# Elk Restoration in Virginia

## A survey of public opinions and concerns

### ** Survey Results**

Survey prepared and administered by:
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This questionnaire was designed to assess the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and concerns of residents of the Commonwealth about elk and elk restoration in Virginia. Information you provided helped formulate recommendations on whether elk should be reintroduced and identified special considerations that need to be addressed. All responses were kept confidential, and your identity was never connected to any specific response you see in the following pages.

For the purposes of this survey, please remember that a biological assessment was conducted, potentially suitable habitat was identified, and that reintroduction of elk was determined to be biologically feasible prior to the survey. This survey was limited only to issues relating to the social and economic desirability of elk restoration in Virginia.

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(1) Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Please check the appropriate box)

"Reintroducing elk into Virginia is a good idea."

(25%) Strongly Agree
(36%) Agree
(16%) Neither Agree nor Disagree
(8%) Disagree
(6%) Strongly Disagree
(9%) Don't Know

(2) Based on past research, it has been shown that the amount of knowledge and experience a person has regarding a particular topic greatly affects his/her attitudes and opinions about that issue (such as elk and elk restoration). Measuring this effect is important to making good management decisions. How confident do you feel about your knowledge of elk and your ability to make judgment on the costs and benefits of reintroducing elk in Virginia?

(13%) Very Confident
(39%) Somewhat Confident
(29%) Somewhat Uncertain
(20%) Very Uncertain

(3) How helpful was the enclosed brochure in giving you the information you need to make the types of decisions referred to in Question 2?

(36%) Very Helpful
(51%) Somewhat Helpful
(9%) Not Very Helpful
(4%) Didn't Read It

Questions 4-8 were designed to assess your interests in the potential of viewing elk and your opinions about the placement of released elk. Your responses helped determine the potential for increased tourism in and around potential release sites.

(4) If elk were reintroduced in Virginia, how likely would you be to make a special trip to view them?

(33%) Very Likely
(30%) Somewhat Likely
(34%) Not Very Likely
(3%) Don't Know

(5) What is the farthest distance you would be willing to travel if the primary purpose of your trip was to view the elk?

(37%) Less than 50 miles
(36%) 50-100 miles
(21%) 100-200 miles
(6%) More than 200 miles

(6) Would you be more or less likely to make a trip to view elk if a special viewing facility (such as an overlook) were built in an area where elk are likely to be?

(46%) More Likely (43%) About the Same (11%) Less Likely

(7) Would you be more or less likely to support elk reintroduction in Virginia if elk were kept in a permanent enclosure (i.e., surrounded by an elk-proof fence)?

(17%) More Likely (36%) About the Same (47%) Less Likely

(8) Would you be more or less likely to support elk reintroduction in Virginia if the release site was near (less than 50 miles from) your home?

(26%) More Likely (58%) About the Same (17%) Less Likely

Below is a list of possible outcomes or concerns about elk reintroduction in Virginia. These responses indicated how positive or negative you believe the impacts on YOU would be if each scenario were to occur.

If this scenario were to occur, I believe the impacts ON ME would be...

| | Very Positive | Positive | Neither | Negative | Very Negative | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (9) ...an increase in agricultural damages (i.e., damage to crops, fences, and gardens) | 6% | 10% | 46% | 22% | 9% | 7% |
| (10) ...an economic hardship placed on farmers | 6% | 11% | 34% | 27% | 11% | 10% |
| (11)...an increase in Virginia's biodiversity. | 15% | 42% | 27% | 2% | 2% | 13% |
| (12) ...a reduction in the size of Virginia's deer herd due to competition for forage | 11% | 26% | 33% | 16% | 6% | 8% |
| (13) ...negative impacts on other wildlife through habitat alteration caused by elk | 4% | 10% | 44% | 26% | 7% | 10% |
| (14) ...movement of elk from release sites and their intended range | 4% | 17% | 47% | 16% | 5% | 11% |
| (15)...an increase in recreational opportunities associated with elk | 12% | 49% | 24% | 5% | 3% | 7% |
| (16) ...disease transmission from elk to Virginia's livestock | 5% | 5% | 29% | 31% | 16% | 15% |
| (17) ...disease transmission from elk to Virginia's wildlife | 3% | 6% | 27% | 33% | 16% | 14% |
| (18)...economic benefits to communities near release sites | 9% | 39% | 34% | 5% | 4% | 9% |
| (19) ...a problem of illegal taking of elk (i.e., poaching) | 8% | 11% | 29% | 24% | 18% | 9% |
| (20) ...inhumane treatment of elk during trapping, transport, and release | 5% | 6% | 33% | 24% | 21% | 11% |

