



Jake Dingell/PGC Photo

Making Memories in Elk Country

With a little guidance anyone can head to Elk Country and see elk. It's not like you need to be an expert in elk biology or intimately familiar with the region's topography or roads to find them. Folks just need some help with where-to-go and what-to-do information when they get to this rugged, big country.

Since elk viewing is better in some areas than others, it stands to reason that the largest numbers of wildlife watchers will be in those areas with the best viewing opportunities. No one really wants to watch what's going on in a field with nothing in it! However, wherever people congregate along narrow rural roads, the potential for problems increases, especially when motorists and wildlife viewers on the road's shoulder pay more attention to elk than oncoming traffic. Be safe. Be considerate. Be the one who knows he or she is doing everything right.

So the secret to maximizing your chances to see elk is knowing where to go, when to go and what to do and what not to do when you get there. Sounds easy, right? Well it is; it just requires that you pay attention and be respectful. In the long run, your actions ensure all elk-watchers, landowners, and law enforcement and conservation officials have fewer problems. That means a more pleasurable experience in elk country for you, your family and the folks you meet. And remember, that's what everybody wants: a chance to enjoy Pennsylvania's elk without problems and unnecessary complications.

WHAT TO BRING: Binoculars, spotting scopes, cameras and video cameras are always good bets, because they ensure you'll get a better view and provide a means to record important moments. Bring along some snacks and water, especially on high-volume traffic days, because if you get a parking spot, you may not want to give it up, or if you get stuck in traffic, you'll be covered. Dress for the [weather](#), because you may be standing outside, or sitting in the car with the window down. The key to having a good trip, though, is figuring out what you want to do and how comfortable you want to be, and then taking the steps to make it happen. Make a copy of this brochure to help you prepare for and navigate in elk country.



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TIMING: Being in at the right place at the right time is one of the most important factors that will influence whether you and your family will see elk. Although you can go almost anytime throughout the calendar year at almost any time during the day, the best time to visit the elk range is from late summer through spring – with September and October being the top months, particularly for people who want to hear bulls bugle and watch them spar – during the first two hours after sunrise and the two hours before sunset. But there’s always a chance to see elk out and about because these massive animals have

tremendous nutritional and varied habitat needs. When the temperature climbs above 80 degrees, though, elk generally slow down, take advantage of cover and generally aren’t very visible. June and July are usually more challenging months, because cows are caring for calves in cover and the hot sun forces elk into forested areas.

ETIQUETTE: Whenever large numbers of people converge in remote rural settings to witness a natural phenomenon, they usually and immediately stress and congest the area’s roads, services and modern conveniences. If you visit the elk range between Labor Day and Halloween, chances are you’ll have plenty of company, because the mating season, or the “rut” is on, winter’s approaching and elk are consequently on the move.



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It’s estimated 75,000 to 100,000 people visit Winslow Hill and Benezette at this time. Often, there is no way to avoid the bottlenecks because the prime spots are where everyone is going and en route rubbernecking is rampant. This is not a place for folks without patience or with a short-fuse, because you will be delayed, your serenity will be tested, and early-birds matter not.



By Joe KosackPGC Photo

The masses always converge and the best way to break through to the elk is to be tolerant, hospitable and understanding. Imagine what it’s like for the homeowners in these areas who are forced to negotiate these inconveniences and deal with thousands of elk tourists every fall. It’s not a picnic for them, weekends in particular.



Hal Korber/PGC Photo

There are plenty of things every elk enthusiast can do to help property owners, motorists, law enforcement officials, wildlife conservation officers and other elk tourists while out and about the elk range. Most of this advice is simply commonsense and good manners. But following it can make your and everyone else's day afield more enjoyable, and less complicated.

Here's a Top Ten List of Things You Should Not Do:

- 1.) Don't stop on the road to watch elk (see how not to do it in the photo above);
- 2.) Don't walk or park on private property – especially driveways – without permission;
- 3.) Don't approach or attempt to pet elk ever;
- 4.) Don't disturb elk or property owners (horn honking, yelling);
- 5.) Don't feed elk (it's illegal);
- 6.) Don't litter and consider cleaning up what others may leave;
- 7.) Don't be judgmental, enjoy yourself or just move to a place more to your liking;
- 8.) Don't use profanity;
- 9.) Don't be selfish, share good vistas and viewing blinds; and
- 10.) Don't crowd others, wait your turn.



By Jon DeBerti/PGC Photo

Unless you're visiting the elk range in other than peak viewing periods, you should expect to encounter some congestion of people/vehicles, because folks tend to congregate wherever elk gather and graze, or they can get close. Everyone who visits the state's elk range is looking for a front-row seat to the action. Recognizing that, and remaining polite and considerate, will go a long way to ensuring this wonderful outdoors opportunity doesn't become less than it should be for everyone who takes the time to come. And don't forget, watch for elk and other wildlife crossing roads. Having too close of an encounter with an elk is something no motorist wants to do!

