

# **2020-21 Kansas Elk Harvest Report**

## **PERFORMANCE REPORT STATEWIDE WILDLIFE RESEARCH AND SURVEYS**

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**Background** – Elk inhabited Kansas in abundance prior to European settlement, but unregulated harvest led to their extirpation from the state by about 1900. In 1981, reintroduction efforts were initiated on Cimarron National Grassland (CNG) in Morton County, the southwestern-most county in the state. Over a 10 year period, 33 elk were released onto CNG. In 1986, stocking efforts were also initiated on Fort Riley Military Reservation in north-central Kansas where, over a 9 year period, 54 elk were released.

Herds at both locations experienced population increases, and hunting seasons were initiated on CNG 1987, with two to four permits available for the first seven seasons. Under limited harvest pressures, the CNG population increased to over 100 elk before conflicts with private landowners in Kansas and neighboring states led to the harvest of most of this herd in 1994 and 1995. In Kansas, the hunting season was discontinued after 1995 due to a lack of elk. Permit sales and harvest associated with the CNG elk are not included in this report.

The elk population on and around Fort Riley initially followed a similar pattern as that on CNG. Limited hunting was initiated in 1990, but the herd continued to increase until the elk began leaving the Fort and causing significant crop damage on neighboring landowners in the late 1990's. The Department responded by allocating almost 200 permits in 1999 and 2000 resulting in the harvest of over 100 elk on and around the Fort. Since 1999 when the first landowner permits were issued for the area around the Fort, the Department has responded to various concerns and complaints about elk by progressively authorizing longer seasons and less restrictive permitting options that now provide elk harvest opportunity to resident hunters throughout most of the state. This framework is intended to allow for elk that may be causing crop damage or other conflicts on private land to be harvested during open seasons, and for landowners to have the opportunity to maintain elk at desirable numbers on their own property while at the same time allowing the Fort Riley and Cimarron herds to be maintained.

Elk continue to increase under this management approach and now occur at least occasionally though often unpredictably throughout most of the state. Several herds exist on private land around the state, but most of the hunting opportunity still occurs on the Fort. Elk also still occasionally occur on CNG, but this herd spends most of its time in neighboring states.

Elk hunting in Kansas is limited to Kansas residents. Any-elk permits valid on Fort Riley are once-in-a-lifetime, and antlerless-only elk permits valid on Fort Riley may only be obtained once every five years. An average of over 1000 applicants have applied for these permits or bought preference points over the past five years, including over 1400 this season (Figure 1). This includes an average over the past five years of 73 active-duty military personnel stationed at Fort Riley. These individuals are given a preferential draw opportunity for Fort Riley permits. Unit 3 permits are available over-the-counter (OTC) to general residents and landowner/tenants. Hunt-own-land permits are also available OTC in Units 2 and 3, with their advantage over the Unit 3 landowner/tenant permits being their availability to landowners in the buffer area outside of Fort Riley within Unit 2.

Hunters purchased 172 elk permits for the 2020 season (Figure 2). This is the most elk permits ever sold in Kansas. The steady increase in the sale of over-the-counter permits is indicative of an elk herd growing in number and distribution in the state but also reflects changes in regulations making elk accessible to more hunters.

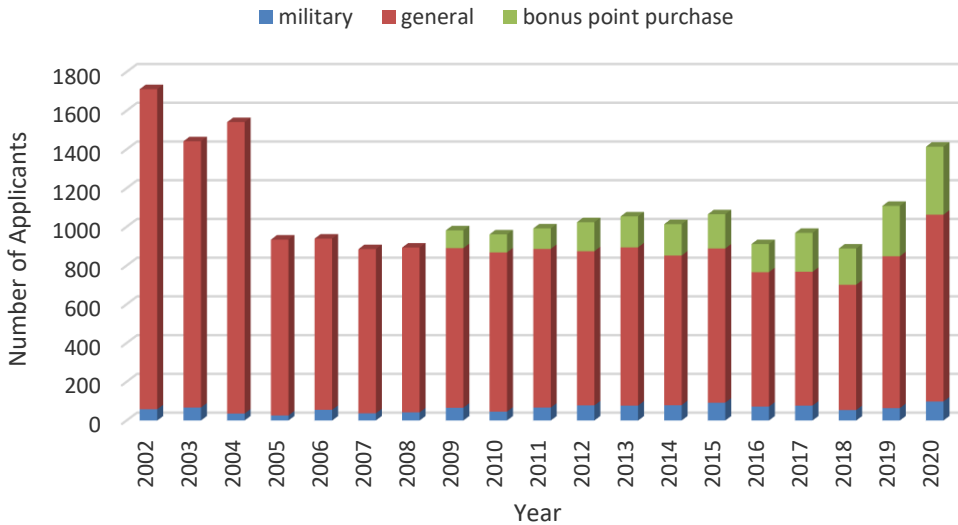


Figure 1. Fort Riley elk permit applications and bonus point purchases in Kansas since 2002. A \$5 bonus point fee was initiated in 2005 and increased to \$10 in 2016.

