

# 2019-20 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. Permits valid for any-elk 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 almost 1000 applicants have applied for these permits over the past several years, including over 1100 this season (Figure 1). This includes an average over the past five years of 72 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 to general residents and landowner/tenants. Hunt-own-land permits are also available over-the-counter 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 153 elk permits for the 2019 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.

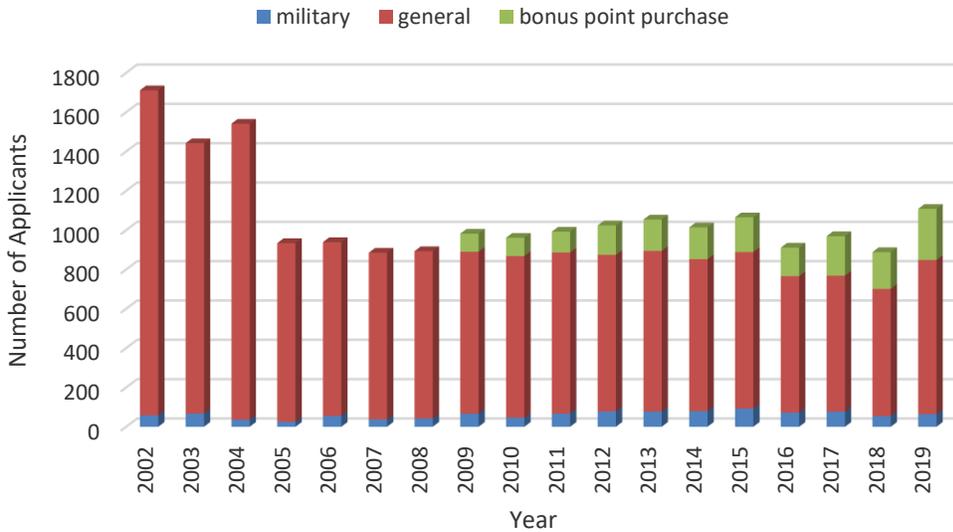


Figure 1. Fort Riley elk permit applications and bonus point purchases in Kansas since 2002. A \$5 bonus point fee was initiated in 2005 and increased to \$10 in 2016.

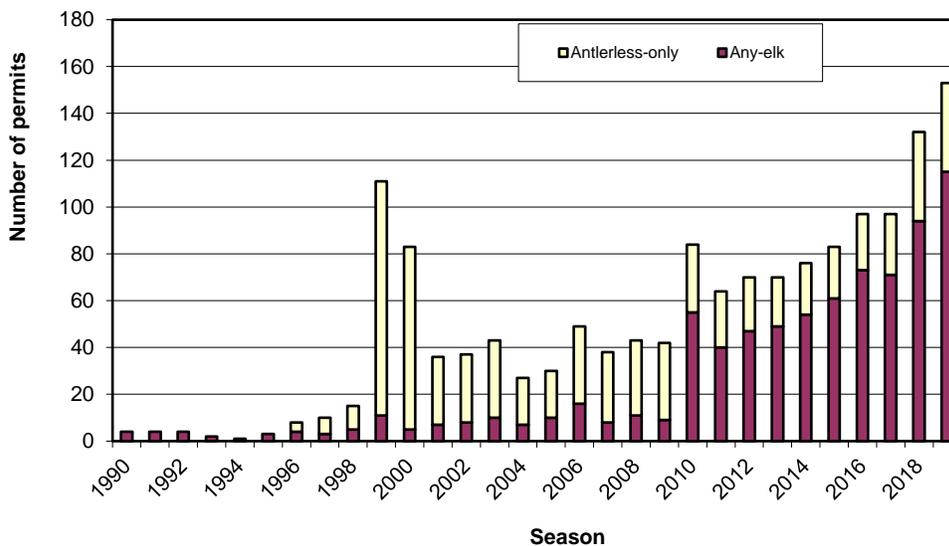


Figure 2. Antlerless-only and Any-elk permit sales in Kansas since hunting seasons were initiated on Fort Riley in 1990.

