

4 VAC 15-90-550

Game: Deer: Special elk hunting license, Conservation License Program.

Summary:

The recommendation is to allow one special elk hunting license to be reserved for a conservation organization each license year for a period of up to five years.

Recommended language of amendment:

4VAC15-90-550. Special elk hunting license, Conservation License Program.

A. For the purposes of this section, the following words or terms shall have the following meanings, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

"Individual, cooperators, or wildlife conservation organizations" means those people or entities whose mission is to promote and ensure the conservation of Virginia's wildlife resources or to promote opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, or other wildlife-related recreation within Virginia.

"Proceeds" means the amount of money received by the cooperator or organization from the transfer of a reserved special elk hunting license minus all expenses, including the fees associated with the license, and administrative costs directly attributable to the transfer of the permit or the implementation of the defined project.

B. Upon receipt of a valid Conservation License Program application from an officer or other designated official representative of any individual, cooperator, or wildlife conservation organization, the director or the director's designee shall verify the application materials and may select a program awardee ~~annually for a period not to exceed five years.~~

C. The director shall establish a Conservation License Program Committee composed of a minimum of three individuals to review program applications and submit a recommendation to the director to reserve no more than one special elk hunting license per license year for a period not to exceed five years for a cooperator or organization whose application is deemed to provide the greatest benefit to elk conservation and elk-related recreation ~~in Virginia per license year. This committee shall be composed of a minimum of three individuals and make a recommendation to the director each year.~~

D. ~~A cooperator or organization receiving~~ The awardee will receive a reserved special elk hunting license each license year during the award period, subject to the provisions of subsection G of this section. The awardee must direct all proceeds from the transfer of such reservation, toward ~~a~~ projects to improve and enhance elk habitat, elk populations, or elk-related recreation within the Elk Management Zone.

E. In coordination with the department, a cooperator or organization may transfer the reserved special elk hunting license to any person eligible to hunt in Virginia. The generation of funds from the transfer of the reserved special elk hunting license may only be conducted through a raffle.

F. A special elk hunting license transferee may be rejected if it is determined that the transferee has a hunting license revocation at the time they are drawn, been convicted of one or more wildlife violations within five years prior to the last date of the application period, or convicted of one or more violations involving elk. In determining the transferee's eligibility, the department shall take into account the nature and severity of the violations.

G. The department reserves the right to terminate a multi-year award if the cooperator or organization violates the intent of the Conservation License Program or breaches any agreement made with the department pertaining to the Conservation License Program or if the department alters special elk hunting license opportunities for elk management purposes.

H. Cooperators or organizations are eligible to apply for and be selected for the Conservation License Program, regardless of the number of times they have applied or been selected in the past.

Rationale:

The recommended language change allowing an organization or cooperator to be awarded the opportunity to raffle one special elk hunting license each license year for a period of up to five years will promote a more sustainable, long-term funding mechanism for the elk program and all the work required for it, such as habitat improvement, land access, etc. The Elk Conservation License Program is an opportunity to provide an organization with a significant incentive (special elk hunting license) for people to spend money that will be directed towards projects that help elk populations and the elk hunt itself. The previous four habitat projects executed through the Elk Conservation License Program have all been elk-focused but have improved habitat for many wildlife species. All of the elk lottery application revenue goes to the Department's general fund and not to the elk program. Therefore, maximizing the ability of this one separate elk license to generate funding that will sustain the elk program is crucial.

Currently, DWR notifies the winning organization in early May, and they must work quickly to organize a raffle and online resources for inclusion in the Department's late May announcement of the elk lottery winners. This short planning time frame does not afford sufficient opportunity to organize and maximize the profitability of a raffle package. A longer planning time frame would foster much greater opportunity to solicit donations from individuals or businesses to add value and prizes to the raffle, and thus, the overall attractiveness of the raffle to prospective participants. Further, a longer planning time frame would offer greater opportunities to effectively advertise and distribute raffle materials. Previous winning organizations have stated that given more time to solicit donations and build their raffle package, they would expect to be able to raise significantly more money to benefit elk conservation and recreation.