

Hunting License Trends in Montana

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Updated August 2024

Adjusting License & Permit Numbers



Population Management & FWP's Management Tools

Population Goals

- Population size
- Age structure
- Male to female ratios

Tools

- Number of hunters
- Method of harvest
- Season Length & Timing
- Bag limits
- Access



Population Management

A Licenses: Antlered or Either-Sex

- Used primarily to target antlered animals
- Manage population age structure and male to female ratios
- Does not significantly affect population trajectory unless the population is substantially under objective

B Licenses: Antlerless

- Manage population trends



Licensing Overview



Hunting License vs. Permit

License

- Provides an opportunity for a license holder to harvest and possess the carcass of an animal

Permit

- Used in conjunction with a license
- Expands or restricts a license opportunity



Resident & Nonresident Deer & Elk Licenses

Resident

- A Licenses
 - General Deer and Elk Licenses
- B Licenses
 - Some Deer B and Elk B Licenses are limited by a quota while others are available without a quota

Nonresident

- A Licenses
 - Limited by statutory quotas and allocated by drawing
- B Licenses
 - Limited to a maximum of 10% of a drawing-based license quota unless all resident applicants receive a license (MCA, 87-2-506)



Statutorily Limited Nonresident Deer & Elk Licenses

- Big Game & Elk Combination:
 - Combined Quota: 17,000 (MCA, 87-2-505)
- Deer Combination:
 - Quota: 4,600 (MCA, 87-2-501)
- Landowner Sponsor Deer Combination:
 - Quota: 2,000 (MCA, 87-2-511)
- Come Home to Hunt (MCA, 87-2-526)
 - Big Game Combination:
 - Quota: 500
 - Elk Combination:
 - Quota: 500
 - Deer Combination:
 - Quota: 500



Nonresident Deer Combination Licenses

- The base quota for Deer Combination Licenses is 4,600 (MCA, 87-2-510) During the drawing, deer licenses are added to the quota from the following sources: (MCA, 87-2-511)
 - Landowner Sponsored Deer Combination (LOS)
 - Unclaimed Landowner Sponsored Deer Licenses are added to the Deer Combination License quota
 - Elk Combination
 - For each Elk Combination License holder, an unclaimed General Deer License is separated from a Big Game Combination and added to the Deer Combination quota



2024 Nonresident Combination License Drawing

- 17,000 General Big Game & Elk Combination Licenses
 - **12,224 General Big Game Combination Licenses issued in initial drawing**
 - **4,776 General Elk Combination Licenses issued in initial drawing**
 - = 4,776 orphaned deer Licenses
 - **880 LOS Deer Combination Licenses issued**
 - = 1,120 unclaimed LOS Deer Combination Licenses
- 4,600 base quota + 1,120 unclaimed LOS + 4,776 orphaned deer = **10,496 total General Deer Combo quota**



10% Nonresident Restriction: Example #1

- Quota of 100
- 150 applicants (120 residents and 30 nonresidents).

Applicant Type	# of Applicants	Quota Limit	Successful Applicants	Percentage of License Holders
Resident	120	100	90	90%
Nonresident	30	10	10	10%



License Example #2

- Quota of 50
- 50 applicants (30 residents and 20 nonresidents)

Applicant Type	# of Applicants	Quota Limit	Successful Applicants	Percentage of license holders
Resident	30	50	30	60%
Nonresident	20	5	20	40%



License Example #3

- Quota of 150: 100 applicants (80 residents and 20 nonresidents)

Applicant Type	# of Applicants	Quota Limit	Successful Applicants	Percentage of License Holders
Resident	80	150	80	80%
Nonresident	20	15	20	20%

Applicant Type	Licenses Available	Successful Purchasers	Percentage of Surplus License Holders
Resident	50	35	70%
Nonresident		15	30%



Other Nonresident Licenses

- Deer and Elk
 - Nonresident Relative of a Resident Licenses (MCA, 87-2-514)
 - College Student Licenses (MCA, 87-2-525)
 - Youth Licenses (MCA, 87-2-522)
- Birds
 - Upland Game Bird (MCA, 87-2-402)
 - Migratory Bird (MCA, 87-2-411)
 - Turkey (MCA, 87-2-403)
- Bighorn Sheep
 - 5 Unlimited Hunting Districts
- Other
 - Black Bear (MCA, 87-2-701)
 - Mountain Lion (MCA, 87-2-507)
 - Wolf (MCA, 87-2-524)



Statutory Changes to Licensing

I-161 Outfitter Sponsored Licenses

- Passed in 2010
- Variable price license
- Restrictions on nonresident license holders

House Bill 140

- 2015 Legislative session
- Created a base hunting license
- Standardized license fees and discounts
- Reduced the number of free licenses

Senate Bill 281

- 2023 Legislative session
- Limits the number of deer b licenses available to nonresidents
 - 2 if a nonresident holds a combination license
 - 1 if a nonresident does not hold a combination license



Commission Actions License Year 24

- Region 6, 7 & along with select districts in Region 4: Mule deer doe's only valid for private land
- Licenses and/or permits issued through a drawing identified as a "first and only choice" opportunity will not be offered as a surplus license/permit opportunity if the department receives fewer applications than the number of license/permits available.
- Permits for either-sex elk or brow-tined bull-antlerless elk will limit the holder to hunting for antlered elk within only the designated hunting district (HD) for the period identified on the permit.