**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 KDWP). The harvest survey response rate was 76% this season, which is decreasing a bit as the percentage of Fort Riley permits has decreased.

The reported harvest was 47 elk (Figure 3), including 31 elk taken on 115 any-elk permits (27%) and 16 taken on 38 antlerless-only elk permits (42%). This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest harvest in Kansas since the population reduction effort on Fort Riley in 1999, down 9 from last season. Twenty-five of the 31 elk taken on any-elk permits were antlered. The number of antler points of 22 of these animals can be found in Table 1.

This season, 11 of 12 hunters (92%) with Fort Riley any-elk permits and 12 of 18 hunters with Fort Riley antlerless-only elk permits harvested elk. Over the past five years, Fort Riley any-elk permit holders have averaged 76% 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 55%, 54% and 58%, 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 21% and 18%, respectively, over the past five years. Success rates for landowner permits including landowner/tenant and hunt-own-land averaged 24% and 26%, 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 would have yielded an additional harvest of 10 elk, 6 of which would have been antlered.

Elk harvest is spread out fairly evenly throughout the season (Figure 6), but there are a couple of notable points. Only one elk was killed during the newly established August 1-31 firearms season which was established as an alternative to issuing depredation tags. Archery and muzzleloader seasons on Fort Riley open September 1. Four elk were killed on Fort Riley and one on private land during that month. On Fort Riley, 5 elk were killed during each month of October, November and December. There were also 5 elk killed outside of Fort Riley during the Dec. 4-15 regular firearms season (concurrent with firearms deer). Another 5 elk were killed on private lands during the late firearms season off Fort Riley, including 4 in January and 1 in February.

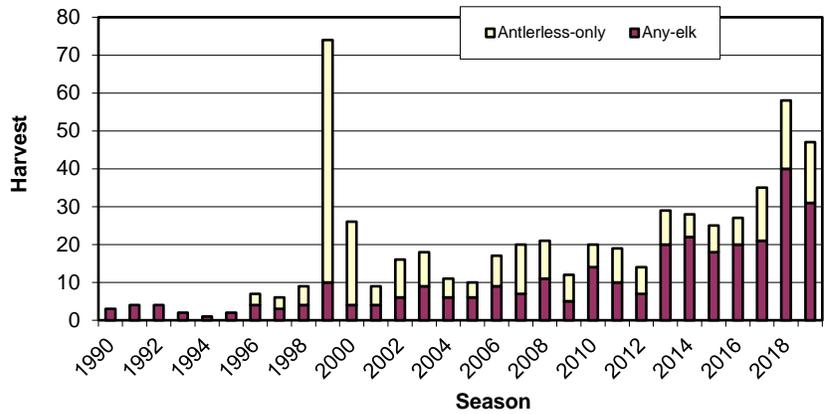


Figure 3. Elk harvest in Kansas by any-elk and antlerless-only elk permit holders since hunting seasons were initiated on Fort Riley in 1990.

Table 1. Antler points of bull elk harvested in Kansas during the 2019-20 season (n=22).

