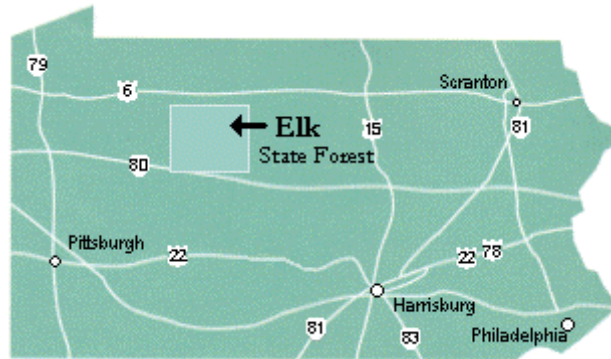


# Elk State Forest



**Bureau of Forestry  
Forest District #13  
258 Sizerville Road  
Emporium, PA  
15834  
(814) 486-3353  
Email:  
[fd13 @state.pa.us](mailto:fd13@state.pa.us)**

## State Forest Location



## History of the Elk State Forest

The Elk State Forest derives its name from the great number of elk that once thrived in the area. Pennsylvania's only elk here can usually be found in the forests between the village of Benezette eastward into the Hicks Run watershed.

Located principally in Elk and Cameron counties, Elk State Forest, comprised of 200,000 acres, is open to primitive camping, licensed hunting and fishing, and general recreational activities. The state forest land is delineated by metal tags and white paint marks on trees. Along major roads, the boundary markers are supplemented with wooden signs.

The virgin forest in Elk District consisted of magnificent white pine, hemlock, some red pine, mixed oaks and northern hardwoods, which included beech, sugar maple, birch, and black cherry. The first timber removed from the district was the white pine used for ship masts. Some of the finest white pine spar trees in the country were removed from Sterling Run between 1865 and 1872.



After white pine longs became scarce, hemlock lumber prices rose high enough for the tanneries formerly using only the bark, to begin marketing hemlock logs for lumber. Sawmills and logging camps sprang up throughout the district. Logs cut from the vast stands of hemlock were rafted or floated down streams such as the First Fork, the Driftwood Branch and the Bennett's Branch of the Sinnemahoning Creek.

In 1915, the last log raft went down the Driftwood Branch, thus ending the hemlock logging era. The cut-over areas were further altered by vast wildfires that killed the remaining young trees. With the exception of few virgin stands passed up by loggers, the old growth forest in this area was gone.

The first purchase of land for the Elk State Forest was 3,487 acre tract in Middle Jerry Run bought from D.R. Fullerton on May 31, 1900. Originally called Forest Reservations, these lands were purchased to reestablish a forest that had been nearly eliminated by cutting and burning.

Many of the roads, hiking trails and conifer plantations in the Elk State Forest were projects of the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.). This 1933 peace time "army" was recruited to battle the destruction and erosion of the nation's natural resources. Between 1933 and 1941, men from nine camps accomplished many projects on the Elk State Forest.

On October 19, 1938, eight C.C.C. fire fighters lost their lives at Pepperhill, north of Sinnemahoning, when they were trapped on the steep hillside by a fast-moving forest fire. The **Wayside Memorial Spring**, located three miles south of Emporium along PA Route 120, is maintained for the public use in memory of those devoted men.

### Activities near the Elk State Forest

The Elk State Forest offers some of the best opportunities for both experience and inexperienced hikers to get out and really enjoy themselves. Currently, there are six hiking trails, maintained by various volunteers and our district staff, that serve as major trails on the forest.

**Hiking Trails:** The two premier trails are *The Bucktail Path* and *The Quehanna Trail*. The Bucktail begins near Sizerville State Park and extends southward approximately 30 miles to the village of Sinnemahoning. A hiker on this trail will travel through both the northern hardwood and oak hickory forest types. The trail can be traversed in short sections, if desired, and it can provide both an enjoyable experience for the beginning hiker and the challenging one for the veteran. The Quehanna Trail, located in the southern part of Cameron County, loops through the Quehanna Wild Area and surrounding state forest land, covering approximately 30 miles on the Elk State Forest. The trail continues into the Moshannon State Forest for another 30 miles.