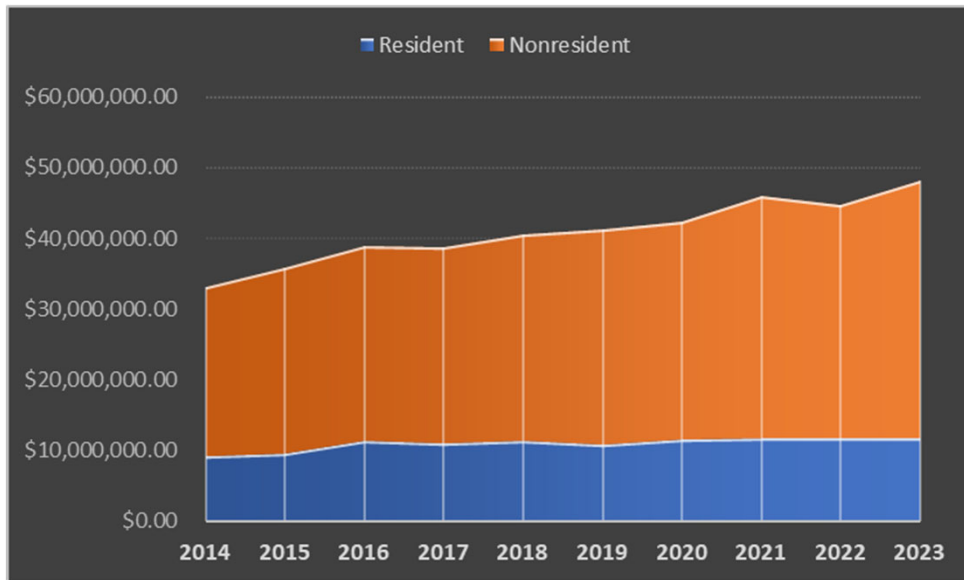


Resident vs. Nonresident Prices

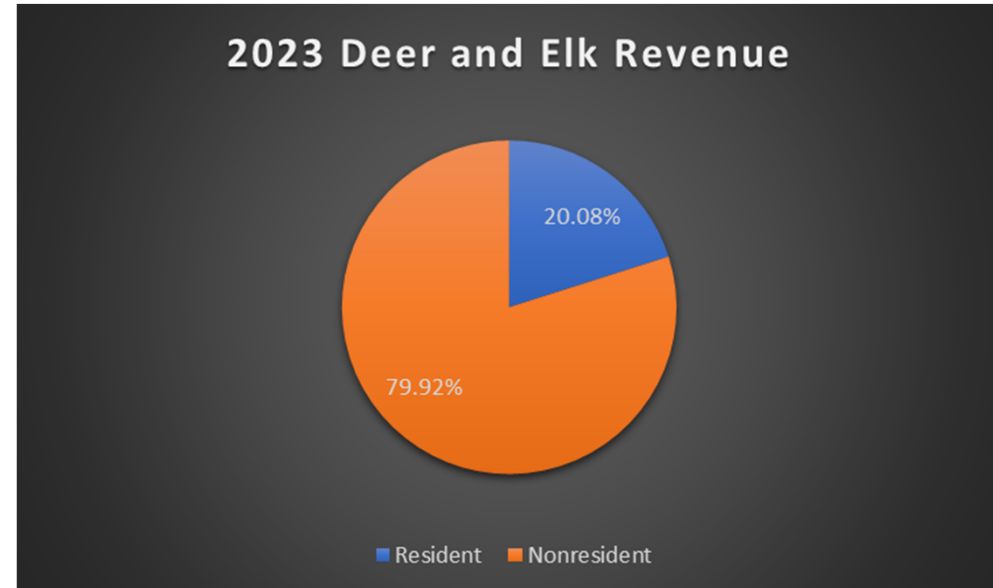
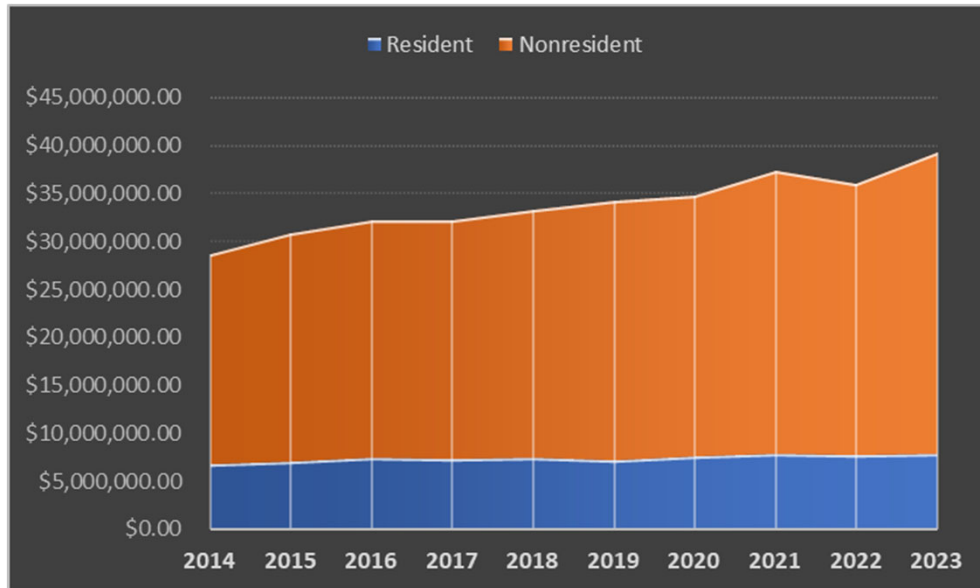
- License Packages
 - Resident: Sportsman's Combination w/o Bear \$62
 - Nonresident: Big Game Combination \$1,242
- Deer B License
 - Resident: \$10
 - Nonresident: \$75
- Elk B License
 - Resident: \$20
 - Nonresident: \$270



