



2025 Minnesota Elk Harvest Report

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Introduction

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been directed to restrict existing elk herd sizes by legislation introduced in 2016 ([MN Statute 97B.516b](#)), which states DNR “...must 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 limits for each herd:

- Kittson Central herd: up to 98 elk (previously set at 50-60 elk from 2016-2024).
- Caribou-Vita herd: 150-200 elk
- Grygla herd: 30-38 elk

DNR conducts an [annual aerial elk survey](#) using a fixed-wing aircraft to obtain minimum counts of the population across the three established herds. These annual surveys provide baseline data for determining harvest recommendations that will allow the elk populations to remain within the statutorily limited population goals. To maintain consistency in observation success between years, certain conditions are typically required to complete the aerial survey, including a minimum of 8” of snow. Mild conditions and lack of snow cover during winter 2023-2024 prevented an aerial survey from being conducted. It was decided that the survey would be flown as soon as possible in winter 2024-2025, even if optimal snow conditions were not present. When the 2024-2025 aerial survey was conducted, there was an average of 5 inches of snow cover in the Grygla survey block and 5-7 inches of snow cover in the Kittson Central and Caribou-Vita blocks. Additionally, the Caribou-Vita survey was terminated after 8 hours due to mechanical issues and poor weather conditions; however 37% of the survey block (including 100% of the Minnesota portion and 24% of the Manitoba portion) was covered during those first 8 hours. The surveys for all three elk herds were completed in Jan 2025 with these minimum counts by herd: Grygla herd = 24 elk; Kittson Central herd = 75 elk; and Caribou-Vita herd (incomplete survey) = 134 elk.

The Red Lake Band of Ojibwe began holding off-reservation tribal elk hunts within the 1863 Old Crossing Treaty Area in 2022 and has indicated plans to continue annual hunts. 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. First-Nation's harvest of elk in the Caribou-Vita herd occurs in Manitoba but resulting harvest numbers are unknown. As of fall 2025, Manitoba provincial hunting was not in effect for the Caribou-Vita herd, but wildlife managers in Manitoba have expressed a desire to open a limited hunt soon.

Due to the stagnant herd growth between 2023 and 2025 for all three herds, DNR took a conservative approach for the distribution of state elk hunting licenses. In 2025, there was one established zone open for state-licensed elk hunting: 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). This was the first time Zone 20 – Kittson Central was closed for hunting since it was first opened in 2008.

In Zone 30, two regular season state license options were available for the Caribou-Vita herd: Season A) two either-sex licenses for Sept. 13-21 and Season B) two antlerless only licenses for Sept. 27-Oct. 5. Both seasons were 9 days in length, including two weekends, centered around the elk rut.

Hunting season options and license lottery

A total of 4 licenses were available and 3,548 individuals or parties (up to two hunters) applied for the opportunity to hunt elk in Minnesota (Table 1). Applicants are required to be Minnesota residents and were given the opportunity to select both zone and season in which to hunt; 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. The 10-year lottery is run when total licenses available in all zones combined is equal to or greater than five (this was not true for 2025, so there was not a special drawing for 10-year applicants). 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 with at least 160 acres of agricultural or grazing land within the elk hunt zones. The landowner lottery is run when total licenses within a Zone is equal to or greater than five (this was not true for 2025, so there was not a special drawing for landowner applicants). 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. Given we had less than 5 licenses, all winners were selected through the general lottery drawing for the 2025 season.

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 describe 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: 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. Biological samples are used for disease testing and other research monitoring projects.

Elk harvest results – state hunters

In 2025, a total of 2 elk were harvested in Zone 30 (Table 2), for an overall hunter success rate of 50%. Two bull elk were taken by hunters using either-sex licenses for Zone 30, and no antlerless elk were taken by hunters using antlerless-only licenses. Long-term elk harvest by state hunters for all zones is depicted in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Elk hunt in the 1863 Treaty Territory

In 2025, the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians offered a lottery for tribal members to hunt elk in the area included under the 1863 Old Crossing Treaty. The Red Lake Band provided DNR information on elk harvested in this tribal hunt to facilitate collaboration on elk population management. The lottery consisted of 10 either-sex permits and 10 antlerless permits, with harvest to be capped after tribal members successful filled 5 either-sex and 5 antlerless permits. Hunting season dates were Sept. 15 to Dec. 31, 2025. Seven (7) elk were reported to be taken during the 2025 tribal hunting season with 5 bulls taken with either-sex permits and 2 cow taken with antlerless permits.

Table 1. License allocation and application numbers of the 2025 Minnesota elk seasons

Zone	Season Dates	Either-Sex	Antlerless-Only	Total	Total Applicants
Zone 30	A: Sept. 13–Sept. 21	2	0	2	3185
Zone 30	B: Sept. 27–Oct. 5	0	2	2	363
OVERALL	TOTAL	2	2	4	3544

Table 2. Distribution of the 2025 Minnesota elk harvest.

