



Idaho Elk Application Guide

Nonresident Step-by-Step Application Walkthrough — No Points | Draw + General Season Tags

This guide covers everything a nonresident archery elk hunter needs to apply in Idaho. 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	January 15, 2026		Set calendar reminder now
Application Deadline	February 15, 2026		DO NOT miss this deadline
Draw Results	Spring 2026 (check idfg.idaho.gov)		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 — RANDOM DRAW — NO PREFERENCE OR BONUS POINTS

MAJOR 2026 CHANGE: Idaho moved nonresident general-season elk tags from OTC (online rush) to a draw system starting in 2026. Instead of competing to buy the tag in a fast online sale, nonresidents now apply during the January 15–February 15 window. Idaho uses NO preference or bonus points — every applicant has equal odds each year. This makes Idaho one of the most accessible western states for first-time applicants. Controlled hunts (premium limited units) also use a random draw. Idaho's elk herd is approximately 110,000–120,000 animals across diverse terrain. Nonresidents are limited in quantity per unit — quotas vary by zone.

Strategy tip: Apply every single year — there is no compounding point advantage. Choose units with higher elk density and public land access for best opportunity. Watch for unclaimed/leftover controlled hunt tags posted on idfg.idaho.gov after the main draw. The Super Hunt program is worth entering annually — you don't need a license to enter.

COST SUMMARY

ITEM	COST (APPROX.)	PAID?	DATE PAID
Hunting License	~\$185 (nonresident hunting license — required to apply)		
Elk Tag / Permit	~\$492 (nonresident elk tag)		



ITEM	COST (APPROX.)	PAID?	DATE PAID
Application Fee	Included in license / tag cost		
Archery Permit (if required)	Varies by state		
Conservation / Habitat Stamp	Varies by state		
TOTAL ESTIMATED	~\$677+		

APPLICATION STEP-BY-STEP

Step 1: Purchase a Hunting License

A valid Idaho nonresident hunting license (~\$185) is REQUIRED to apply for controlled hunts or the general draw. Buy it at idfg.idaho.gov before the application window opens.

Step 2: Log In and Find the Draw

Go to idfg.idaho.gov > Licenses & Permits > Big Game Draw. Log in or create your account.

Step 3: Apply for General Elk Tag (New for 2026)

Select the Nonresident General Elk tag application. This is the new draw system replacing the old OTC online sale. Application window: January 15–February 15, 2026.

Step 4: Apply for Controlled Hunts (Optional)

If targeting a specific premium unit (Frank Church, etc.), apply for a controlled hunt during the same window. Same deadline: February 15, 2026.

Step 5: Enter Unit Choices

List your unit preferences. With no points, any choice is equally valid. First choice: _____ Second choice: _____ Third choice: _____

Step 6: Submit & Pay

Pay all fees at time of application. Screenshot your confirmation immediately.

Step 7: Watch for Leftover Tags

After draw results, check idfg.idaho.gov for unclaimed or leftover controlled hunt tags — these are sold on a first-come basis.

Step 8: Check Super Hunt

Enter the Super Hunt program separately — no license required to enter. Two winners receive elk, deer, pronghorn, and moose tags statewide.

UNIT RESEARCH NOTES

Idaho has incredibly diverse terrain from the Bitterroot Range to the Sawtooths to the Snake River breaks. Unit 10 (panhandle), Unit 44 (central mountains), Unit 75 and 76 (Frank Church Wilderness — remote and wild), and Unit 78 are worth researching. Unit 76 (River of No Return wilderness) is one of the most remote elk hunts in the lower 48. Grizzly bears are present in some northern Idaho units — check regulations carefully.

UNIT / REGION	PUBLIC LAND	TROPHY POTENTIAL	TERRAIN	MY NOTES
Unit 10 / 11	High	Moderate	N. Idaho timber	Panhandle region



UNIT / REGION	PUBLIC LAND	TROPHY POTENTIAL	TERRAIN	MY NOTES
Unit 44	High	Good	Central mountains	Strong elk population
Unit 75	High	Good	Frank Church adjacent	Remote; pack or horse
Unit 76	Very High	Trophy	River of No Return	Most remote elk hunt in lower 48
Unit 78	Moderate	Moderate	Mixed terrain	Accessible option

SEASON DATES (CONFIRM ANNUALLY)

General archery: Late August through September (peak rut). Controlled archery hunts vary by unit. General rifle: October through November (varies by zone). Confirm exact dates and weapon rules at idfg.idaho.gov for your specific unit.

STRATEGY NOTES & REMINDERS

Idaho is a top opportunity state and now even easier to navigate with the new draw system. No points means no long-term investment required — apply and go. If you draw a general tag, Idaho's public land access (over 60% of the state) provides enormous opportunity to find elk without outfitter help. The Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness is one of the premier DIY elk experiences in North America but requires serious logistics — horses or float planes are common. For accessible hunts, central Idaho units with road access are strong options. Apply at idfg.idaho.gov.

MY NOTES

Always verify current regulations at the official state agency website. Use GoHunt and OnX Hunt for research. More at huntinggrowth.com