Total Issued Hunting License Revenue



Issued Deer & Elk License Revenue

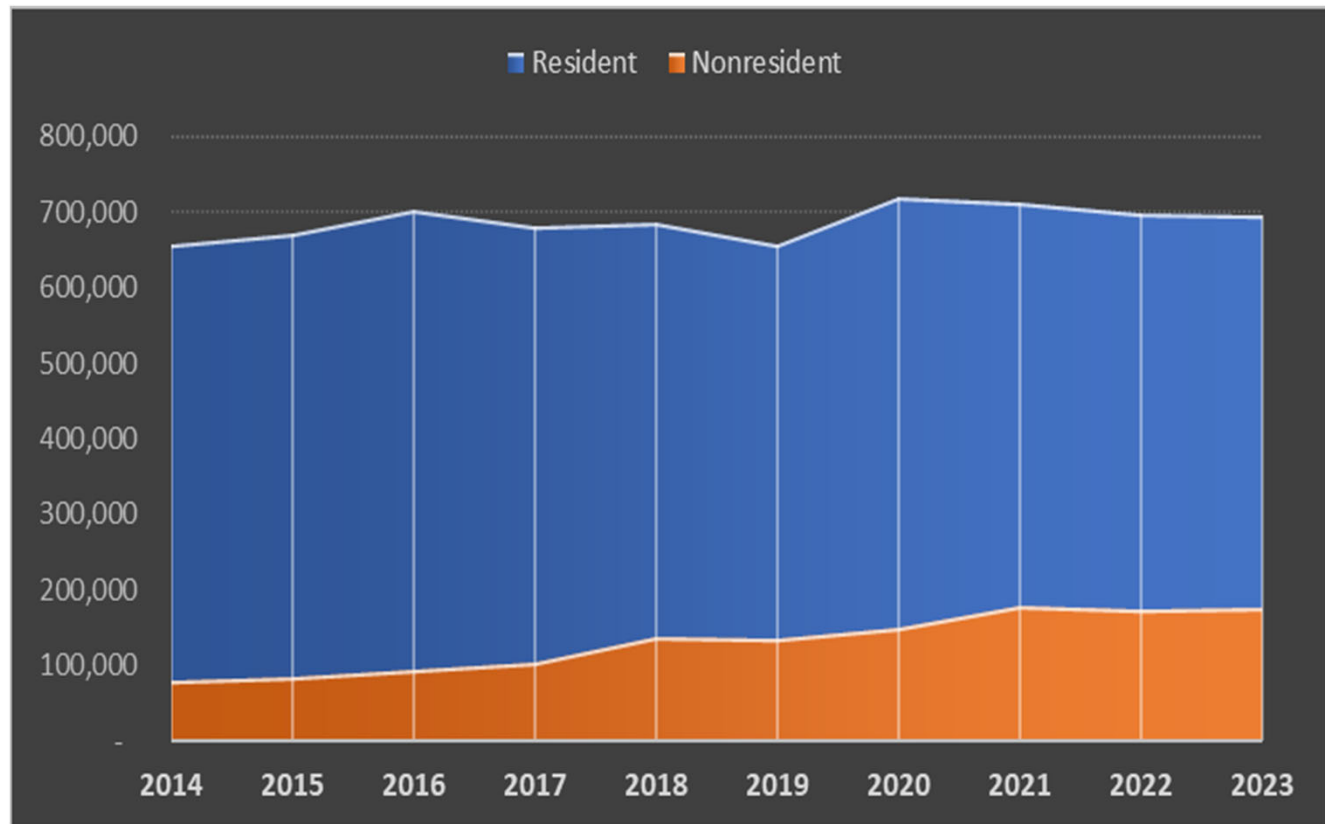


License Sales



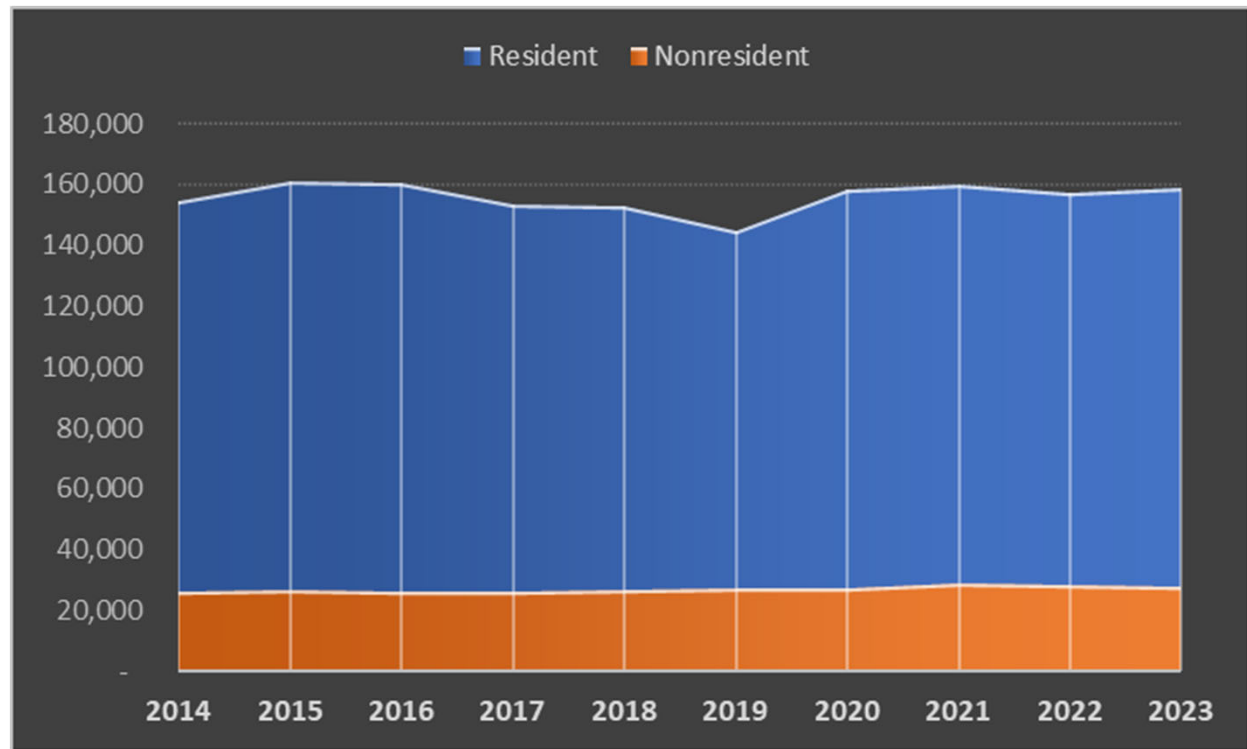
Total Issued Hunting License Sales 2014-2023