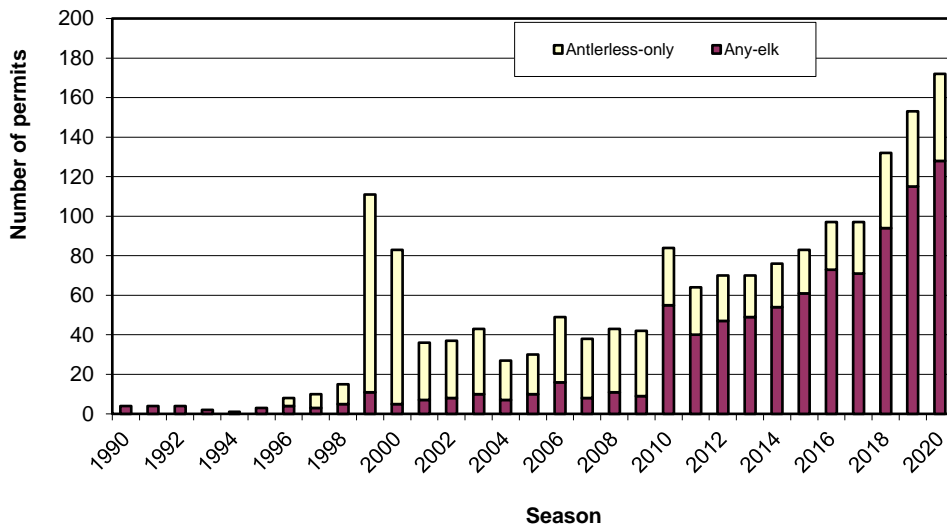


Figure 2. Antlerless-only and Any-elk permit sales in Kansas since hunting seasons were initiated on Fort Riley in 1990.

**Harvest** – Elk harvest and hunter activities are monitored annually through harvest reports sent to all elk hunters (see Appendix 1). Paper report cards and postage paid tooth envelopes are sent out at the beginning of the season, then paper and e-mail follow-ups are conducted at the end of the season. Fort Riley also has mandatory harvest registration that is incorporated into this report for applicable nonrespondents (i.e. those who reported their harvest to Fort Riley but not KDWPT). The harvest survey response rate was 79% this season, which is the average over the past four years.

The reported harvest was 45 elk (Figure 3), including 31 elk taken on 128 any-elk permits (24%) and 14 taken on 44 antlerless-only elk permits (32%). This was the 3rd highest harvest in Kansas since the population reduction effort on Fort Riley in 1999, down two from last season. Twenty-four of the 31 elk taken on any-elk permits were antlered. The number of antler points of 21 of these animals can be found in Table 1.

Total permit success was 26%. Nine of 12 hunters (75%) with Fort Riley any-elk permits and 10 of 18 hunters (56%) with Fort Riley antlerless-only elk permits harvested elk. Over the past five years, Fort Riley any-elk permit holders have averaged 76% success and Fort Riley antlerless-only permit holders have averaged 58% success. Only 1/3 of the antlerless-only permits are valid during each one-month segment of the any-weapon season on Fort Riley. Five-year average harvest success for the October, November and December segments for antlerless-only permits were 68, 52% and 53%, respectively. Harvest success rates for these permits since 2013 can be found in Figure 4.

Harvest success rates for permit types available over-the-counter (not valid on Fort Riley) are provided in Figure 5. General resident any-elk and antlerless-only elk permit success rates averaged 22% and 19%, respectively, over the past five years. Success rates for landowner permits including landowner/tenant and hunt-own-land permits averaged 24% and 31%, respectively, for any-elk and antlerless only elk permits over the past five years.

Reported harvest and success rates do not include a correction for nonrespondents because Fort Riley has traditionally accounted for most of the harvest, and they have mandatory harvest reporting. In addition, from 2006-2015, harvest reporting was mandatory statewide to facilitate testing for chronic wasting disease (CWD). Consequently, until recently, the number of harvested elk not reported to the Department was presumably very low. More recently, with high permit sales and success off of Fort Riley, nonrespondents potentially had a greater impact on harvest than ever before. Expanding respondent success rates to nonrespondents yields an additional harvest of 9 elk, 4 of which would have been antlerless.

Elk harvest is spread out fairly evenly throughout the season (Figure 6), but there are a couple of notable points. Three elk were killed during the August firearms season which was established two years ago as an alternative to issuing depredation tags. Archery and muzzleloader seasons on Fort Riley open September 1. Six elk were killed on Fort Riley and one on private land during that month. There were also 6 elk killed outside of Fort Riley during the Dec. 2-13 regular firearms season (concurrent with firearms deer). Another 10 elk were killed on private lands during the late firearms season off Fort Riley, including 7 in January and 3 in February.