Antler Points	Number of Hunters
7x8	1
6x10	1
6x7	4
6x6	5
5x6	2
5x5	5
4x5	1
1X1	3

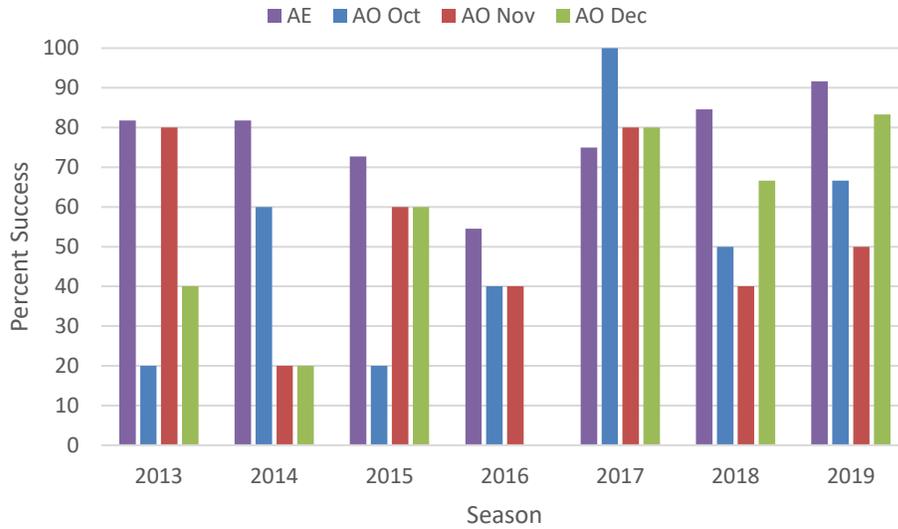


Figure 4. Harvest success rates for permit types valid on Fort Riley for elk in Kansas since 2013. (AE=any-elk, AO=antlerless-only)

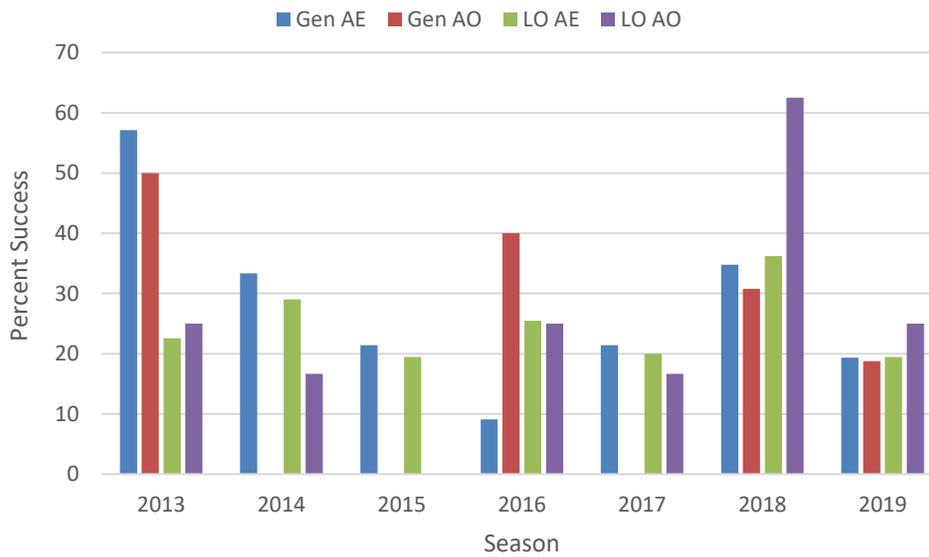


Figure 5. Harvest success rates for general resident (Gen) and landowner/tenant (LO) permit types available over-the-counter for elk in Kansas since 2013. (AE=any-elk, AO=antlerless-only)