- Resident: +39,298
- Nonresident: +97,769
- Overall: +137,067



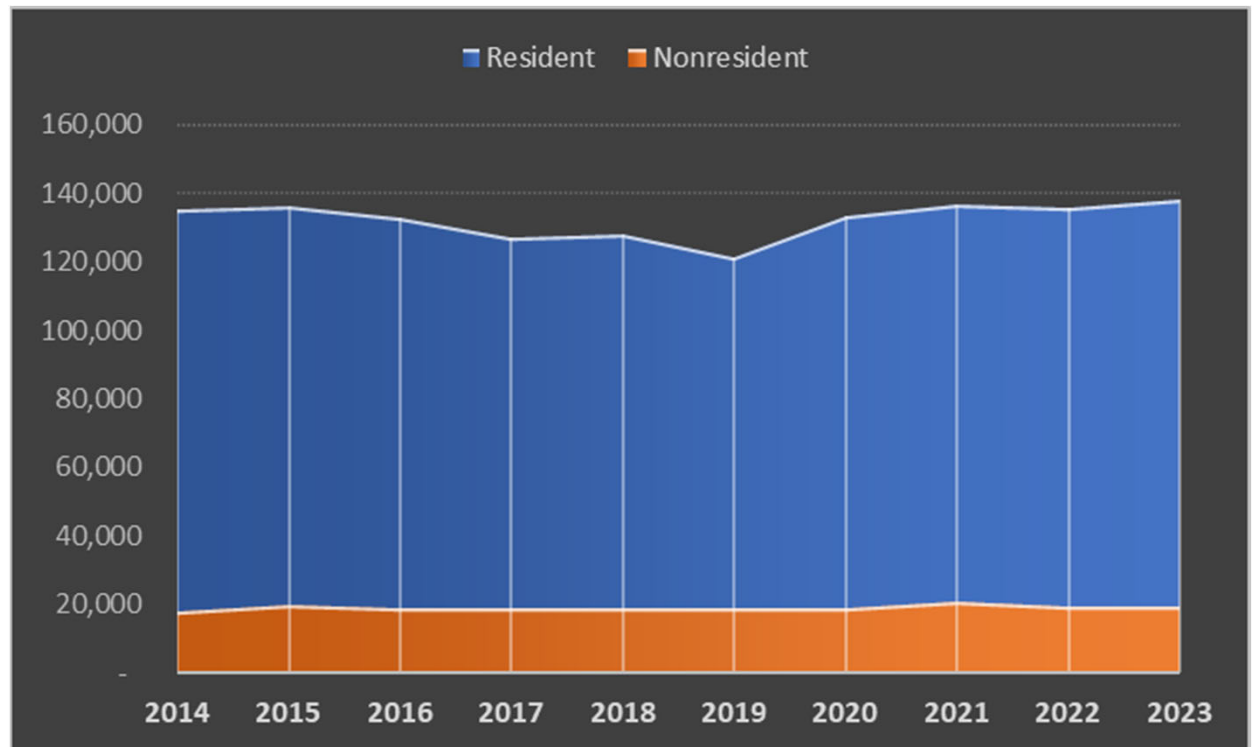
General Deer License Sales 2014-2023

- Resident: +4,291
- Nonresident: +1,428
- Overall: +5,719



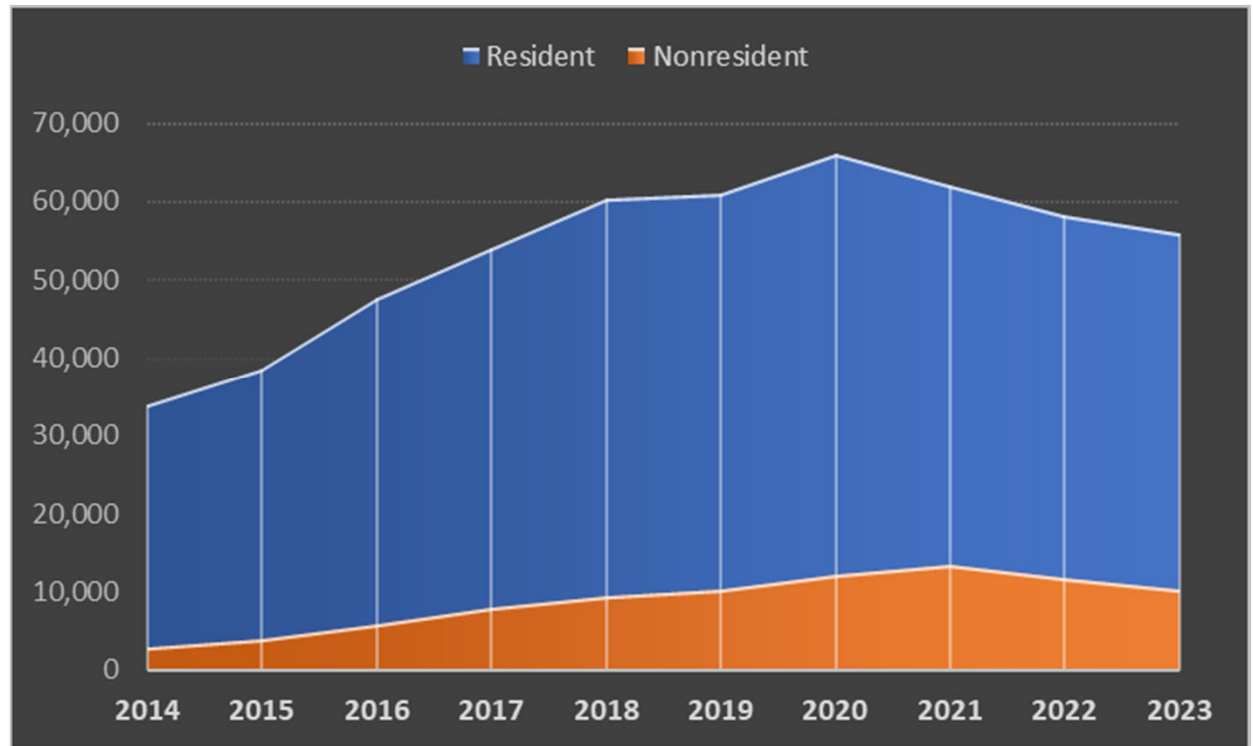
General Elk License Sales 2014-2023