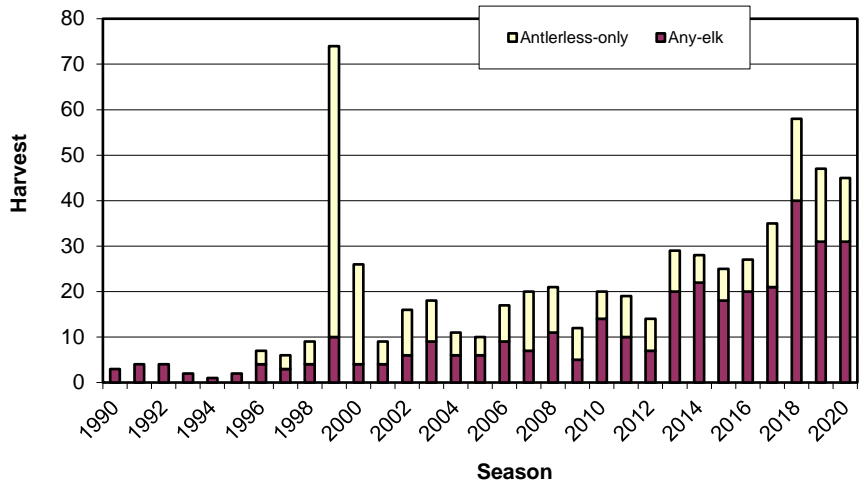


Figure 3. Elk harvest in Kansas by any-elk and antlerless-only elk permit holders since hunting seasons were initiated on Fort Riley in 1990.

Table 1. Antler points of bull elk harvested in Kansas during the 2020-21 season (n=21).

Antler Points	Number of Hunters
1x1	1
1x2	1
2x5	1
4x4	1
4x5	2
5x5	2
5x6	2
5x8	1
6x6	3
6x7	5
7x7	1
7x8	1

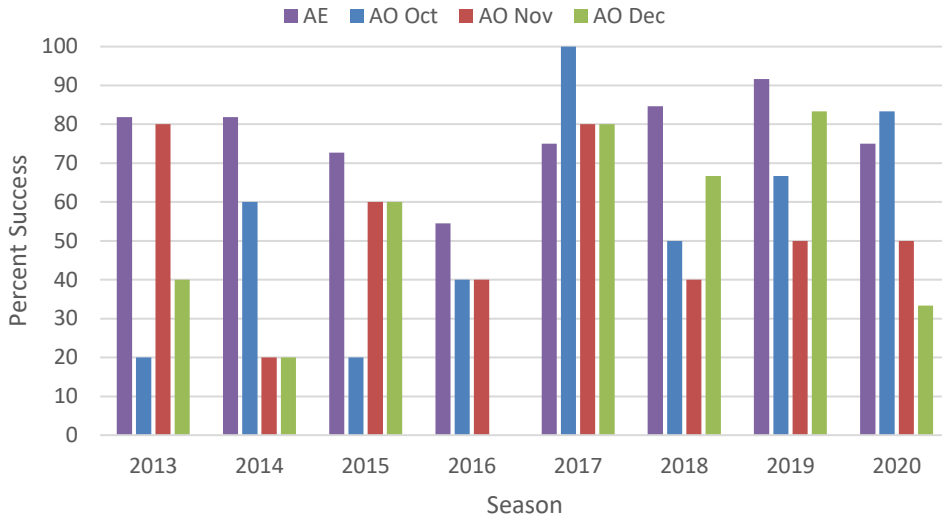


Figure 4. Harvest success rates for permit types valid on Fort Riley for elk in Kansas since 2013. (AE=any-elk, AO=antlerless-only)