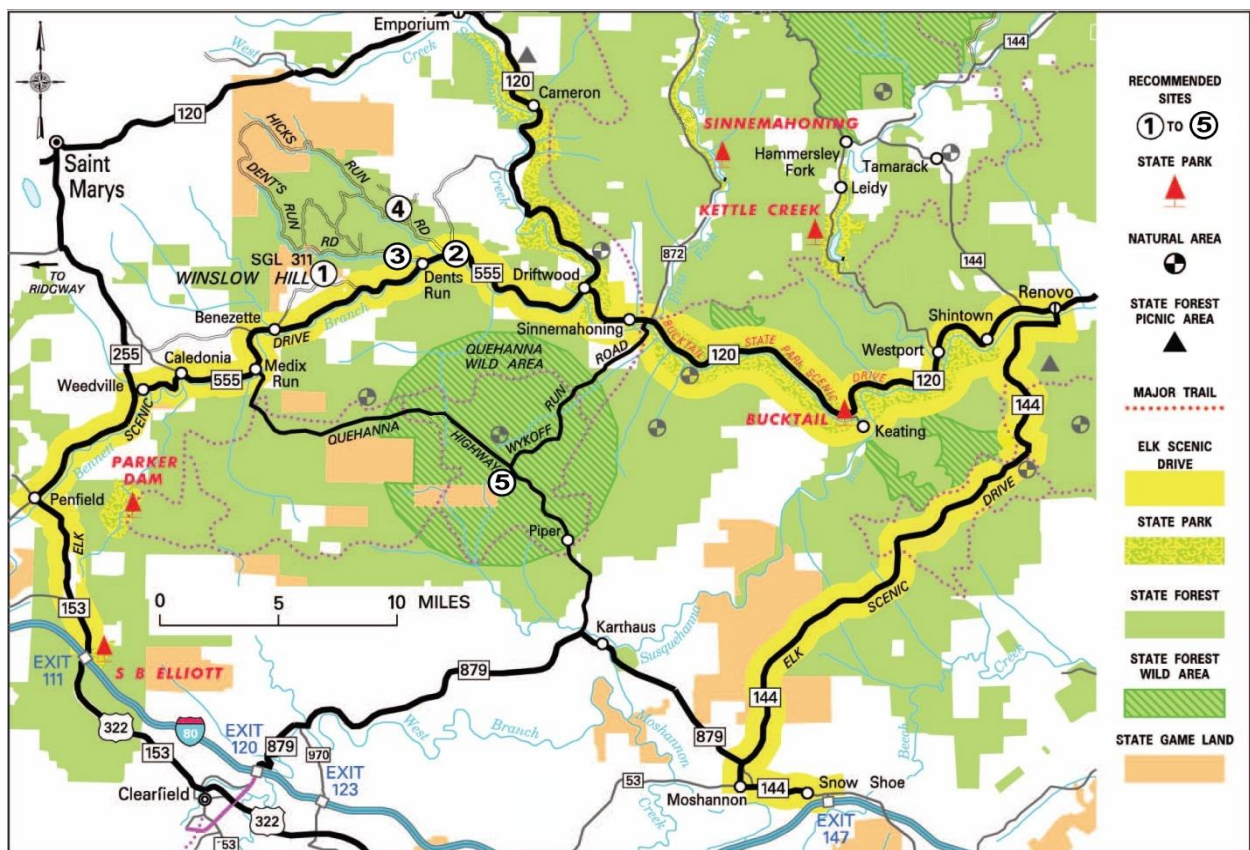
PARTNERS: Although elk are managed by the [Pennsylvania Game Commission](#), the wildlife agency does work with two important partners to heighten the Commonwealth's conservation of elk and improve the public's accessibility to and understanding of this charismatic resource. The state [Department of Conservation and Natural Resources](#) and the [Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation](#) have worked with the Game Commission for decades to protect and improve critical habitat on the elk range.



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RMEF, including its Pennsylvania chapter, also has made sizeable donations to elk research that has helped to strengthen the management techniques used by the Game Commission. To date, RMEF has spent more than \$7.7 million on elk and wildlife conservation in Pennsylvania.

ELK VISITORS CENTER: One longstanding initiative championed by several major conservation supporters, the center will open its doors in late 2010. Located near Winslow Hill, the Pennsylvania Wilds Elk Country Visitor Center will employ interactive, multimedia and stationary exhibits to help visitors learn more about elk, their conservation and where to go to see them. The grounds will include plenty of elk-friendly habitat and viewing stations. For more information, visit the Keystone Elk Country Alliance website.



BLUE-CHIP ELK VIEWING DESTINATIONS: With a little help, anyone can find elk on the elk range. Consider these locations when you're out and about. Don't be surprised to have some company, though.