- Resident: +3,077
- Nonresident: +1,093
- Overall: +4,170



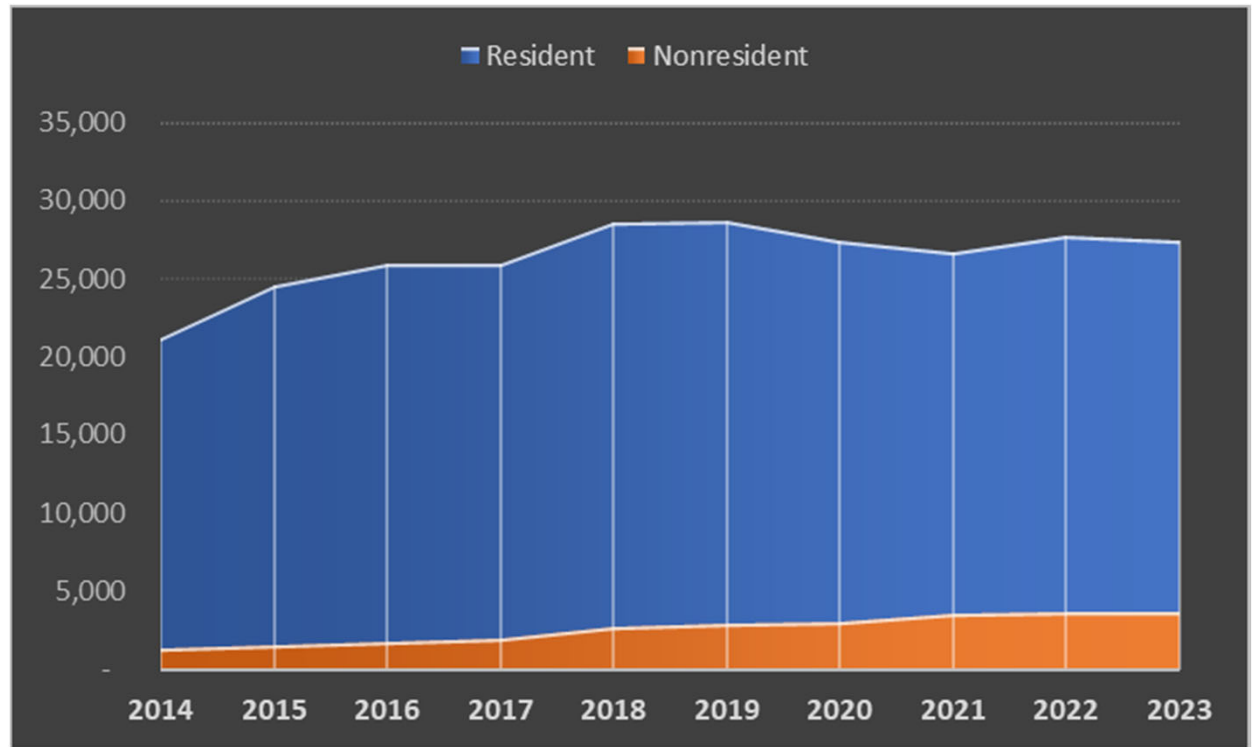
Deer B License Sales 2014-2023

- Resident: +21,924
- Nonresident: +7,407
- Overall: +29,331



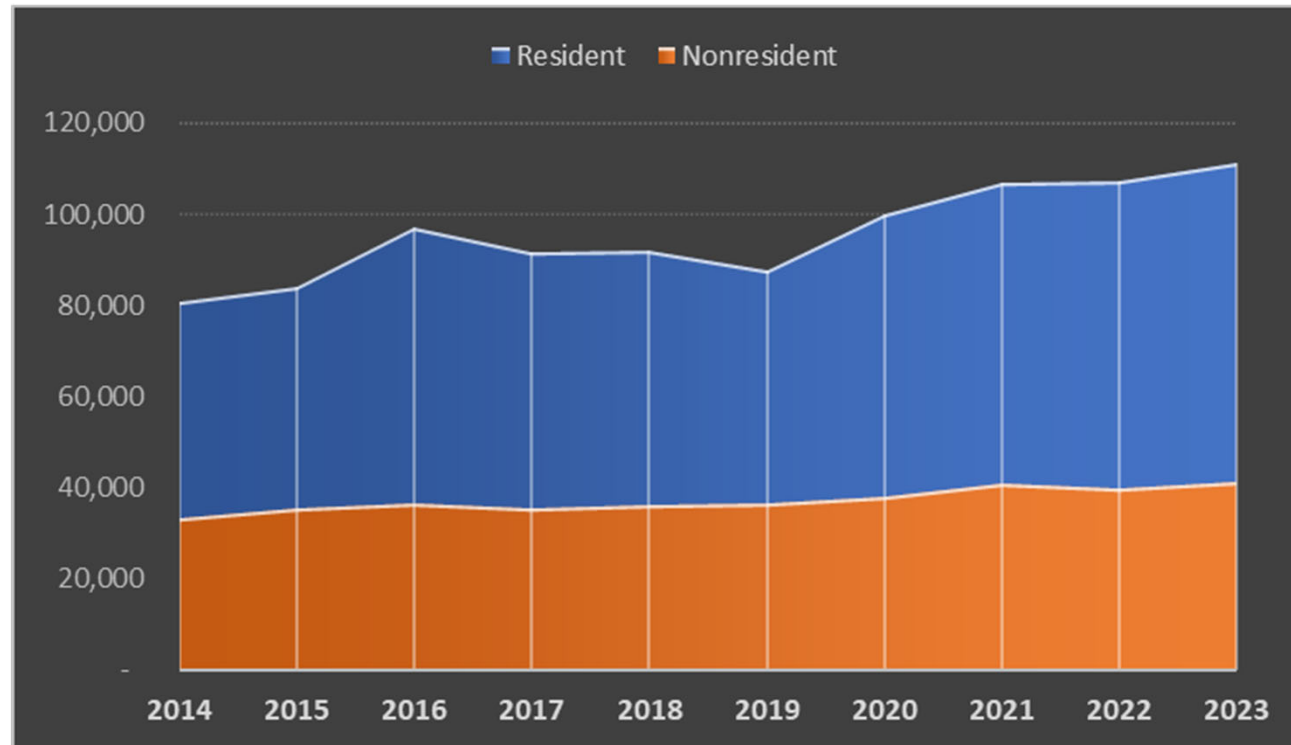
Elk B License Sales 2014-2023

- Resident: +6,266
