

## How to Draw an Elk Tag.

**Doug Scott**

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**Hunt Every Year!**

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Someone once said, 'You have to be in it to win it,' when it comes to quality elk hunting for non-residents out West. That statement just about sums it up. For residents of a few western states, getting a quality elk tag is as easy as going down to the sporting goods store and buying a general license (as is the case here in Wyoming). Non-residents have their work cut out for them if they want a good, quality elk tag, but one can be had just about every year with a little planning and preparation. I am not going to specify guided, do-it-yourself, archery or rifle hunting, I am going to concentrate on 'Being in the game.' What I mean by that is making sure that you have a plan together that will increase the odds of drawing an elk tag in your favor, possibly as often as every year. Here is the strategy.

1. Get on the Internet and write down the application deadlines for all western states on a Calendar. This information can be found on each states game agency website. Without this information you can't start your master plan.
2. After you list all the application dates, you need to decide how you will be applying, internet or mail. Try and use the internet whenever possible, as there is less chances for mistakes and sometimes can save you money (some states do charge more for internet so you need to compare costs). It's also a good idea to have a file setup for each state that you will be applying. By doing this you can put information for each state in the file throughout the year to help you decide where you want to apply. Also,

most fish and game websites have access to the drawing odds. This information will help you balance out drawing odds versus the type of tag you will be applying for.

3. The budget: This is the hardest decision you will have to make. Some states like Utah only charge \$5.00 to apply on line, so it is like a lottery ticket (you get charged the 795.00 only if you get the tag). Other states like Arizona make you buy a hunting license even if you don't get a tag, costing you \$113.50 to apply. In some cases you can apply for 'points only' and save some money if you are not trying to draw a tag that year. Remember that if you don't get drawn, most of your money will be returned and could be used to apply for other states if times allotted. At the end of our plan I will give you each states costs with the pros and con's of their application process.

4. You need to decide which states you will be applying for and how much money you are willing to 'invest.' What I mean is, like previously mentioned, certain states require you to purchase a hunting license before applying for a tag and there is usually a small application fee to go along with the application. To apply in all eight western states for a nonresident elk tag would cost you around \$590 in nonrefundable fees including states with bonus points. That seems like a lot but if you can start positioning yourself for quality tags each year, is it worth the cost? That's up to you to decide. Some hunters may elect to only apply in states that do not require you to purchase a license before applying. Many hunters go that route, but the hunters who do elect to 'invest' have much better odds of drawing a quality elk tag. For example, I have consistently applied in Arizona for elk over the past 10 years, costing me about \$1000 in nonrefundable fees for elk applications. In those 10 years I have been lucky enough to draw two tags, costing \$405 each. Add the two tags up to the \$1000 for a total of \$1810. Now divide this total by 2 and the cost of these two tags cost me \$905 each. Good deal? I think so. Plus, both tags were in some of Arizona's top units. If you could purchase these two tags for \$900 each and have one of the best tags in Arizona, would you say yes?? I would....

5. Let's say the budget you set for yourself allows you to apply in all western states. The key now is discipline. There are no second chances when it comes to not getting your applications in on time, it's a wasted year. Try to get your applications in as soon as the states fish and game allows. Missing a year sets you back a year, so you need to stay focused on the calendar you built.

By applying to all these states and looking at the odds you can almost be assured of a good tag every year. The key point is to always apply, even if you are not planning on hunting that particular state that year. You need to continue building bonus/ preference point to increase your odds. This year in Wyoming the odds for a general elk tag for nonresidents was 84% for the more expensive tag. With this in mind, plan your first year's trip to Wyoming. Now you are building points in other states to get you in a better position for the following year. Wyoming has excellent archery and rifle hunting and with a little research (if you plan on going DIY) you should be

able to find a quality area to hunt. Now, if you are one of the unlucky 16% that didn't draw in Wyoming, the results are out at the end of February, giving you plenty of time to apply in other states. Also, Idaho has over-the-counter tags that can be purchased. You will need to do research but you can find quality areas with good hunting.

