

The Status of Hunting Land Access in Kentucky:
Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Report Required by KRS 150.0241 (6): No Net Loss of Hunting Land

September 26, 2023

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources' mission is to conserve, protect and enhance Kentucky's fish and wildlife resources and provide outstanding opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, shooting sports, wildlife viewing, and related activities.

Background

In the 2010 Regular Legislative Session, the Kentucky General Assembly passed Senate Bill 64, which among other things, established a state policy of requiring "No Net Loss" for hunting land access in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) was an early supporter of the No Net Loss policy in the 2010 General Assembly, and included it with its official agency-legislation proposals. Passage of Senate Bill 64 in 2010 made Kentucky the ninth state to establish such a policy. To date, provisions in law for no net loss of hunting lands have been enacted in Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

The concept of No Net Loss has consistently been a focal point of hunting and public lands advocates nationwide, and has also been considered a key legislative agenda item for the National Rifle Association (NRA) and Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. In short, the No Net Loss policy generally requires that states maintain at least the same level of available public hunting land that currently exists under the state's ownership or management authority. The end result is to assure hunters that the opportunities they now have will not be eliminated.

In Senate Bill 64, the Kentucky Legislature included various reporting requirements to maintain a constant focus on hunting land access in the Commonwealth. For example, any state agency that owns or manages lands shall submit a written report by October 1 of each year to the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Legislative Research Commission, and the Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Environment describing the following:

1. A list of properties that were open for hunting during the previous fiscal year;
2. A list of properties that were not open for hunting during the previous fiscal year; and
3. The acreage for each property and the county where each property is located.

Additionally, KDFWR specifically is required by October 1 of each year to submit to the Legislative Research Commission and the Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Environment a written report describing:

1. The acreage managed by the commission that was closed to hunting during the previous fiscal year and the reasons for the closures; and
2. The acreage managed by the commission that was opened to hunting to compensate for closures of existing land pursuant to subsection (4) of this section.

Operationally, Section 4 of Senate Bill 64 that became law on July 10, 2010 requires that any land-management decisions “shall not result in any net loss of habitat land acreage available for hunting opportunities on commission-managed lands that exists on the effective date of this Act.” This was eventually codified as KRS 150.0241. The department is glad to have this opportunity to offer this report of the available hunting lands in Kentucky as of September 30, 2023. Some baseline acreages may be adjusted from last year’s report as a result of minor cartographic, boundary clean-up. In these instances, the actual acreage available for hunting opportunities was unchanged.

Table 1. Total of Wildlife Management Areas Owned or Co-owned by KDFWR

Name of Area	County	2022 Acres	2023 Acres
Ballard WMA	Ballard	8,014	8,014
Beechy Creek WMA	Calloway	119	119
Big Rivers WMA and State Forest ¹	Crittenden, Union	7,574	7,574
Boatwright WMA ²	Ballard	6,782	6,782
Buck Creek WMA	Pulaski	850	850
Burchell-Beech Creek WMA	Clay	1,241	1,241
Cedar Creek Lake WMA	Lincoln	796	796
Clay WMA	Bath, Fleming, Nicholas	8,979	8,979
Clear Creek WMA	Hopkins	858	858
Coil Estate WMA	Ballard, Carlisle	795	795
Cranks Creek WMA	Harlan	2,155	2,155
Curtis Gates Lloyd WMA	Grant	1,105	1,105
Decker WMA ³	Boone	0	300
Dennis-Gray WMA	Adair	102	102
Dix River WMA	Lincoln	401	401
Doug Travis WMA	Carlisle, Hickman	4,132	4,132
Dr. James R. Rich WMA	Owen	2,264	2,264
Dr. Norman and Martha Adair WMA	Boone	635	635
Ed Mabry - Laurel Gorge WMA	Elliott	1,486	1,486
Ferguson Creek WMA ³	Livingston	0	615
Fleming WMA	Fleming	1,907	1,907
Gabbard Branch WMA ³	Butler	0	809
Griffith Woods WMA	Harrison	746	746
Harris-Dickerson WMA	Hopkins, Muhlenberg	1,837	1,837
Hensley-Pine Mountain WMA	Harlan, Letcher	4,848	4,848
Higginson-Henry WMA	Union	5,446	5,446
John A. Kleber WMA	Franklin, Owen, Scott	4,245	4,245
Marion County WMA and State Forest ^{1,2}	Hardin, Nelson	730	730