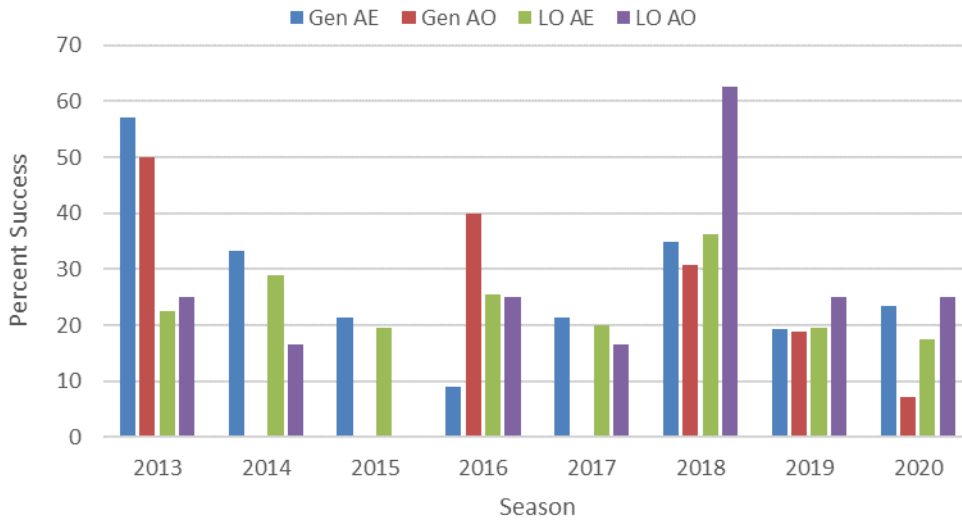


Figure 5. Harvest success rates for general resident (Gen) and landowner/tenant (LO) permit types available over-the-counter for elk in Kansas since 2013. (AE=any-elk, AO=antlerless-only)

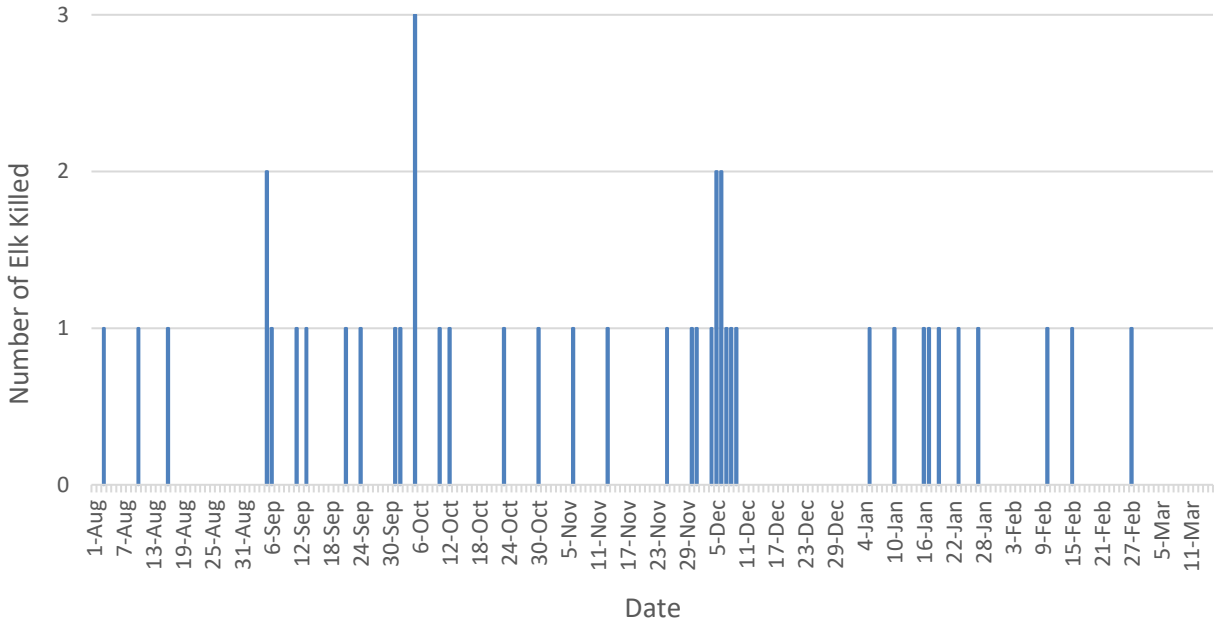


Figure 6. Reported date of harvest of elk taken during the 2020 season (n=42).

**Equipment Use** - Elk permits are valid during any season with equipment legal for that season. The percent of elk hunters using each equipment type in recent years is provided in Figure 7. Annual totals in this figure exceed 100% as quite a few hunters use more than one equipment type (30% in 2020). The percent of elk harvested with each equipment type is provided in Figure 8. Five-year averages by equipment type are: firearms-73%, muzzleloader-14%, compound bow-10%, crossbow-3%, shotgun-0%, longbow-0%, and recurve bow-0%.