**Caribou-Vita Hunt
Zone 30**

Season	Either-Sex Licenses	Antlerless Licenses	Bulls taken	Antlerless taken	Total elk taken	Success rate
Season A (Sept. 13 – Sept 21)	2	0	2	0	2	100%
Season B (Sept. 27 – Oct. 5)	0	2	0	0	0	0%

Table 3. Grygla (Zone 10) elk harvest by state hunters, 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 4. Kittson Central (Zone 20) elk harvest by state hunters, 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%
2025	No state permits offered					

Table 5. Caribou-Vita (Zone 30) elk harvest by state hunters, 2012-2025

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%
2025	2	2	2	0	2	50%

Figure 1. Minnesota Elk Hunt Zones 20 and 30. Due to stagnant elk population growth for the Kittson Central herd, no hunting was permitted for state hunters in Zone 20 for 2025.

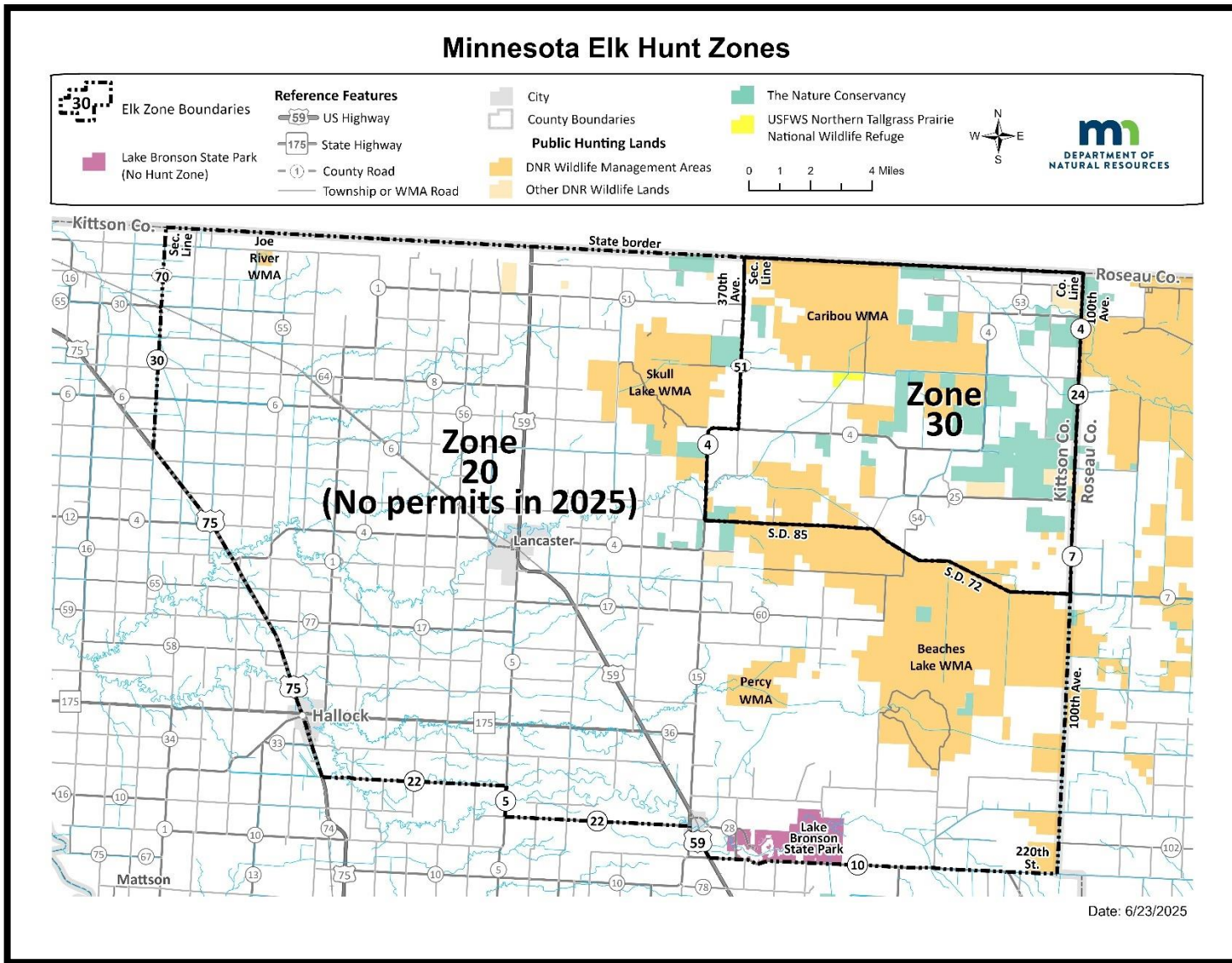


Figure 2. Grygla Elk Hunt Zone 10 (no state hunting permitted since 2012 due to low elk population numbers).

