

Dept. of Natural Resources: Application period for the 2026 elk season opens March 1

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced today that the application period for Wisconsin's 2026 elk hunt will open Sunday, March 1, and close on Sunday, May 31. Applicants and selected hunters will see increased opportunities again in 2026. These include increased application options and license availability, coupled with a longer hunting season.

For the third year in a row, there will be increased opportunity to pursue elk within the Central Elk Management Zone (formerly Black River Elk Range), as additional bull elk and antlerless harvest authorizations will be available through the state licensing system. The 2026 elk quota for the Central Elk Management Zone is six bull elk and six antlerless elk, up from a quota of four bull and five antlerless in 2025.

The Northern Elk Management Zone (formerly Clam Lake Elk Range) quota will be eight bull elk, subject to a 50% declaration by Ojibwe tribes.

During the open application period, applicants will have the choice to submit one bull elk license application and/or one antlerless elk license application, separately. Applicants can apply to any unit grouping with an associated quota for that authorization type (bull or antlerless). The order of drawing will be bull licenses first, followed by antlerless licenses. As a reminder, only one resident elk hunting license can be issued or transferred to a person in their lifetime, regardless of authorization type.

Selected applicants will be notified in early June.

In 2026, there will be one continuous hunting season, opening Saturday, Oct. 17, and continuing through Sunday, Dec. 13, eliminating the split-season structure that was in effect from 2018-2025. This offers elk hunters more opportunities and flexibility to pursue elk in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin residents can submit elk license applications online through the [Go Wild](#) license portal or in person at a license sales agent. The application fee is \$10 for each of the bull elk and antlerless elk drawings and is limited to one application per person, per authorization type. The DNR recommends that all applicants check and update their contact information to ensure contact with successful applicants.

For each application fee, \$7 goes directly to elk management, monitoring and research. These funds also enhance elk habitat, which benefits elk and many other wildlife. If selected in the drawing, an elk hunting license costs \$49.

Before obtaining an elk hunting license, all selected hunters must participate in a Wisconsin elk hunter education course. The class covers Wisconsin elk history, hunting regulations, biology, behavior and scouting/hunting techniques.

For more information on the elk hunt, visit the DNR's [Elk Hunting webpage](#).