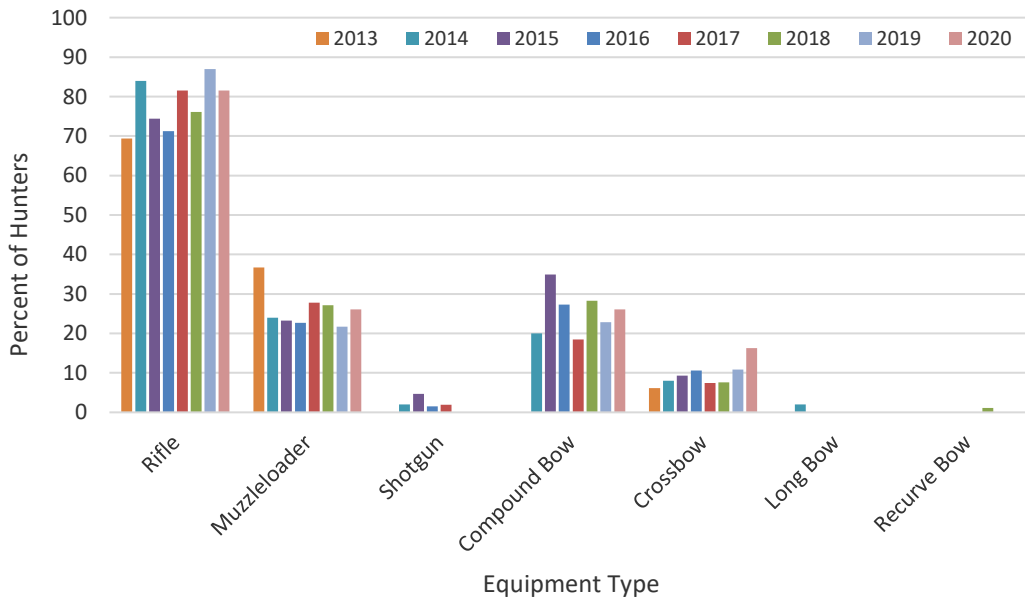


Figure 7. Percent of hunters using each equipment type to hunt elk in Kansas since 2013.

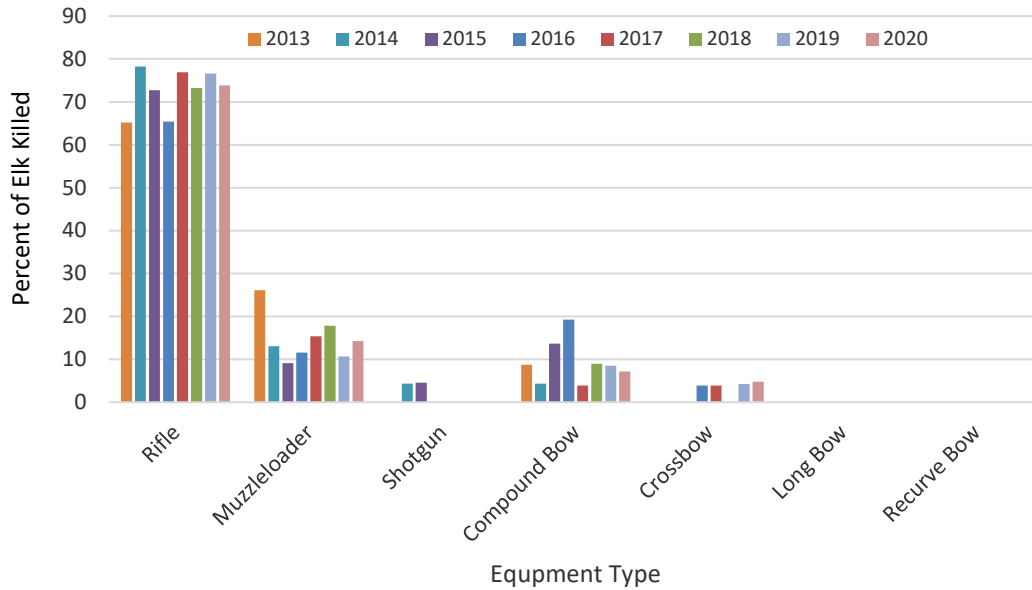


Figure 8. Percent of elk harvested in Kansas with each equipment type since 2013.

**Harvest by Location** – There are currently three elk management units in Kansas (see page 2 of Appendix 1) of which Units 2 and 3 are open to hunting. These units have been in place since 2011 except the boundary of Unit 2 was adjusted in 2018. Elk harvest in Kansas by management unit since 2013 can be found in Figure 9. Elk harvest by property type since 2013 can be found in Figure 10. Hunters provided county of harvest for 46 of 47 elk harvested. Harvest by county was as follows: Riley-25, Geary-3, Kearny, Reno and Stafford-2, and one in Greenwood, Hamilton, Jewell, Neosho, Rush, Thomas, Wallace and Washington. In the last five years, elk have been harvested in almost ¼ of the counties in Kansas (26 of 105).

