hunters since 2013 because the population has remained below goal (Figure 2). In Zone 20, two regular season license options were available for the Kittson Central herd: Season A) three either-sex licenses for Sept. 21-29 and Season B) two antlerless only licenses for Sept. 21-29. For the Caribou-Vita herd, considerations were also given for First-Nations harvest on the Manitoba side of the border. To that end, in Zone 30 one regular season license option was available: Season C) five either-sex licenses for Sept. 21-29. All of the seasons were the same 9 days in length, including two weekends, centered around the elk rut.

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

A total of 10 licenses were available and 4,307 individuals or parties (up to two hunters) applied for the opportunity to hunt elk in Minnesota (Table 2). Applicants are required to be Minnesota residents and 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 and is directed in part by [Minnesota statute 97A.433](#). First, DNR holds a lottery for applicants that have applied for 10 years or more; 20% of elk licenses must be issued to this group each year (20% = 2 licenses offered in 2024). The 10-year lottery is run when total licenses available in all zones combined is equal to or greater than five. Once the 10-year applicant lottery is run, a second lottery is held for qualifying landowner applicants, by zone. The statute dictates up to 20% of total elk licenses may be issued to landowners. The landowner lottery is run when total licenses within a Zone (Zone 20 or 30) is equal to or greater than five, thus it was run for both Zone 20 and Zone 30 in 2024 (20% = 1 license in Zone 20 and 1 license in Zone 30). 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.

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

All state-licensed elk hunters are required to attend a mandatory orientation session the Friday before a given hunt. At this session, DNR staff go over the logistics of the elk hunt and explain how we collect biological samples from their harvested animal. 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 collect biological samples. DNR staff collect lymph nodes, the obex (brain stem), muscle, hair, 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 2024, a total of 8 elk were harvested in Zones 20 and 30 combined (Table 3), for an overall hunter success rate of 60% for Zone 20 and 100% for Zone 30. Three bull elk were taken from hunters using either-sex licenses for Zone 20, and no antlerless elk were taken by hunters using antlerless-only

licenses. Five bull elk were taken by hunters using either-sex licenses for Zone 30. Long-term elk harvest by state hunters for all zones is depicted in Tables 4, 5, and 6.

### **Elk hunt in the 1863 Treaty Territory**

In 2024, the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians offered a lottery for 30 permits for tribal members to hunt elk in the area included under the 1863 Old Crossing Treaty. Elk harvest was capped at 10. Hunting season dates were Sept. 15 to Dec. 31, 2024 and permits could be used to harvest either antlered or antlerless elk. Ten elk were reported to be taken during the 2024 tribal hunting season and the tribal elk hunting season closed early as a result.

Table 1. Kittson Central (Zone 20) elk survey count, 2008-2024

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of bulls surveyed</b>	<b>Number of antlerless surveyed</b>	<b>Total number surveyed</b>
2008	14	46	60
2009	16	29	45
2010	NO SURVEY COMPLETED THIS YEAR		
2011	12	31	43
2012	NO SURVEY COMPLETED THIS YEAR		
2013	17	28	45
2014	17	20	37
2015	18	16	34
2016	18	34	52
2017	16	45	61
2018	18	57	75
2019	33	61	94
2020	33	69	102
2021	NO SURVEY COMPLETED THIS YEAR		
2022	33	51	84
2023	25	50	75
2024	NO SURVEY COMPLETED THIS YEAR		

Table 2. License allocation and application numbers of the 2024 Minnesota elk seasons

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Season Dates</b>	<b>Either-Sex</b>	<b>Antlerless-Only</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Applicants</b>
Zone 20	A: Sept. 21–Sept. 29	3	0	<b>3</b>	1,578
Zone 20	B: Sept. 21–Sept. 29	0	2	<b>2</b>	135
Zone 30	C: Sept. 21–Sept. 29	5	0	<b>5</b>	2,594
OVERALL	TOTAL	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	4,307

Table 3. Distribution of the 2024 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 & B (Sept. 21–29)	3	2	3	0	3	60%

**Kittson County Northeast Hunt  
Zone 30**

Season	Either-Sex Licenses	Antlerless Licenses	Bulls taken	Antlerless taken	Total elk taken	Success rate
Season C (Sept. 21–29)	5	0	5	0	5	100%

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, 2008-2024

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%
2021	8	7	20	16	23	82%
2022	8	7	20	8	15	54%
2023	6	3	6	3	6	50%
2024	3	3	2	0	3	60%



Table 6. Kittson Northeast (Zone 30) elk harvests, 2012-2024

Year	Total Bull or Either-Sex Licenses	Total Bulls Harvested	Total Antlerless Licenses	Total Antlerless Harvested	Total Harvest	Hunter Success Rate
2012	2	1	0	0	1	50%
2013	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2014	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2015	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2016	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2017	5	4	0	0	4	80%
2018	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2019	2	1	0	0	1	50%
2020	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2021	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2022	2	2	0	0	2	100%
2023	5	5	0	0	5	100%
2024	5	5	0	0	5	100%

Figure 1. Kittson County Elk Hunt Zones 20 and 30.

