



# Colorado Elk Application Guide

Nonresident Step-by-Step Application Walkthrough — Preference Point System | Draw + Limited OTC

This guide covers everything a nonresident archery elk hunter needs to apply in Colorado. 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 7, 2026 at 8:00 PM MT |           | DO NOT miss this deadline    |
| Draw Results          | May 26–29, 2026             |           | 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 — PREFERENCE POINTS

Colorado uses a true preference point system — applicants with the most points draw first. **MAJOR 2025–2026 CHANGE:** Nonresident archery elk tags west of I-25 are now DRAW ONLY — no more over-the-counter (OTC) archery. Some OTC archery remains east of I-25 with specific hunt codes. OTC rifle elk (2nd and 3rd seasons) still available in most units. In 2028 Colorado shifts to a 50/50 hybrid preference + bonus point system — if you are sitting on mid-range points, consider burning them in 2026 or 2027. Colorado holds the largest elk herd in North America (~303,000 animals). Nonresidents are capped at 20–25% of available tags depending on point demand. Points reset to zero if you draw. Points are purged after 10 consecutive years without applying.

*Strategy tip: Apply every year even if you do not expect to draw — you gain a point and stay eligible. Mid-tier units (44, 54, 21, 12) draw at 3–8 points and produce bulls every year. Secondary draw in late June uses no points and is a real second chance for tags.*

## COST SUMMARY

| ITEM             | COST (APPROX.)                                     | PAID? | DATE PAID |
|------------------|--|-------|-----------|
| Hunting License  | ~\$105 (nonresident small game qualifying license) |       |           |
| Elk Tag / Permit | ~\$911 (nonresident elk)                           |       |           |



| ITEM                         | COST (APPROX.)                               | PAID? | DATE PAID |
|------------------------------|--|-------|-----------|
| Application Fee              | ~\$11.49 per species + \$12.76 habitat stamp |       |           |
| Archery Permit (if required) | Varies by state                              |       |           |
| Conservation / Habitat Stamp | Varies by state                              |       |           |
| <b>TOTAL ESTIMATED</b>       | ~\$1,050+                                    |       |           |

## APPLICATION STEP-BY-STEP

### Step 1: Create/Log Into Your CPW Account

Go to [cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us) and create or log into your account. Verify all personal information before proceeding.

### Step 2: Purchase a Qualifying License

You MUST purchase a qualifying license (nonresident small game, ~\$105) before you can apply. This is the most common mistake NR hunters make.

### Step 3: Purchase Habitat Stamp

Buy the required habitat stamp (~\$12.76). This is mandatory for all applicants.

### Step 4: Select Your Application

Navigate to the Big Game Draw. Select elk. Choose your first, second, and third hunt code choices. Use GoHunt draw odds to research before selecting.

### Step 5: Enter Hunt Codes

Hunt codes are tied to unit, weapon type, season, and sex class. Research carefully. First choice: \_\_\_\_\_ Second choice: \_\_\_\_\_ Third choice: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 6: Review Party Application (if applicable)

Groups average preference points of all members. A low-point member can lower group odds. Apply solo for best results unless points are aligned.

### Step 7: Submit & Pay

Review all selections before submitting. Payment is charged immediately for the qualifying license. Tag cost only charged if you draw.

### Step 8: Screenshot Your Receipt

Screenshot or print confirmation immediately. Check your email for draw results May 26–29, 2026.

## UNIT RESEARCH NOTES

Top regions: White River National Forest (units 12, 13, 14), Flat Tops Wilderness (units 22, 23), San Juan Mountains (units 74, 76, 77), and Gunnison Basin (now limited draw only — units 54, 55, 551). Zero-to-one-point opportunity units include 26, 9, 13 — huntable every year with realistic success.

| UNIT / REGION | PUBLIC LAND | TROPHY POTENTIAL | TERRAIN             | MY NOTES |
|---------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Unit 12/13    | High        | Good             | Timber / ridgelines |          |



| UNIT / REGION | PUBLIC LAND   | TROPHY POTENTIAL | TERRAIN              | MY NOTES               |
|---------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Unit 22/23    | High          | Moderate         | Flat Tops wilderness |                        |
| Unit 54/55    | High          | Trophy           | Alpine / aspen       | Now draw only 2026     |
| Unit 74/76    | Moderate-High | Good             | San Juans, steep     | Forest closure check   |
| Unit 26 / 9   | Moderate      | Moderate         | Mixed terrain        | 0-pt opportunity units |

### SEASON DATES (CONFIRM ANNUALLY)

Archery: September 2–30, 2026. Muzzleloader: September 12–20 (limited draw). Rifle 1st: October 14–18. Rifle 2nd: October 24–November 1. Rifle 3rd: November 7–15. Rifle 4th: November 18–December 6. All nonresident archery tags west of I-25 are now draw-only. Confirm current hunt codes with Colorado Parks & Wildlife ([cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us)).

### STRATEGY NOTES & REMINDERS

Colorado is the most consistent elk state for annual access due to its combination of draw, secondary draw, and leftover tags. Apply in the primary draw, then watch for leftover archery tags after the secondary draw in late June — nearly 3,900 nonresident archery tags went leftover in 2025. If hunting OTC rifle, 2nd and 3rd seasons remain the most accessible options. Use GoHunt to compare units and OnX to e-scout before committing to a first choice. Remember: a qualifying hunting license must be purchased BEFORE submitting your application. Apply at [cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us).

### MY NOTES

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**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](http://huntinggrowth.com)**