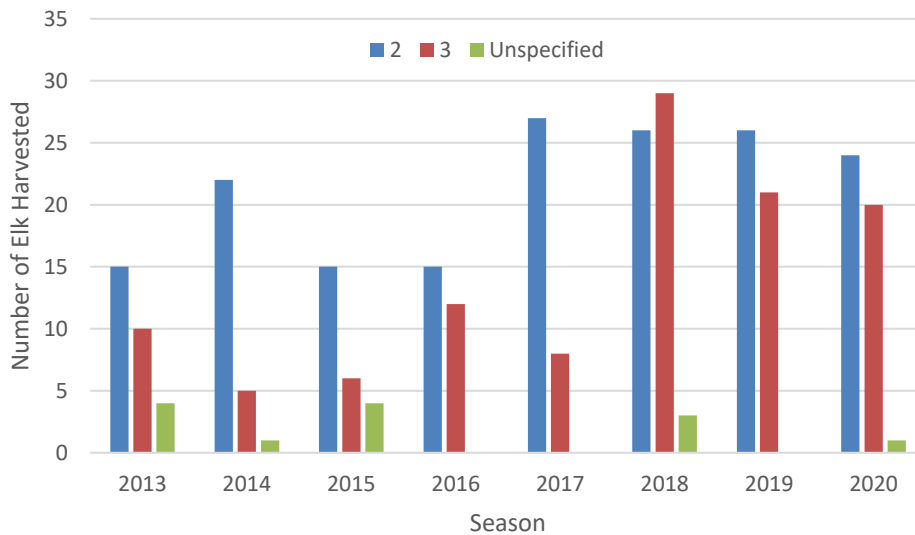


Figure 9. Elk harvest in Kansas by management unit since 2013.



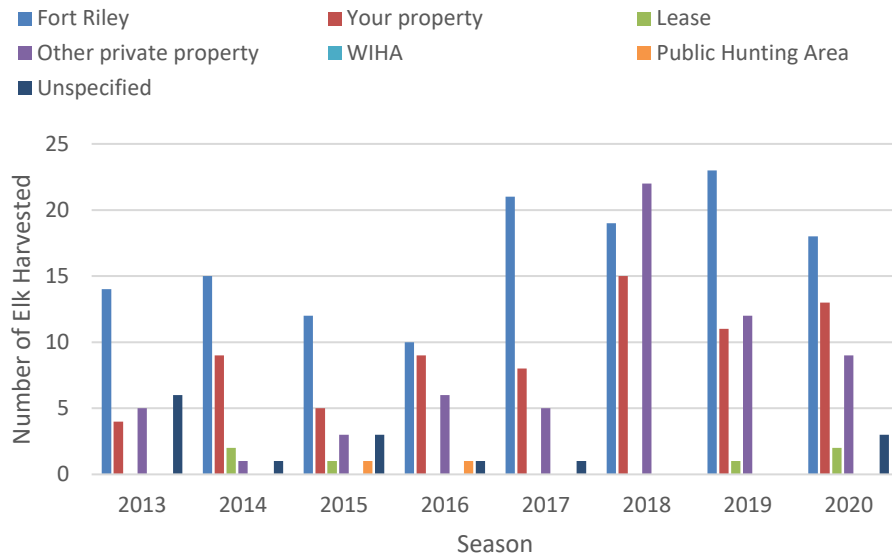


Figure 10. Elk harvest in Kansas by property type since 2013.

**Satisfaction** - Elk hunters are asked to indicate their hunt satisfaction on a 7–point scale ranging from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied. This serves as a general indicator of hunt quality likely reflecting harvest success, elk numbers, bull quality, access, crowding and various other factors of the hunt. Mean satisfaction by permit type since 2016 is found in Figure 11. Also an indication of satisfaction, elk hunter comments from the harvest survey are provided in Appendix 2.

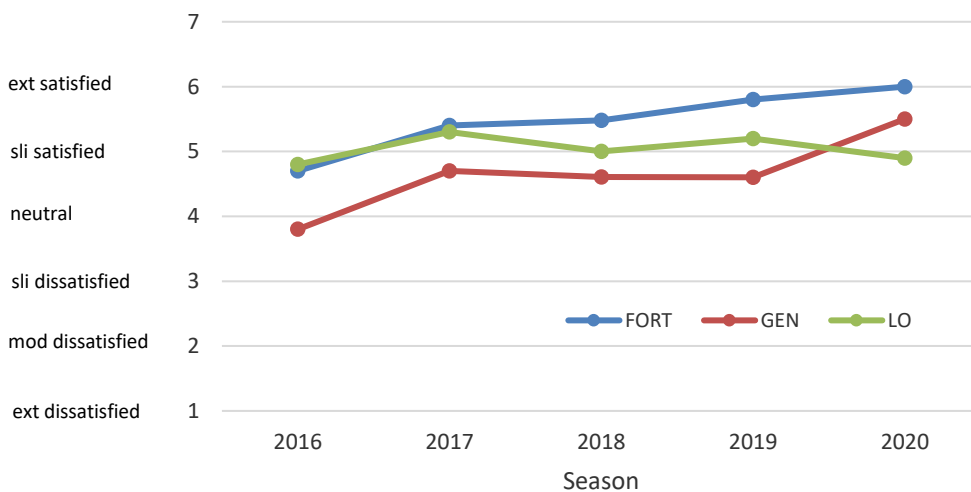


Figure 11. Mean elk hunter satisfaction by permit type in Kansas since 2016. (FORT=Fort Riley, GEN=general resident and LO=landowner/tenant)

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**EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT**

This program receives Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex (in educational programs). If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, or if you desire further information, please write to:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Diversity and Civil Rights Programs- External Programs, 4040 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 130, Arlington, VA 22203 |

Appendix 1.