1. Winslow Hill is hands down the best place to see elk. With a good pair of binoculars, you can count the whiskers on an elk's face here. Sometimes they're so close to the viewing positions and roads, you can't even use binoculars! The Game Commission's Food and Cover workers maintain an elk viewing area – with off-road parking, a pavilion and portable toilets – overlooking carefully managed elk habitat on Winslow Hill. Elk frequent this area – in fact some seemingly never leave – as well as whitetails and wild turkeys. Bring the kids. Pack a lunch. This is the ace! To get here, take Winslow Hill Road, three miles from its intersection with Route 555 in Benezette.



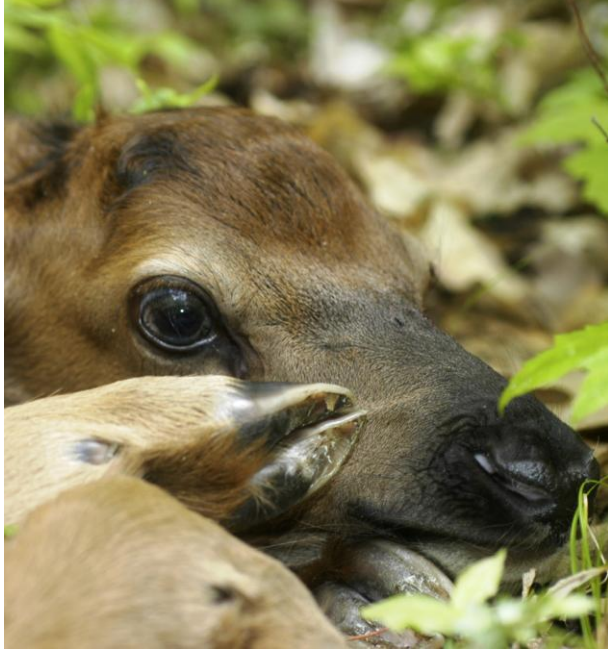
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2. Hicks Run Viewing Area is adjacent to the Hicks Run Cemetery along Route 555 on the [Elk State Forest](#). This viewing area with blind overlooks high-quality elk forage. Elk are commonly present there early and late in the day all year. It's a great stop to tie into a fall foliage ride and the viewing blind offers fine photography opportunities. The viewing area is along Route 555 about 12 miles east of Benezette, near Hicks Run Road. Off-highway parking is available. Please park with care and be respectful of the cemetery. For more information, call DCNR at 814-486-3353.

3. If you're more active and are into leaving the road behind, there are two other possibilities for you to consider. But before you decide to go, recognize that you're entering the Allegheny Mountains and you will find challenges that may test your abilities – sometimes difficult-to-cross streams; rattlesnakes; unfamiliar surroundings; steep terrain, etc. But if you're up for it, the still relatively new, 19-mile **Elk Trail** on the Elk State Forest will satisfy your thirst for things wild. The trail – often old roads, railroad grades and utility right-of-ways – meanders through decent elk country providing the hiker with both casual and occasionally strenuous stretches of travel-way to cover. Camping locations are available along the way. The only parking is at the trailhead along Dents Run Road, about two miles north of its intersection with Route 555, 10 miles east of Benezette. Call DCNR at 814-486-3353 for more details.



Joe Kosack/PGC Photo

4. If you prefer horseback riding, then maybe the **Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail** would be more to your liking. The 26-mile loop – also with shorter routes – gives riders an unforgettable ride through the Elk State Forest and some of the finest elk territory Pennsylvania has to offer. The trail comes with great mountain vistas, satisfying encounters with elk and other forest denizens and a taste of wilderness that most naturalists will enjoy. The trailhead and day-use parking for equestrians are along East Hicks Run Road about 3.75 miles from its intersection with Route 555, and 12 miles east of Benezette. For more details, go to [Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail](#) or call DCNR at 814-486-3353.

5. The **Hoover Farm Viewing Area of Moshannon State Forest** has a viewing blind (handicapped-accessible) overlooking food plots and wildlife openings maintained by the Game Commission. Located at the intersection of Wykoff Run Road and Quehanna Highway, the viewing area is owned by the DCNR and annually draws elk from the nearby big woods. It's a fascinating area to visit with loads of potential.



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Route 555 runs through the heart of Pennsylvania's elk country, so whenever you're on the road between Weedville and Driftwood, traveling through the scenic Bennett Branch of Sinnemahoning Creek corridor, keep an eye out for elk, especially around Caledonia, the lower end of the Quehanna Highway around Medix Run, Benezette and Dents Run.

LOCAL SUPPORT: One of the best ways to learn your way around elk country is to visit the local stores and businesses that serve this area. The folks who run these establishments often have a good idea of where elk are – sometimes on a daily basis – and can surely direct you to places that aren't covered in this guide or other ones. So stop by for lunch, stay overnight, or buy something. One of the best ways to get to know an area is get to know the folks who live there.



The Pennsylvania Game Commission
Managing elk for everyone!