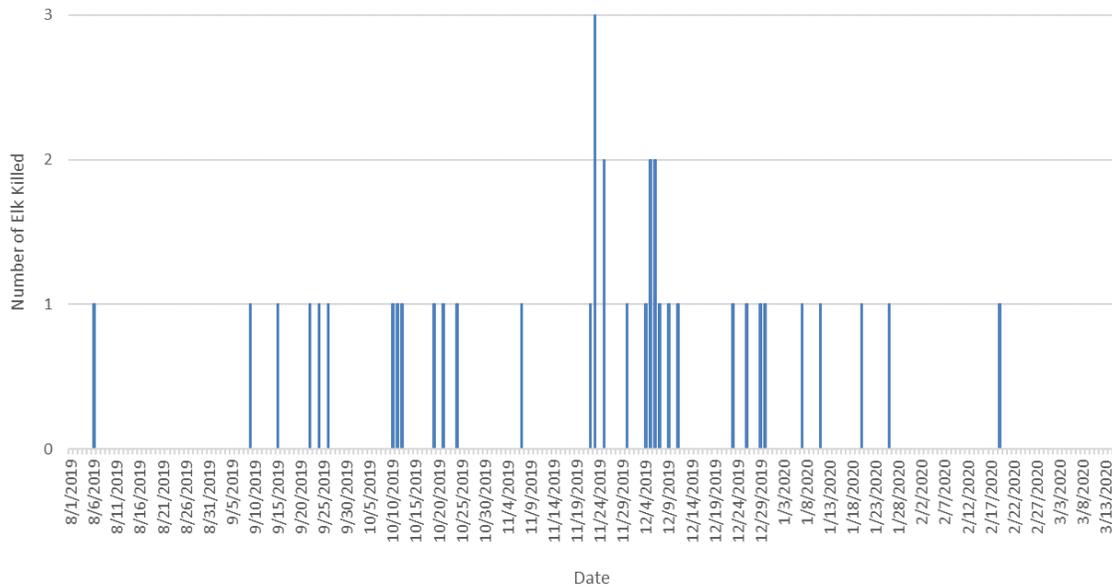


Figure 6. Reported date of harvest of elk taken during the 2019 season (n=37).

**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 (32% in 2019). The percent of elk harvested with each equipment type is provided in Figure 8. Five-year averages by equipment type are: firearms-71%, muzzleloader-13%, compound bow-11%, crossbow-2%, shotgun-1%, longbow-0%, and recurve bow-0%.

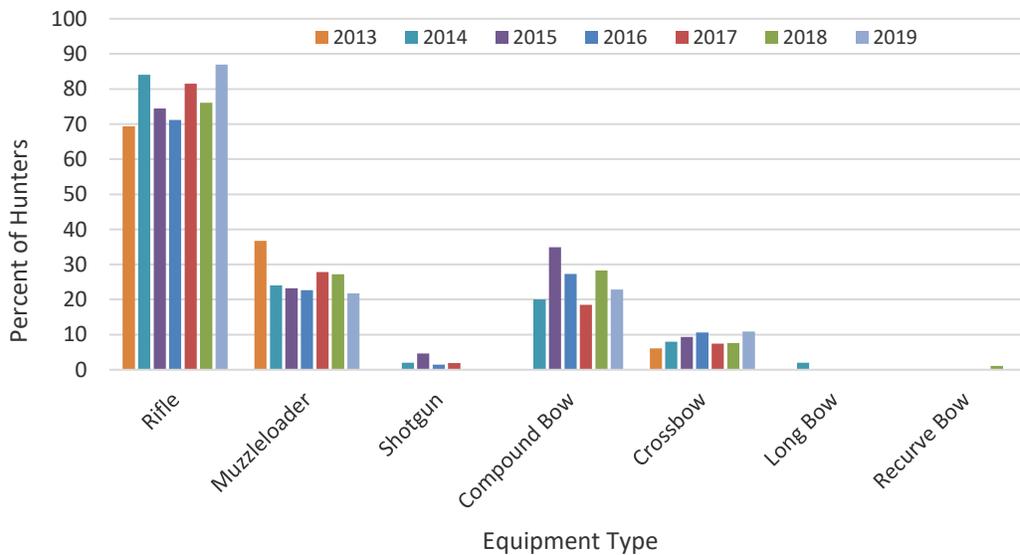


Figure 7. Percent of hunters using each equipment type to hunt elk in Kansas since 2013.