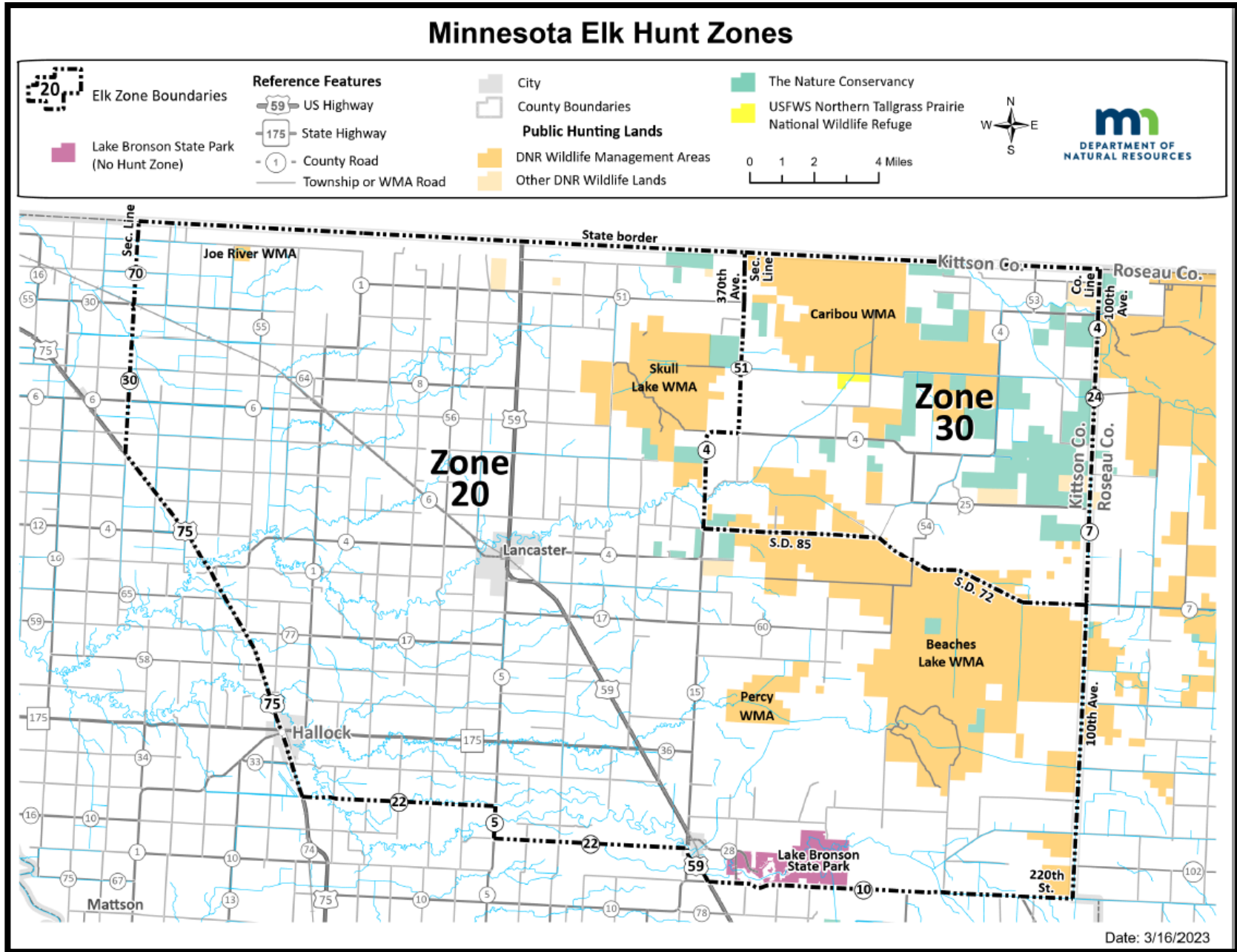


Figure 2. Grygla Elk Hunt Zone 10.