Other hiking trails of special note in the district are: *The Fred Woods Trail*, a five-mile loop taking the hiker to a unique area of large boulders and scenic vistas; *The Pine Tree Trail*, a self-guided two-mile walk along an interpretive trail that winds through The Pine Tree Natural Area; *The Dividing Ridge/Eddy's Run Trail*, a fairly easy ten-mile walk, close to Emporium, which has the hiker following a system of logging roads through a beautiful area of state forest land; and the newly created *Elk Trail*, where the hiker can cover 19 miles over railroad grades, pipelines, logging roads, and sections of newly created trail, with a chance to see free-roaming elk in their eastern habitat.

### Natural & Wild Areas near the Elk State Forest

**Quehanna Wild Area** became Pennsylvania's first large forest area (48,186 acres) devoted to the pursuit of peace and solitude. Once this area was an industrial research complex with restricted public access, now the public use is encouraged, while buildings, new public roads, mineral development and rights-of-way are restricted. In the early 1990s, the elk herd expanded its range to include the 23,000 acres of Quehanna in the Elk State Forest.

Areas of unique values that are maintained in a "natural condition," without the usual human intervention, are designated as **Natural Areas**. The Natural areas found on the Elk State Forest are:

**Johnson Run Natural Area** - 216 acres with old growth hemlock-hardwood.

**Lower Jerry Run Natural Area** - 892 acres with old growth pine-hemlock.

**Pine Tree Trail Natural Area** - 276 acres with old field growth white pine.

**Bucktail State Park Natural Area** - 16,433 acres; a scenic drive

**Wykoff Run Natural Area** - 1,215 acres of hydric hemlock and white birch

The **Lower Jerry** and **Wykoff Natural Areas** are further designated as special protection areas for all amphibians and reptiles - e.g. even rattlesnakes should not be disturbed, in those areas.



The **Bucktail State Park Natural Area** is a 75-mile scenic drive from Emporium to Lock Haven that involves 16,433 acres in the Elk and Sproul State Forests. All state-owned land, visible from PA Route 120 (rim to rim along the Susquehanna River and Sinnemahoning Creek), was legislated "State Park" status in 1933, at a time when the Department of Forests and Waters did not have a state Parks System.

## The Pennsylvania Elk

Elk once lived throughout Pennsylvania. By the mid 1800s, their range was reduced to a small area in Elk County. The last native Pennsylvania eastern elk was killed near Ridgway, in 1867.

Between 1913 and 1926, the Pennsylvania Game Commission attempted to restore an elk herd by releasing 177 western elk. These relocated animals flourished so well that 98 antlered bulls were legally killed in open hunting seasons between 1923 and 1931. Because of a declining herd size, hunting of elk has been prohibited since 1932. A recent survey indicated the herd size to be more than 600 animals, up from a low of 35 animals in the early 1970s. The current elk range is in southwestern Cameron and southeastern Elk counties.



To maintain the elk herd and to keep them from agricultural areas, the Game Commission and the Bureau of Forestry, with financial assistance from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, have conducted timber sales to provide browse, established and maintained grassy strips for grazing, and have planted selected trees and shrubs to provide food variety.

Elk are much larger than white-tailed deer. In fact, a mature bull can stand about five feet high and the shoulders, could weigh between 700 and 1000 pounds, and would have a set of backward curving antlers that can sport as many as 16 points. On the other hand, cows are somewhat smaller, antlerless and can weigh between 500 and 600 pounds. The elks' coat vary from dark brown to reddish, depending on the season, but a large buff-colored patch covering the rump is unmistakable.

Elk may be viewed by an alert visitor from the many roads throughout their range. Elk are best observed at dawn and dusk, in September and October during the mating season. Please remember that Elk are wild animals and can be dangerous, especially bulls during the rutting season. People can disturb elk by approaching too closely and elk should always be appreciated and viewed from a safe distance. While searching for elk, respect private landowners' rights and privacy. Remember: The feeding of elk is prohibited by law in Pennsylvania.

Brought to you as a public service from [The Bureau of Forestry](#) and [Pa-Conservation.Org](#)