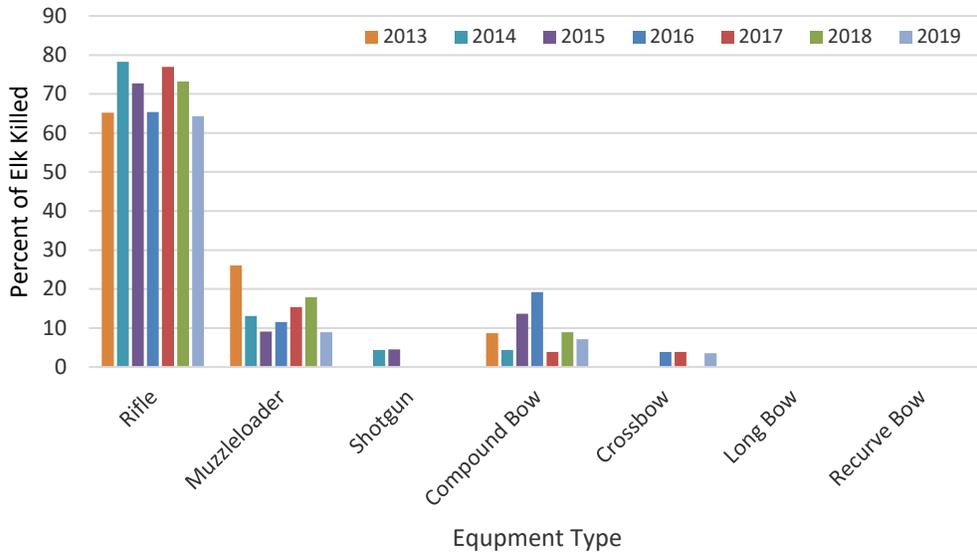


Figure 8. Percent of elk harvested in Kansas with each equipment type since 2013.

**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. A map of the units can be found in Appendix 1. 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-24, Hamilton-6, Kearny-4, Geary, Greenwood, and Stafford-2, and one in Barber, Logan, Marshall, Osborne, Reno, and Washington.

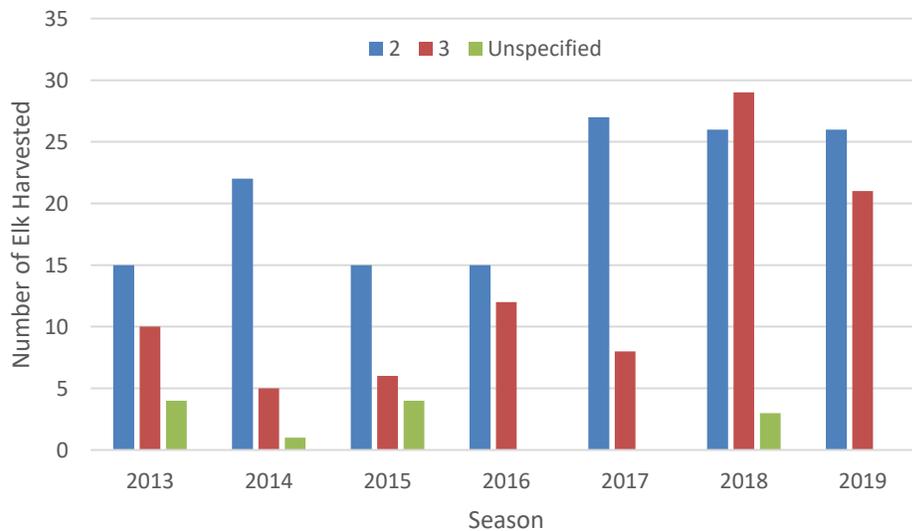


Figure 9. Elk harvest in Kansas by management unit since 2013.



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.

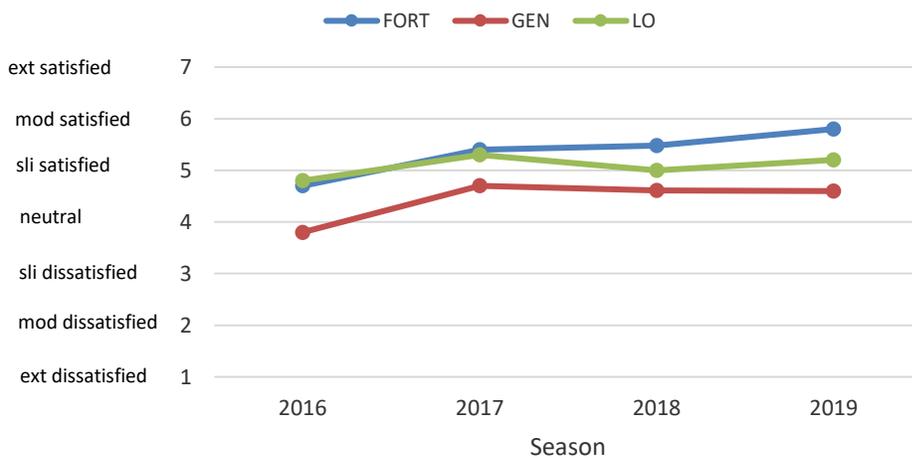


Figure 11. Mean elk hunter satisfaction by permit type in Kansas since 2016. (FORT=Fort Riley, GEN=general resident and LO=landowner/tenant)

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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.

