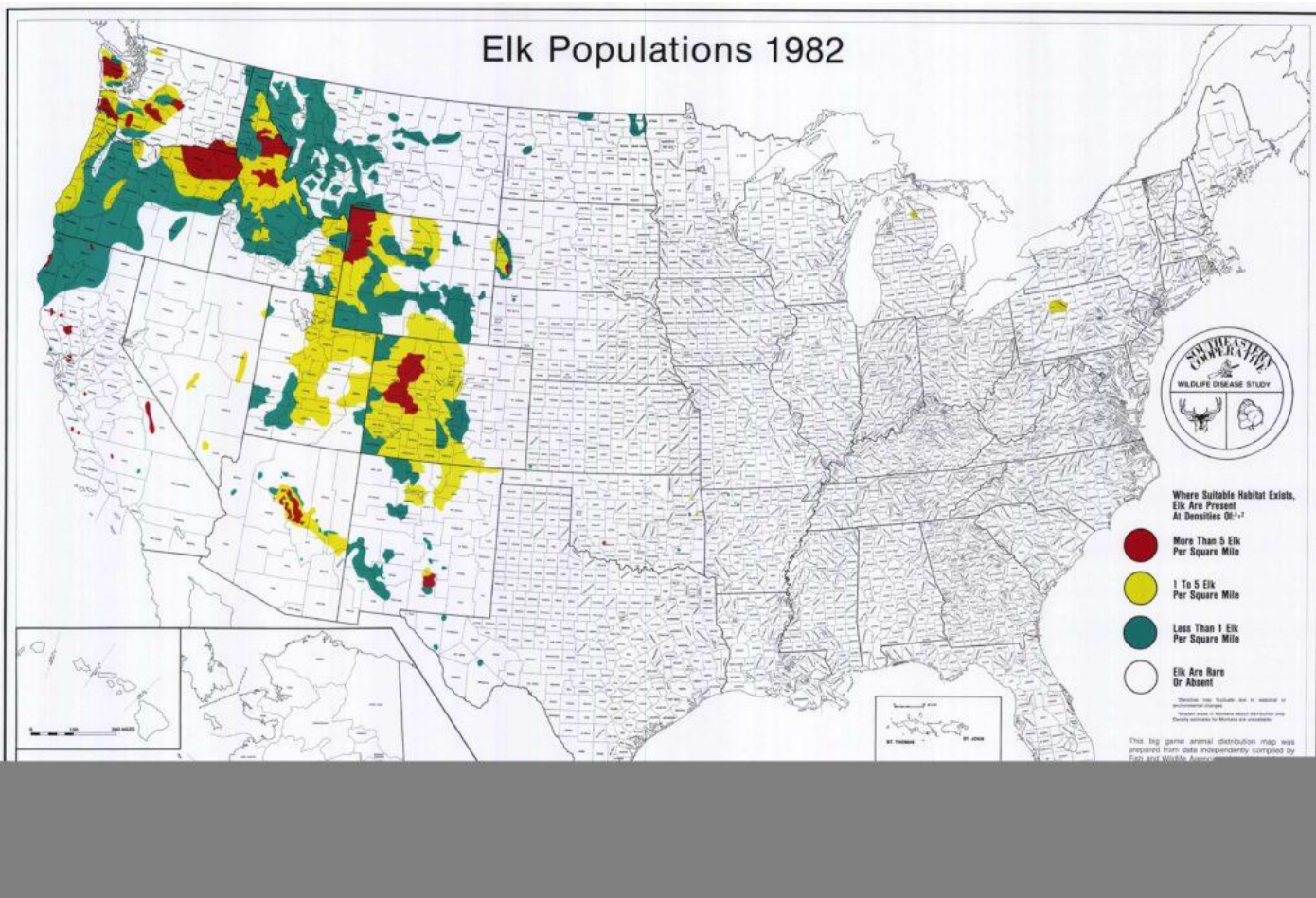


Elk Reintroduced to West Virginia | Guide Outdoors

By Kathy Pilney

On March 3, 2018, a new group of elk were welcomed back to the state of West Virginia, thanks to a collaborative effort between the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Elk used to live in the state, but became extinct around 1875.

The RMEF is helping to reintroduce elk to its native historic range through its [Eastern Elk Initiative](#). Before European settlement, an estimated ten million elk lived throughout North America and Canada in nearly every state besides Alaska and Florida. Unregulated hunting and habitat loss due to urbanization caused the elk population to dwindle. In the early 1890s, populations were less than 100,000. Today due to habitat restoration projects, they live in about 24 states and 7 provinces.



1982 US elk population map. Source: [UGA College of Veterinary Medicine](#)

Elk Reintroduction Numbers





WHERE ARE THE WAPITI?

STATE	ESTIMATED POPULATION
AR	700
KY	10,530
MI	1,370
MO	135
MN	83
NC	150
PA	996
TN	405
VA	160
WI	230
WV	24
Ontario	800

Note: Arkansas, Michigan and Pennsylvania restored elk prior to the founding of the RMEF.

According to a 2014-2015 Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources Elk Report, the estimated elk population was approximately 10,000 animals. Kentucky has the highest elk population of any state east of the Mississippi River. After this recent reintroduction of approx. 60 elk from Arizona, West. Virginia has approx. 90 elk today.

The RMEF Elk Network estimates about one million elk live in the western United States, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina, and from Ontario west in Canada. [Click here](#) to view the current and historic elk population map online.

Elk Subspecies

There were 6 subspecies of elk, but the Eastern and Merriam's elk have both been extinct for at least a century.

Rocky Mountain (Rocky Mountain West, now transplanted to other locations) – largest antlers of all subspecies

Roosevelt's (Coastal Pacific Northwest) – largest in body size of all subspecies, but not antler size

Tule (Central California) – smallest body size of all subspecies

Manitoban (northern Great Plains)

Merriam's (Southwest and Mexico) – Extinct

Eastern (east of the Mississippi) – Extinct

Source: [RMEF Elk Network](#)

Reintroduction Timeline:

February 1913: Sportsmen released 83 elk from Yellowstone National Park into Cabin Draw, Arizona

December 1997: Seven elk captured in Western Kansas were released in Eastern Kentucky.

2000: Kentucky received 26 elk captured near the Raymond Wildlife Area in Arizona

2002: Over 1,500 elk had been released at 8 different sites in Kentucky. Herds were considered healthy and the program was discontinued.

2012-2014: Virginia successfully trapped 70 elk in Kentucky and released them all near Vansant, Buchanan County

2016: West Virginia receives 12 elk from Kentucky

March 3, 2018: Approx. 50 cows and 10 bulls captured and quarantined in January east of Flagstaff are introduced to the Tomblin Wildlife Management Area. They join nearly two dozen elk already on site.

Additional Resources

[Kentucky Elk Herd History](#)

[History of Kentucky Elk Restoration \[Video\]](#)

[RMEF Eastern Elk Initiative Brochure](#)

[Arizona Elk Bound for West Virginia \[Video\]](#)