- Nonresident: +2,393
- Overall: +8,659



Upland Bird Season License Sales 2014-2023

- Resident: +30,438
- Nonresident: +8,072
- Overall: +38,510

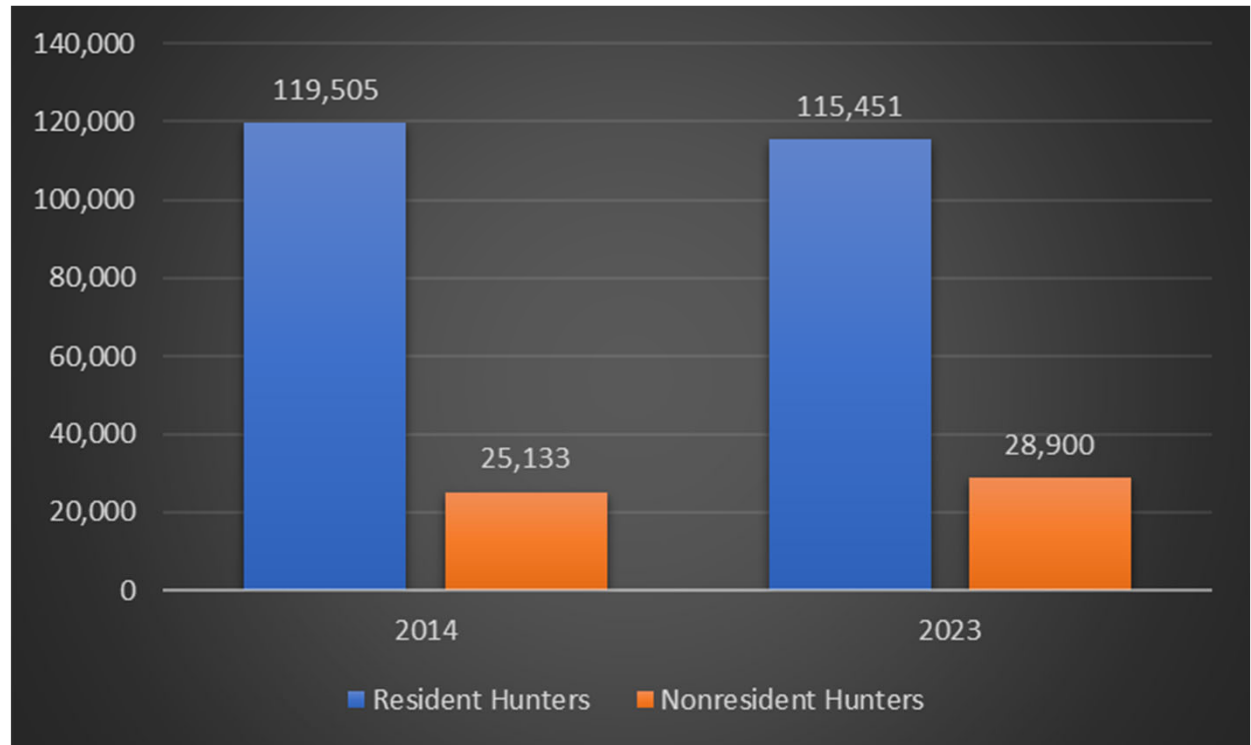


Hunter Effort



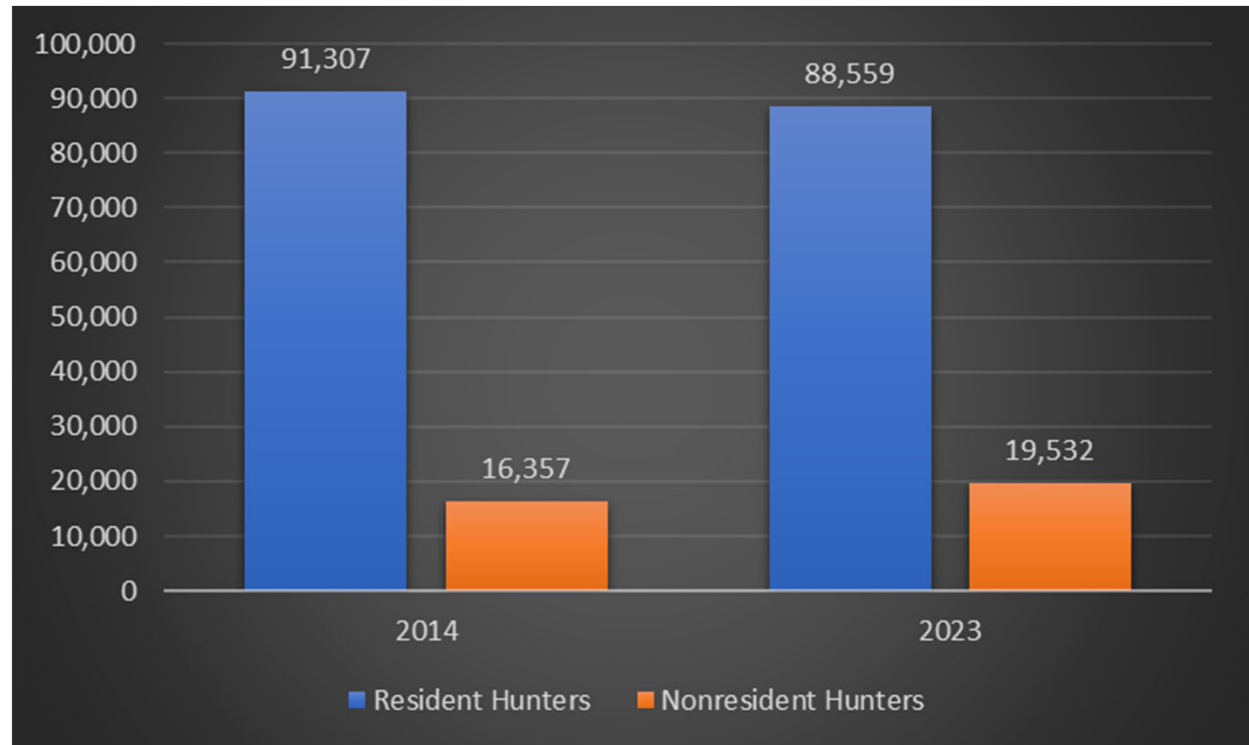
Statewide Active Deer Hunter Estimates - 2014 vs. 2023

- Resident: -4,054
 - 2014: 119,505
 - 2023: 115,451
- Nonresident: +3,767
 - 2014: 25,133
 - 2023: 28,900



Statewide Active Elk Hunter Estimates – 2014 vs. 2023

- Resident: -2,748
 - 2014: 91,307
 - 2023: 88,559
- Nonresident: +3,175
 - 2014: 16,357
 - 2023: 19,532