2019-20 Elk Hunter Report Card

# 2019-20 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. Milford 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): \_\_\_\_\_

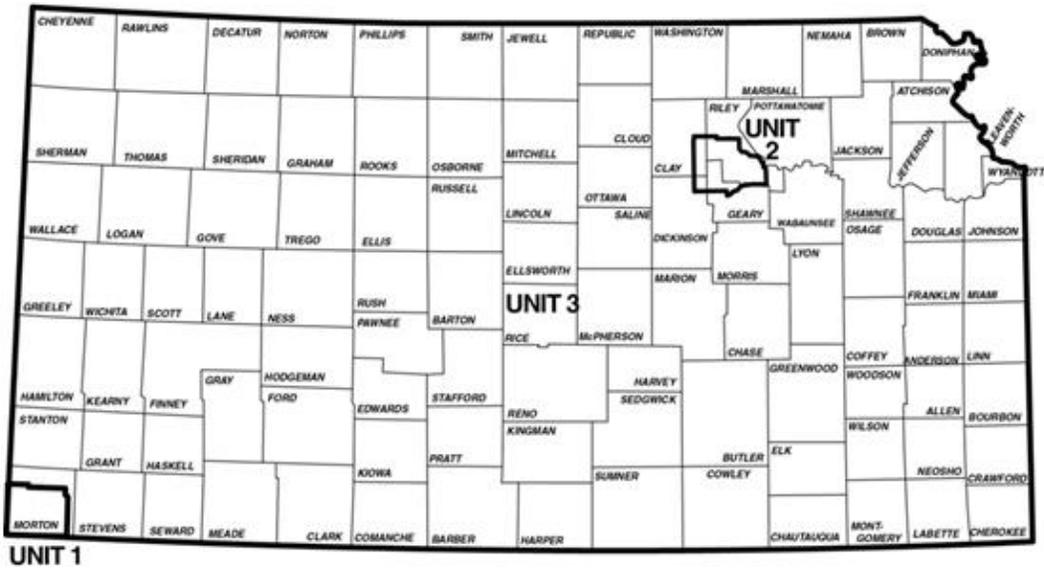
**b. Circle the equipment type above that you used to kill your elk.**

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

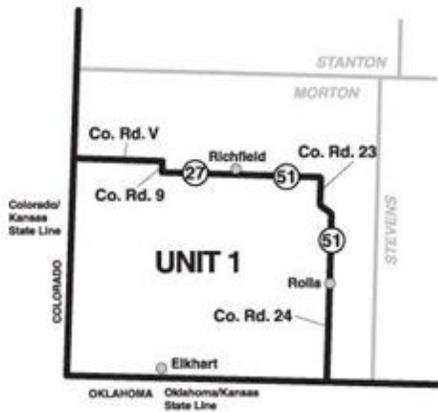
- |   |                          |                          |   |                          |                          |   |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
|  |                          |                          |  |                          |                          |  |
| 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: \_\_\_\_\_

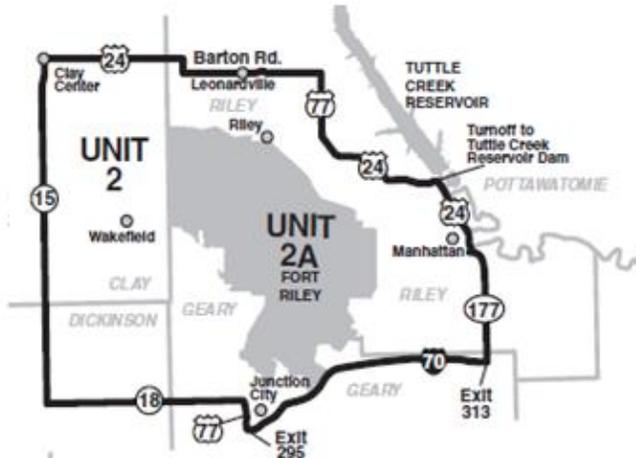
# Elk Units



UNIT 1



Unit 1 is closed to elk hunting



Appendix 2.