Table 1. (continued)

Name of Area	County	2022 Acres	2023 Acres
Jones-Keeney WMA	Caldwell	2,055	2,055
Kaler Bottoms WMA	Graves	1,904	1,904
Kentucky Ridge Forest WMA ¹	Bell	3,504	3,504
Kentucky River WMA	Henry, Owen	3,643	3,643
Knobs State Forest and WMA ¹	Bullitt	1,537	1,537
L. B. Davison WMA	Ohio	137	137
Lee K. Nelson WMA	Webster	60	60
Marion County WMA and State Forest ^{1,2}	Marion	1,341	1,341
Marrowbone State Forest and WMA ¹	Cumberland, Metcalfe	1,955	1,955
Meadow Creek WMA	Wayne	232	232
Miller Welch-Central Kentucky WMA	Madison	1,847	1,847
Mud Camp Creek WMA	Cumberland	572	572
Mullins WMA	Grant, Kenton	259	259
Obion Creek WMA	Carlisle, Fulton, Hickman	4,258	4,258
Old Trace Creek WMA	Lewis	769	874
Peabody WMA ²	Hopkins, Muhlenberg, Ohio	39,246	39,246
Ping-Sinking Valley WMA	Pulaski	806	806
R. F. Tarter WMA	Adair, Russell	1,171	1,171
Rockcastle River WMA	Pulaski	2,924	2,924
Rolling Fork WMA	Larue, Nelson	2,896	2,896
Ross Creek WMA	Estill, Lee	935	935
Shillalah Creek WMA	Bell, Harlan	2,535	2,535
Simon Kenton WMA	Mason	982	982
Sloughs WMA ²	Henderson, Union	6,283	6,283
South Shore WMA	Greenup	98	98
Stephens Creek WMA	Gallatin	398	398
Stone Mountain WMA and State Natural Area ¹	Harlan	1,017	1,017
Sunny Brook WMA	Rowan	142	142
T. N. Sullivan WMA	Franklin	145	145
Tradewater WMA	Christian, Hopkins	727	727
Twin Eagle WMA	Owen	170	170
Veterans Memorial WMA	Scott	2,497	2,497
West Kentucky WMA ²	McCracken	3,190	3,190
Winford WMA	Ballard, Carlisle	236	236
Yatesville Lake WMA	Lawrence	52	52
Yellowbank WMA	Breckinridge	6,761	7,554
	Total	165,328	167,950

¹ These areas are co-owned with another state or county agency.

² These areas have additional tracts of land that are leased, and those specific acres are listed below in Tables 2 or 3.

³ New areas or tracts added since last report.

Table 2. Wildlife Management Areas under a Long-Term State or Federal Lease.

Area Name	County	2022 Acres	2023 Acres
Barren River Lake WMA	Allen, Barren	8,735	8,735
Beaver Creek WMA	McCreary, Pulaski	17,753	17,753
Boatwright WMA	Ballard	2,064	2,064
Buckhorn Lake WMA	Leslie, Perry	3,571	3,571
Cane Creek WMA	Laurel	6,677	6,677
Carr Creek Lake WMA	Knott	2,880	2,880
Dale Hollow Lake WMA	Clinton, Cumberland	5,632	5,632
Dewey Lake WMA	Floyd, Pike	9,172	9,172
Fishtrap Lake WMA	Pike	13,138	13,138
Grayson Lake WMA	Carter, Elliott	8,025	8,025
Green River Lake WMA	Adair, Taylor	21,019	21,019
John C. Williams WMA	Nelson	343	343
Kentucky Lake WMA	Calloway, Marshall	4,044	4,044
Lake Barkley WMA	Lyon, Trigg	907	907
Lake Cumberland WMA	Clinton, McCreary, Pulaski, Russell, Wayne	38,789	38,789
Livingston County WMA and State Natural Area	Livingston	2,430	2,430
Martins Fork Lake WMA	Harlan	764	764
Martins Fork WMA and State Natural Area	Harlan	1,599	1,599
Mill Creek WMA	Jackson	13,009	13,009
Nolin River Lake WMA	Edmonson, Grayson, Hart	6,456	6,456
Ohio River Islands WMA	Livingston	1,264	1,264
Paintsville Lake WMA	Johnson, Morgan	11,220	11,220
Paul Van Booven WMA	Breathitt	2,287	2,287
Pioneer Weapons WMA	Bath, Menifee	7,731	7,731
Redbird WMA ¹	Clay, Leslie	24,014	24,033
Robinson Forest WMA	Breathitt, Knott, Perry	2,003	2,003
Rough River Lake WMA	Breckinridge, Grayson, Hardin	4,180	4,180
Sloughs WMA	Henderson, Union	4,890	4,890
Taylorsville Lake WMA	Anderson, Nelson, Spencer	9,417	9,417
West Kentucky WMA	McCracken	3,235	3,235
Yatesville Lake WMA	Lawrence	13,139	13,139
Total		250,387	250,405