Year Two: You now have bonus/preference points in most states, congratulations; you are on the path to hunting elk a lot more often. Options in year two start again with Wyoming, as it is the first state that applications are due. First decide if you want to hunt Wyoming. If you elect to not hunt Wyoming, make sure you buy the bonus point. You then should be able to draw a general tag anytime. Or, instead of just buying a point, you could apply for one of the late season tags or a limited entry area. Chances of drawing are slim but if you do, you'll have great opportunities for big bulls. If you don't draw you still get your point.

Utah is due next online for \$5. Give it a shot and again, if you do some research on where to apply (we will help you out in the MRS prior to the application being due) and beat the odds, (they are tough as many people apply due to the low cost) you should have a hunt of a lifetime.

Idaho is always a fall back position if you do not draw another state,.

Montana is next due in mid March. If you want an outfitted hunt, tags are no problem. If you prefer to hunt on your own, you will have tougher odds for a general elk tag. Montana has two drawings, the first one is for a general tag. If you draw your general tag, you then can apply for in the second drawing for a 'limited' tag. Bowhunters have great opportunities if they get a general tag as they can hunt some limited rifle units during the rut. Make sure you at least get your bonus point.

Colorado is due around the first of April for elk and is the, 'You know where you stand state.' Meaning all tags are based on who has the most points. I like to build three to four points for rifle hunts and then hunt, so I would build points for the future unless you knew of a special honey hole that you could draw with only one point. Again, make sure you get your point.

New Mexico is up next and is a lot easier to draw with an outfitter. New Mexico does not have a bonus point program, so everyone is on equal ground. Steep odds for the top units, but there are several units that you can have a quality hunt in, you just need to do some homework if you want to hunt New Mexico.

Nevada: To gain preference points in Nevada you need to buy a nonrefundable hunting license. I like this state because they reward the loyal applicants for purchasing the non-refundable hunting license. Nevada squares your points, meaning if you apply for five years and have not drawn, you get 26 chances in the next draw (5x5 plus the one chance for the year you are entering). Nevada has some great elk hunting, wet springs and the right unit will get you an elk of a lifetime. Unfortunately tags are tough to draw. I look at Nevada as a, 'When you draw, adjust

your season around that tag' and make this hunt.

Oregon: Here is your chance to hunt either Roosevelt's or Rocky Mountain elk. Oregon dose make you purchase a non-refundable hunting license but the elk application is only \$4.50. Although Oregon is not known for its trophy elk, each year good bulls are taken with good research, hard work and some luck. Oregon is a state that I only put in for the best unit and hope I draw, if not I build points.

Idaho is always a state you can fall back to, If your willing to hunt with a bow, as you can buy over-the-counter archery tags for some high quality elk units. If you want to apply for a limited area you will need to purchase a non-refundable license. Odds vary from low single digits to more than 100 to 1, but there are some excellent units with good access and big bulls.

The last state is Arizona, from a quality stand point I think we saved the best for last; good access, big bulls; early rifle rut hunts, late season hunts and great bowhunting. Again, less people apply for Arizona because they make you purchase a non-refundable hunting license to apply. Arizona has bonus points so it is important to apply every year and get those points. This year Arizona instituted a 'loyalty bonus point' for people who have applied for five consecutive years giving you an added chance each year, again it pays to play the game. Many of the units in Arizona have quality elk and several units have world class elk. You need to do your homework because big bulls are there for the taking.

The information listed above is a guideline for the first few years if you want to start to drawing quality tags. we focused on elk but deer ,sheep, antelope, mountain goats and moose are all about done the same way. the one good thing is that in states were you had to purchase a non-refundable license, you don't need to buy another to apply for additional tags. I will discuss other species in later issues of the MRS. The key will be to commit yourself to the process of applying and doing research to select key areas. The MRS section will help layout starting points of where to apply, but it will be up to you to take our information and bring it to the next level to hunt for quality animals year after year.