2020-21 Elk Hunter Report Card

# 2020-21 ELK HUNTER REPORT CARD



Please complete this report as soon as you are finished elk hunting for the season. It should be returned in the enclosed tooth envelope. All "b" sections pertain only to those who harvested an elk.

**1a. Check the one item that best describes your elk season.**

- I harvested an adult bull
- I harvested an adult cow
- I harvested a male calf
- I harvested a female calf
- I hunted but did not harvest an elk
- I did not hunt (If you did not hunt, please [check here](#), sign and return this form.)

**b. If you harvested a bull, how many points did it have, for example 5x6?**

**2a. Describe your elk hunting during each month?**

	Days Hunted	Largest Number of Elk Seen in a Day
August	_____	_____
September	_____	_____
October	_____	_____
November	_____	_____
December	_____	_____
January	_____	_____
February	_____	_____
March	_____	_____

**b. If you killed an elk, what was the date?**

**3a. Check each land ownership type that you used while hunting for elk.**

- Fort Riley
- Public Hunting Areas ([i.e. Millford Wildlife Area](#))
- Walk-In Hunting Area (WIHA) Lands
- Your Property (you own or lease for ag)
- Private Hunting Lease
- Other Private Property

**b. Circle the land ownership above that shows where you killed your elk. If other than Fort Riley, please indicate the county & Elk Unit (see map on back of page).**

County: \_\_\_\_\_ Elk Unit (2 or 3): \_\_\_\_\_

**4a. Check each type of hunting equipment you used while hunting elk.**

- Centerfire Rifle
- Muzzleloader
- Shotgun
- Compound Bow
- Crossbow
- Long Bow
- Recurve Bow
- Other (list below): \_\_\_\_\_

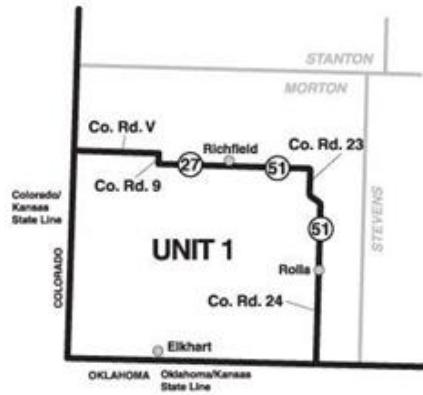
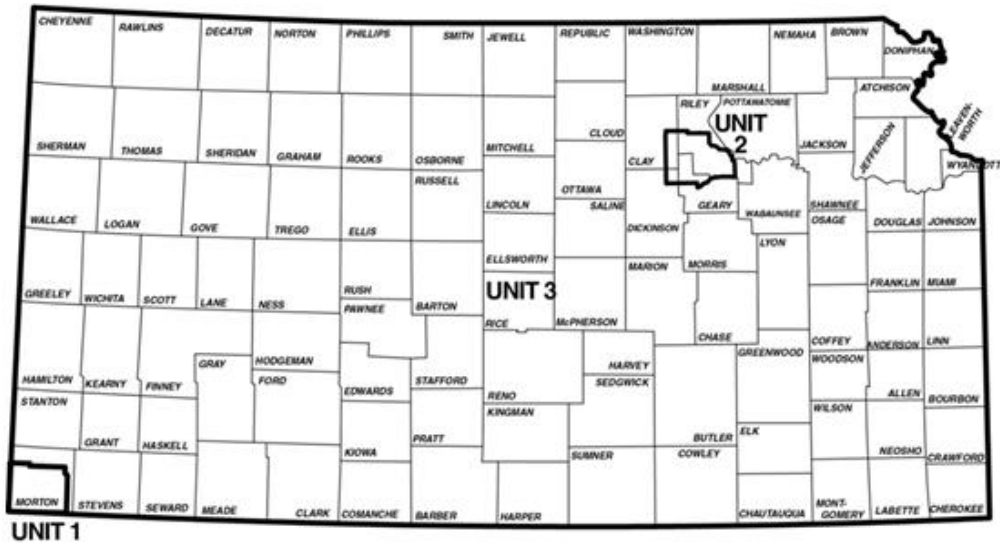
**b. Circle the equipment type above that you used to kill your elk.**