Elk Hunter Comments from the  
2019-20 Elk Hunter Harvest Survey

Comments
Between 2 cow hunters we saw 8 bulls and zero cows in over 20 days of hunting.
Bought a tag just encase.
For the price difference between deer and elk tags for a Kansas resident, it would be nice if cwd testing was included in the price(Like it was in previous years). Would be nice to track the presence or prevalence in our herd.
I have yet to actually see an elk on any of the public lands, WIHA, KDWPT or Corps of Engineers lands. I feel that the elk population is insufficient on managed lands. I also grow tired of using the iSportsman check in system. It all but legally requires the use of a cellular phone just to hunt. Many places I have enjoyed going out West for years require a check in. Many of these areas do not have sufficient cellular coverage and it makes going between properties difficult. Elk are not even listed as a species in iSportsman in what is supposed to be their primary range. Frankly, I find that some species, such as elk are under-managed while others are over-managed. Waterfowl hunting, while I realize it does attract many nonresident gear obsessed "hunters" and subsequently permit fees plus ancillary revenue for lodging and such. I have seen a great deal of excellent deer and elk cover be culled in favor of expanding marshes. (withheld) Marsh at (withheld) is a prime example. One of the most prolific deer bedding areas is being drowned when filling the marsh to what is now considered "full pool". I have long felt this would also be an ideal area for elk introduction as well. It has sustained a very healthy deer population with strong genetics since I can remember. But anyhow, I find elk hunting in Kansas to not yet be fully developed and I am not likely to buy a permit in 2020. I am actually considering moving out of state and hunting my own land elsewhere due to the practices I have seen in the state in recent years. Entirely too much tampering with the land. You are taming the wildness out of it. Us old fashioned hunters that enjoy a good rough day in the wild, earning our game and not baiting it with an artificially flooded corn field, are less enthused with recent developments in conservation.
I know of 8 elk killed in my area, 6 of which I guided friends 1 killed on neighboring ranch and one up on the river at (withheld).
I LIVE IN DONIPHAN COUNTY, THERE USUALLY ARE NO ELK HERE. I SAW A MATURE BULL ON THE ROAD BY MY LEASE BACK IN AUGUST, SO I BOUGHT A TAG THAT DAY. IN CASE I CAME ACROSS HIM AGAIN. I DIDN'T FOCUS ON ELK THIS SEASON BUT WAS IN THE FIELD FOR WHITETAIL SOME. I DIDN'T HAVE ANYMORE SIGHTINGS OF HIM.
I ONLY PURCHASED A TAG BECAUSE I SAW AN ELK ON MY GROUND IN FORD COUNTY. I NEVER SAW HIM AGAIN.
I saw all cows and calves no bulls but could of killed an elk if I wanted to but was extremely happy just seeing them so close on my own land
I want to how and why i ran into so many hunters from other states hunting and killing Kansas elk?
I'd like to hear how other elk hunters did thus year- if that's possible. cell: (withheld)
It was a rough year. Only saw elk on 3 different days. Very large groups of elk. December was warm, elk seem to stay in impact areas. And were hard to find. Disappointed but was not super surprised. Knew it wasn't going to be easy. Just wish they would have opened the elk pen up more times than 3 days.
Must of hid them really well on the fort this year. Didn't see anything except 2 in August. Nobody saw them hardly.
OCT SHOULD NEVER BEEN LISTED FOR COWS, NOV DEC ONLY
Stop the eradication tags. I've seen a big decline in numbers since I started hunting elk in Kansas.
WE SENT TEETH IN , IN THE FALL BUT WERE TOLD THEY WEREN'T USED ANYMORE