¹ Adjusted as a result of minor cartographic, boundary clean-up and/or new boundary information from landowner.

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Table 3. Total of Wildlife Management Areas with a Short-Term Private Lease.

Area Name	County	2022 Acres	2023 Acres
Ashland WMA	Lee	2,506	2,506
Boone Forestlands WMA ¹	Bell, Clay, Harlan, Leslie	31,668	31,664
C. F. Ataya WMA ¹	Harlan, Leslie	54,556	54,389
Elk Forest WMA	Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Leslie	16,802	16,802
Fortner-Davis WMA	Bell	1,358	1,358
Hoskins WMA	Leslie, Harlan	0	5,292
Peabody WMA	Hopkins, Muhlenberg, Ohio	2,077	2,077
	Total	108,967	113,874

¹ Adjusted as a result of minor cartographic, boundary clean-up and/or new boundary information

² Agreement not renewed

Table 4. Non-Wildlife Management Areas Available for Public Hunting.

Owner	2022 Acres	2023 Acres
Army Corps of Engineers	4,099	4,099
Department of Defense ¹	159,248	159,249
Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources	2,221	2,221
Division of Forestry ²	32,781	33,018
Kentucky Department of Parks	11,256	11,256
Kentucky Department of Parks, Army Corps of Engineers	3,304	3,304
Kentucky National Guard	523	523
Lawrence County Fiscal Court	563	563
National Park Service	30,301	30,301
Private ³	138,814	137,143
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	11,774	11,774
U.S. Forest Service ¹	747,901	747,865
Total	1,142,786	1,141,317

¹ Adjusted as a result of minor cartographic, boundary clean-up and/or new boundary information

² New Tract Addition at Tygarts State Forest

³ Loss in Acreage at Legacy LLC Hunting Access Area

No Net Loss Baseline for Hunting Access

As depicted above, KDFWR was fortunate to have a gain in areas owned by the agency that are open to public hunting and access. Compared to the 2010 baseline of 1,006,642 acres of hunting lands, KDFWR has 668,098 more acres for a total of 1,674,740 acres of hunting access lands in 2023. In closing, it is important to note that if hunters are not aware of the access opportunities outlined in this report, then the department, our customers (both current and future) and the Commonwealth as a whole will not see the maximum benefit.

This is why KDFWR strives to publish guides (hunting regulations digests) and other announcements to reflect the hunting opportunities available. The department also makes this and more information available on our website at <http://fw.ky.gov/More/Pages/Wildlife-Management-Areas-and-Public-Hunting-Areas.aspx>. By accessing the department's website, hunters are able to view actual maps of the area, obtain driving directions, download GPS coordinates, and find contact information for area managers.

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources recognizes that approximately 94 percent of Kentucky's land and water area is in private ownership. Additionally, hunter surveys consistently report that "lack of access" is the number one constraint to people going afield. Because of these two factors, the department has continued to focus our efforts on providing public access for all people, but especially hunters in Kentucky. Our department and commission have long held the belief that every hunter, angler and boater should have a place to participate in their preferred outdoor activities within thirty minutes of home. With this continued focus, and with the No Net Loss of hunting land requirement in Kentucky, KDFWR hopes to greatly add to the successes in providing public access we've already enjoyed.