

Appendix G - Elk Bring Opportunity

APPENDIX G

Elk Bring Opportunity and Added Value to Trails

Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park is one of the more remote resort parks in the Kentucky State Park System which in turn has resulted in their visitation being lower than many of the more accessible and/or strategically located parks. And although the Park does reside next to a lake which attracts both boaters and fishermen, and offers other amenities such as a putt putt golf course and a marina, the Park and surrounding campgrounds need something more to set them apart from other areas and give people additional reasons to visit.

Developing trails could definitely be a major attractor. Especially if the trails are constructed so as to encourage people from both outside the region and outside the state to come use the trails multiple times throughout the year to bring new revenue to the Buckhorn area. And by creating looped trail systems of significant length, trail users may be encouraged to stay multiple days thus creating overnight stays which, in turn, will create a greater economic impact on the region. See *What Makes a Trail System*.



But what is truly unique about this area is that both Perry and Leslie are two of only sixteen counties in Kentucky in which Rocky Mountain Elk were reintroduced in 1998- 2000. Over the past decade, the herd has steadily grown in population to the point that there are now over 10,000 elk in Southeast Kentucky becoming the largest herd of free roaming elk east of the Rocky Mountains.

Elk are very charismatic megafauna and can become major attractors to an area year-round but tend to be more visible in Winter, early Spring and Fall. They also tend to be more visible in the first hours of daylight as the mist rises and at dusk as the sun begins to go down and the day cools. These early morning & late nights entices many visitors to stay overnight which in turn means more money spent on lodging & meals while in an area.

Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park is one of only three state parks in Kentucky offering elk viewing tours to see elk in the wild. The other two state parks are Jenny Wiley and Pine Mountain. But due to the proximity of the public viewing areas, visitors staying at any one of the three state parks offering elk tours must travel considerable distances to view elk with Buckhorn visitors having to drive the furthest at just over 1 hour one way. This deters many visitors from participating in this activity.

ELK ARE A YEAR-ROUND ATTRACTOR

Fall is mating season for elk. Bulls spar for their own harem of cows by announcing their presence with a bugle. The "bugle" is an unforgettable sound that begins with a bellow, advances to a squealing whistle and ends with a series of grunts.

Early Spring is when calves are born which are fun to watch. Early Spring is also when bulls shed their antlers creating another attractor. Similar to an Easter egg hunt, people come from all over to search out fallen racks. Growing as much as an inch a day, even the largest rack of antlers will be back to full growth by the Fall mating season starting the cycle all over again.