**5. Check the selection that best describes your satisfaction with your elk hunt.**

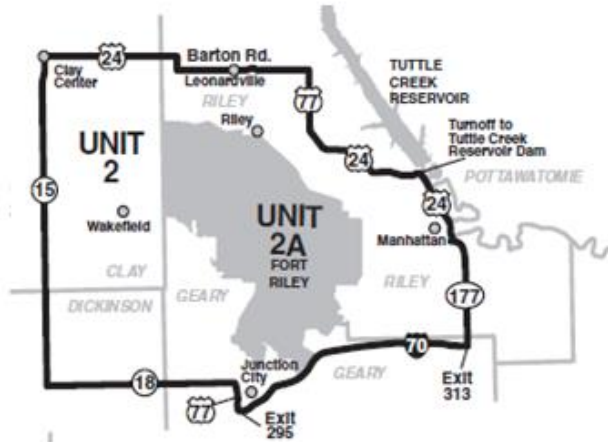
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| Extremely Dissatisfied   | Moderately Dissatisfied  | Slightly Dissatisfied    | Neutral                  | Slightly Satisfied       | Moderately Satisfied     | Extremely Satisfied      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Elk Units



Unit 1 is closed to elk hunting



Appendix 2.

Elk Hunter Comments from the  
2020-21 Elk Hunter Harvest Survey

COMMENTS

Don't let them populate out here...I am a corn farmer and they can wreck a corn field over night...they belong in the mountains

Filled out on line, but apart. used wrong ID. Sorry!

Great hunt glad I live close to the fort to be able to come and go. Visitation pass each week makes it harder

Great hunt. Grateful hunter. I'm very lucky and had great support from everyone.

How many were taken in Kansas?

I didn't get the chance to really get out and hunt due to military requirement to do other obligations. That being said I did enjoy the few days I did get out and will continue to submit for future opportunities.

I feel like we need to get a new gene pool of bulls. They have grown stagnant over the years. The quality have drastically went down especially when they started letting land owners shoot bulls. I feel that land owners should be held to a once in a lifetime bull as well or not one at all.

I have hunted elk out of state for 30 yrs. This is one of the toughest elk hunts I have done. 300 elk can hide pretty well in 110,000 acres. As to management, I think you need to have a one time hunt to thin the bulls way down, then plant some new bulls from several sources to get the genetics back on track. Racks are shrinking & going non typical with deformities.

Although not elk related, I would really like to see a feasibility study of introducing pronghorn to ft Riley. Land mass is there, much of it has good boundary fences, and I believe they would thrive without much impact on landowners. Kent Ifland.

I hunted on private ground in western (withheld) County and all the Elk I saw all seemed very healthy and in good shape.

I own and operate property in (withheld) county. Occasionally we see Elk on our wild life Camera's (One to Two sightings a year). So there is a chance! Thank you for all you do!

It was an incredible experience to hunt on Fort Riley. I am extremely grateful to have drawn the tag and shoot a mature herd bull. I would like to see better genetics on Fort Riley, but understand the complications in adding new genetics to the herd. Pipe dream, but I would love to see more elk across the state. I know crop damage is a huge deal to landowners adjacent to large elk populations, but I think it would be advantageous for the state to protect elk off of Fort Riley and do away with OTC tags in Unit 3 and limited landowner tags in unit 2. The small herd in Reno/Stafford Co's are extremely protected and coveted by the landowners that encompass this small herd. I think there would be a significant interest in elk/elk hunting for landowners across the state if more herds were protected and allowed to grow. Thanks again for what you guys do and if you are interested in Trail cam pics or videos of elk on Fort Riley feel free to reach out. I also filmed my hunt and posted it on Youtube. Talk to you soon! Respectfully, (name withheld)

Our elk are pretty much nocturnal. Cameras show at least 13 cows and 5 bulls. (name withheld)

Really was a pleasurable experience. I think there may be some more clear terms on checking into available areas with certain weapon types on fort, but otherwise very positive. I hope I'm lucky enough to return.

Teeth accidentally destroyed

Thank you for allowing these beautiful animals in this area. We should continue to let the herd grow.

Thanks. I passed on several elk. We are letting bulls grow up. They seem to disappear or poached when they get to 6x. Had a few old cows still with young calves in bow range but did not get a yearling that I wanted.

The elk quit coming on to the property I hunted during the rifle deer season. Then showed up again between that season and the first of January. They never showed up again after January first. If the season had been on during the last part of December I would have had an opportunity to harvest a cow.

The most fun I've had in a long time!

The weather wasn't cooperating and a lot of areas were closed where the most elks are located on Ft. Riley. I request for an extension hunt on Ft. Riley 1 January to 31 January but were unsuccessful. I were very limited with my physical disabilities during my hunt outings.

this is the first thing i have heard about your survey

Wonderful time. Could see approx 75-100 elk coming on post and going to the Impact area to lay up on most days. They were a tad smarter than me. No shots fired but am going to practice long range shooting for the next time. I have been on Ft. Riley since the first release. Wildlife section is doing something right to have this many elk and that's only the ones I saw or didn't hit with my truck. They aren't world records but there are several that are damned huge. There is one place where i would see 50-60 cows, yearlings and spikes coming on post nose to tail. GOOD JOB BY ALL