The next section of the survey was designed to assess the reasons why people may choose to support or not support elk reintroduction in Virginia.

(21) Based on what I know today, if given the opportunity, I would...

(69%) SUPPORT elk reintroduction in Virginia
(32%) NOT SUPPORT elk reintroduction in Virginia

If you indicated in Question 21 that you would SUPPORT reintroduction of elk in Virginia, please indicate below how important each factor listed was in your decision.

| | Very Important | Somewhat Important | Not Very Important | Not a Factor in My Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (22) Elk were present in Virginia historically | 44% | 43% | 8% | 6% |
| (23) Elk have a right to live in their historic native range | 40% | 42% | 13% | 6% |
| (24) Reintroducing elk may restore a part of Virginia's natural heritage | 42% | 46% | 8% | 4% |
| (25) Reintroducing elk may increase biodiversity in Virginia | 40% | 47% | 7% | 6% |
| (26) I would like to be able to see elk in Virginia | 42% | 44% | 10% | 5% |
| (27) I would like to hunt elk in Virginia some day | 16% | 12% | 17% | 55% |
| (28) Managing reintroduced elk in Virginia would be a good use of existing funds by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. | 22% | 43% | 17% | 18% |
| (29) Reintroducing elk may reduce the size of Virginia's deer herds. | 16% | 38% | 31% | 16% |
| (30) Elk may increase opportunities for outdoor recreation in Virginia | 27% | 53% | 12% | 8% |
| (31) Elk may bring economic benefits to communities near the release sites | 26% | 49% | 14% | 11% |

If you indicated in Question 21 that you would NOT SUPPORT elk reintroduction in Virginia, please indicate below how important each factor listed was in your decision.

| | Very Important | Somewhat Important | Not Very Important | Not a Factor in My Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (32) Land uses in Virginia may have changed too much to support an elk herd | 44% | 31% | 9% | 16% |
| (33) I am not interested is seeing elk in Virginia | 20% | 19% | 25% | 36% |
| (34) Reintroducing elk in Virginia may be unsuccessful again | 23% | 31% | 16% | 31% |
| (35) Trapping, transporting, and releasing elk for reintroduction into Virginia may be inhumane to the elk | 28% | 22% | 19% | 31% |
| (36) Elk may compete with deer for forage and harm the deer population | 30% | 30% | 21% | 20% |
| (37) Elk may have a negative impact on other wildlife by altering existing ecosystems and habitats | 37% | 35% | 14% | 14% |
| (38) Managing reintroduced elk in Virginia would not be a good use of existing funds by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. | 47% | 24% | 11% | 19% |
| (39) Elk may cause an increase in automobile-wildlife collisions | 56% | 27% | 6% | 11% |
| (40) Elk may transmit diseases to Virginia's livestock | 45% | 31% | 10% | 15% |
| (41) Elk may transmit diseases to other wildlife in Virginia | 41% | 35% | 10% | 14% |
| (42) Elk may cause agricultural damage on farms (such as crop, fence, and garden damage) | 54% | 30% | 6% | 11% |

Questions 45-48 dealt with your perceptions of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and its ability to effectively and efficiently carry out an elk reintroduction program.

