

Reintroducing Elk in Wisconsin: A Partnership Effort Between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Others

Why Restore Elk in Wisconsin?

- Opportunity to restore a native species to Wisconsin for current and future generations.
- Based on public feedback and a 2012 survey, elk reintroduction is strongly supported in Wisconsin, with 85% of respondents in favor of reintroduction efforts.
- Provide recreational opportunities through viewing and hunting for Wisconsin citizens and tourists from other states, with an expected economic boost for local economies from increased recreation and tourism.
- Introducing additional elk will provide genetic diversity to the existing herd and aid herd growth.

History

- Elk are native to Wisconsin, but were extirpated during the 1800s.
- Early reintroduction efforts in the 1930s failed; the last Wisconsin elk was killed in 1948.
- A feasibility study on elk reintroduction was commissioned in 1989, and in 1993 University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point evaluated the possibility of reintroducing elk to Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.
- In 1995, 25 elk from Michigan were released in the Clam Lake area in northern Wisconsin as part of a feasibility study to determine survivability and adaptability to the area. While this was not considered a true reintroduction effort, the herd has grown consistently in the last 20 years.

Today

- The current herd consists of about 160 elk in Ashland, Sawyer, Rusk and Price County.
- The state of Wisconsin and partners wish to augment the northern Wisconsin herd and establish a new herd further south in Jackson County.

Scope of the New Reintroduction Plan

- Goal: increase herd size to 1400 elk in the Clam Lake area and 390 elk in Jackson County.
- The elk management plan was amended in 2012 and underwent a public review process before final approval.
- Beginning January 2015, wild elk will be trapped in Kentucky and transported to Wisconsin with the health of the elk as top priority.
- Kentucky has an abundant, healthy elk herd of more than 15,000 animals – they will provide additional genetic diversity to the Wisconsin herd.
- Elk will be released on public lands in Jackson County and the Clam Lake region.
- The DNR and partners will distribute elk more evenly across areas of appropriate habitat. This process is known as “assisted dispersal,” and is intended to speed up elk distribution to the most suitable habitat
- Research and monitoring of the current Wisconsin herd and the new elk herd will continue to inform reintroduction efforts.

Today

- Funding for Wisconsin's elk reintroduction efforts is a result of partnerships with stakeholder groups, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has committed to using only funds received from partner groups.
- The current reintroduction effort is expected to cost about \$550,000 and to date has received over \$500,000 in contributions from the Ho-Chunk Nation, Jackson County Wildlife Fund, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and various county governments and other partners.
- Currently, Wisconsin's elk herd generates over \$200,000 of revenue per year in the Clam Lake area (according to the Cable Chamber of Commerce).
- The opportunity to provide for a further increase in economic revenue for communities near these elk herds (and statewide) is significant - larger elk herds in other states generate over \$1 million to local economies from wildlife viewing alone.
- Hunting season establishment is expected to draw additional funds for elk management and generate revenue for local economies in Wisconsin.

Moving Forward – Reintroduction Timeline and Details

- It is the Department's hope to reintroduce a target goal of 150 elk to Wisconsin over an expected period of three to five years. If realized, these elk will be divided between the current Clam Lake elk herd and a new Jackson County elk herd.
- During each year in this initial period, our goal is that a minimum of 25 and a maximum of 50 elk will be trapped and transported to Wisconsin per year.
- Staff from Wisconsin DNR and Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife expect to begin trapping elk in January 2015 and complete trapping by the first week of February.
- The department will work in partnership with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- We have full-time staff and rotating crews involved from Wisconsin
- Captured elk will be transported to a holding pen in Kentucky, where they will be tested for diseases and quarantined before beginning the trip to Wisconsin.
- Elk will receive health assessments before and after arriving in Wisconsin.
- All elk captured in the first year will be released in Jackson County.
- Upon arrival in Wisconsin, elk will be held in a 7 acre pen in Jackson County prior to release so they can acclimate to a new home range and complete their quarantine period - this will reduce the likelihood of elk traveling great distances once released.
- All elk captured in the second year are expected to be released in the Clam Lake elk range.
- Elk captured in the final year(s) will be divided between Jackson County and Clam Lake.