



Montana Elk Application Guide

Nonresident Step-by-Step Application Walkthrough — Preference Points (General) + Bonus Points (Limited Entry)

This guide covers everything a nonresident archery elk hunter needs to apply in Montana. Verify all deadlines and fees at the official state agency website before applying — regulations change annually.

HUNTER INFORMATION

Your Name	_____	State Account / Username	_____
Application Year	_____	Points Currently Held	_____
Preferred Unit / Region	_____	Backup Unit / Region	_____

KEY DATES

MILESTONE	TYPICAL WINDOW	YOUR DATE	NOTES
Application Opens	March 1, 2026		Set calendar reminder now
Application Deadline	April 1, 2026 (approx.)		DO NOT miss this deadline
Draw Results	April 14–May (varies)		Check email and state portal
License / Payment Due	After draw results		Pay promptly or forfeit tag
Archery Season Opens	Early–Mid September		Confirm year-specific dates

POINT SYSTEM — TWO-TIER POINT SYSTEM

Montana uses TWO separate point currencies. PREFERENCE POINTS are used for the nonresident general combination (combo) license. 75% of combo tags go to highest preference point holders; 25% are random — meaning zero-point hunters can still draw. BONUS POINTS are used for limited-entry permits (e.g., Breaks, Elkhorns, Sun River). Bonus points are squared in the drawing — 3 points = 9 chances. Max 24 bonus points for 2026. Critical: You must draw the GENERAL combo first before your limited-entry application is considered. If you don't draw the combo, your limited-entry application is voided. Montana's elk herd is approximately 157,000 animals. Nonresidents receive up to 10% of the big game tag quota. Two consecutive years without buying a point resets your points to zero.

Strategy tip: Apply for the combo every year. With the 25% random pool, general tags are accessible even at 0–1 points. If you draw a combo but miss your limited-entry permit, you can return the combo for an ~80% refund while keeping your point. Opt into the Alternate List for a second-chance at refunded tags — it's free and worth selecting.

COST SUMMARY

ITEM	COST (APPROX.)	PAID?	DATE PAID
Hunting License	~\$15 (base) + \$10 (conservation) = \$25 required to apply		



ITEM	COST (APPROX.)	PAID?	DATE PAID
Elk Tag / Permit	~\$1,000–\$1,100 (nonresident elk combination license)		
Application Fee	~\$25 preference point fee		
Archery Permit (if required)	Varies by state		
Conservation / Habitat Stamp	Varies by state		
TOTAL ESTIMATED	~\$1,050–\$1,150+		

APPLICATION STEP-BY-STEP

Step 1: Purchase Required Licenses

Buy a Base Hunting License (~\$15) and Conservation License (~\$10) at fwp.mt.gov. These are required before you can apply or buy points.

Step 2: Log In and Find the Draw

Go to fwp.mt.gov. Navigate to Hunting > Licenses & Permits > Big Game Draw. Log in or create your account.

Step 3: Apply for Nonresident Combination License

Select the Nonresident Elk Combination License. This is your primary application — draw it first before limited-entry consideration.

Step 4: Apply for Limited-Entry Permit (optional)

If targeting a specific district (Breaks, Elkhorns, etc.), add a limited-entry application. This uses your bonus points. You must draw the combo first.

Step 5: Select Alternate List

Opt into the Alternate List. This is a second-chance pool of refunded/declined tags — free and worth selecting every year.

Step 6: Pay Application Fee & Point

Pay the \$25 preference point fee. This secures your point for the year regardless of draw outcome.

Step 7: Submit & Confirm

Screenshot your confirmation. Draw results typically available in April. If you draw, payment for the combo license will be processed automatically.

UNIT RESEARCH NOTES

Top limited-entry areas: Missouri River Breaks (elite — 10–15+ years), Elkhorns, Sun River. General season hunt districts cover most of the state. Popular general districts: 210 (northwest), 313 (Grizzly country), 580 (southwest — high elk), 325 (excellent glassing terrain). Note: Grizzly bears are present in SW Montana (Yellowstone ecosystem) and NW Montana (Glacier). Plan accordingly — bear spray and camp protocols are essential.

UNIT / REGION	PUBLIC LAND	TROPHY POTENTIAL	TERRAIN	MY NOTES
HDs 210 / 313	High	Good	NW forest, Grizzly present	Bear spray required



UNIT / REGION	PUBLIC LAND	TROPHY POTENTIAL	TERRAIN	MY NOTES
HD 580	High	Good	SW Montana, timber	High elk density
HD 325	Moderate	Good	Open ridges / drainages	Excellent glassing country
Breaks (LE)	Very High	Trophy	Missouri River breaks	10–15+ yrs to draw
Elkhorns (LE)	High	Trophy	Isolated range	Significant NR wait

SEASON DATES (CONFIRM ANNUALLY)

Archery season: September (early archery typically opens late August). General rifle: October through November. Limited-entry rifle and archery permits tied to specific hunt district dates. Confirm exact dates at fwp.mt.gov.

STRATEGY NOTES & REMINDERS

Montana is one of the best opportunity states for consistent nonresident elk access. Apply every year — even with zero points — because of the 25% random combo pool. Buy a preference point in summers/falls if you don't plan to hunt that year. If you draw a combo, always apply for a limited-entry permit as well — you can return the combo for a partial refund if you miss the LE draw. Be prepared for grizzly bears in many high-elk areas — carry bear spray and plan your meat care protocols carefully. Apply at fwp.mt.gov.

MY NOTES

Always verify current regulations at the official state agency website. For research tools and draw odds, use GoHunt and OnX Hunt. More at huntinggrowth.com