(43) Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"Management of a reintroduced elk herd is an appropriate use of funding by Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries."

(18%) Strongly Agree
(38%) Agree
(15%) Neither Agree nor Disagree
(12%) Disagree
(10%) Strongly Disagree
(8%) Don't Know

(44) If elk were restored to Virginia and VDGIF needed to obtain additional funding in order to manage the elk herd, where do you think that money should come from? Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Funds should be reallocated from other wildlife programs within VDGIF | 8% | 35% | 16% | 21% | 11% | 8% |
| b) Funds should be reallocated from other non-wildlife programs within VDGIF (such as law enforcement or information and education) | 3% | 11% | 14% | 36% | 29% | 6% |
| c) New money should be obtained from general state funds | 10% | 33% | 16% | 16% | 18% | 7% |
| d) New funds should be obtained from outside private sources (such as non-governmental organizations) | 19% | 49% | 16% | 4% | 5% | 7% |
| e) Additional funds should not be obtained | 10% | 8% | 24% | 27% | 18% | 14% |

(45) How satisfied are you with the performance of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries in the following areas? (Please check one box for each statement)

| | Very Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Neither | Somewhat Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Wildlife Management (Game Species) | 24% | 28% | 18% | 4% | 2% | 23% |
| b) Wildlife Management (Non-Game Species) | 20% | 28% | 24% | 3% | 1% | 25% |
| c) Overall Performance | 23% | 32% | 18% | 5% | 2% | 20% |

(46) If people affected by elk damage were to be compensated for their losses, money for that compensation must come from some source. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) Money from general state funds should be paid to victims of elk damage | 7% | 30% | 18% | 26% | 15% | 5% |
| b) Communities in the vicinity of the release site should pay a fee to compensate victims of elk damage | 2% | 9% | 15% | 42% | 27% | 5% |
| c) Organizations that support elk reintroduction should contribute money to compensate victims of elk damage | 20% | 45% | 14% | 11% | 5% | 6% |
| d) Free damage prevention tools (such as fencing materials) should be given to victims of elk damage | 11% | 39% | 23% | 13% | 8% | 5% |
| e) Victims of elk damage should not be compensated at all | 4% | 9% | 17% | 35% | 27% | 7% |

(47) What method(s) do you feel would be most effective for distributing additional information to the general public about an elk restoration program in Virginia? (Please check all that apply.)

(76%) Brochures (such as the one included with this survey)
(74%) Newspaper articles
(61%) Informational public meetings
(34%) Educational programs at VDGIF events
(34%) News segments or programs on TV
(6%) It is not necessary to provide information

The last group of questions provided useful information about respondents' background and activity in wildlife-related activities. This information was combine with the responses of other participants having similar backgrounds. Remember, all responses were confidential.

(48) What is your age?

(2%) < 25 years (34%) 26-45 years (45%) 46-65 years (19%) > 65 years

(49) What is your gender?

(73%) Male (27%) Female

(50) Please check the highest level of education you have completed

(4%) < High School
(15%) High School Diploma
(32%) Some college
(23%) Bachelor's Degree
(25%) Graduate or other advanced degree

(51) What is the approximate income (before taxes) of your household?

(14%) <$30,000
(39%) $30,000 - $59,999
(31%) $60,000 - $99,999
(16%) > $100,000

(52) Other experiences have suggested that people who work in agriculture or horticulture may have very different opinions of wildlife issues than those who work in other fields. Which category best describes your current employment?

(20%) I am not employed (5%) Agriculture or Horticulture (75%) Other

(53) Which of the following environments best describes your upbringing or background?

(46%) A rural area
(21%) City, < 50,000 people
(19%) City, 50,000-249,999 people
(14%) City, > 250,000 people

(54) Which of the following environments best describes your current living conditions?

(33%) A rural area
(19%) City, < 50,000 people
(30%) City, 50,000-249,999 people
(19%) City, > 250,000 people