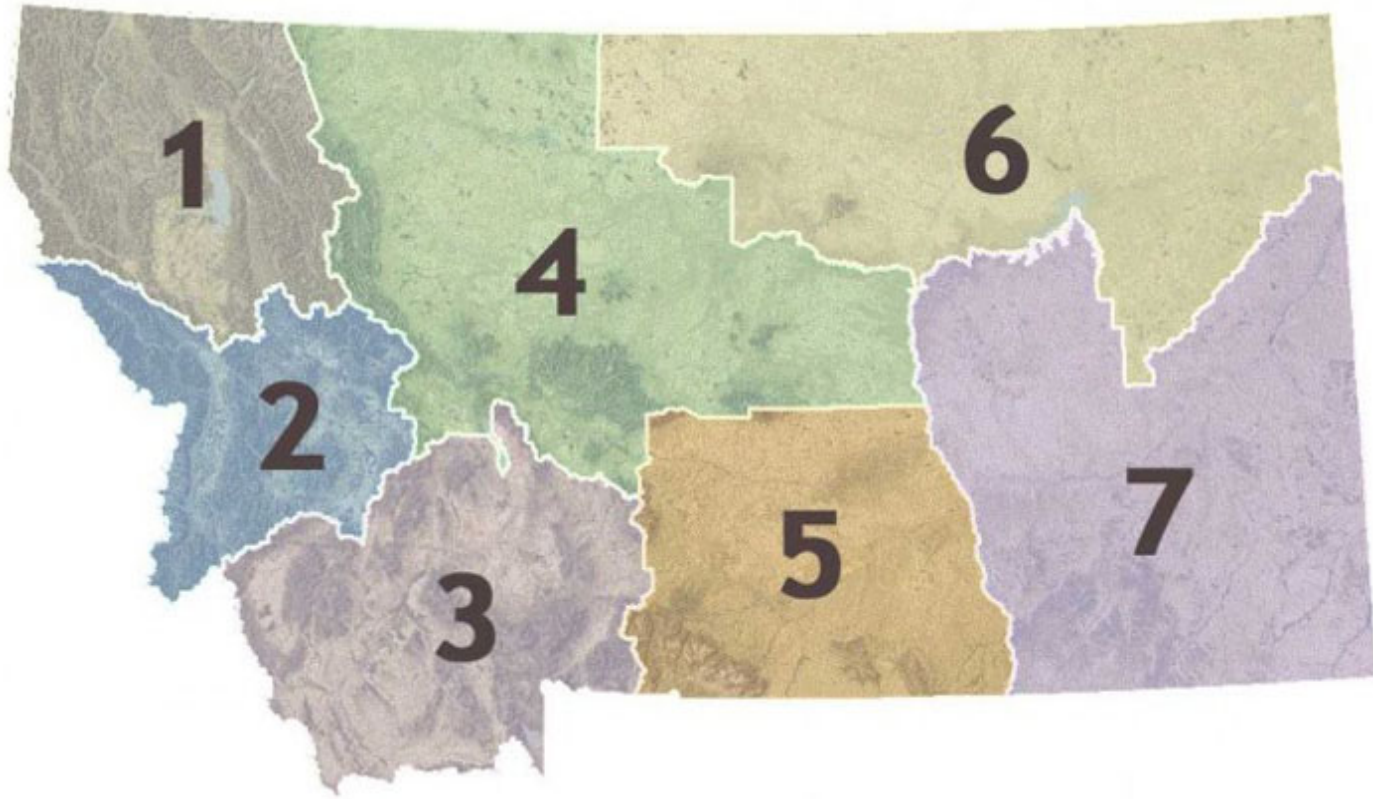
Other Species Targeted by Nonresident Hunters

- Black Bear
- Wolf
- Mountain Lion
- Migratory Bird
- Upland Game Bird
- Turkey
- Antelope
- Moose
- Sheep
- Goat
- Bison



Hunter Locations and Days

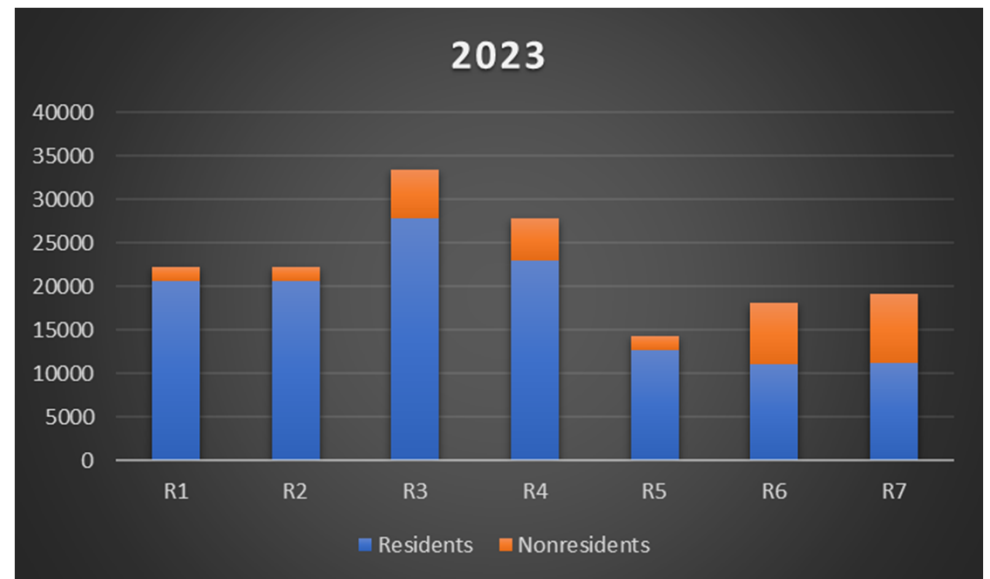
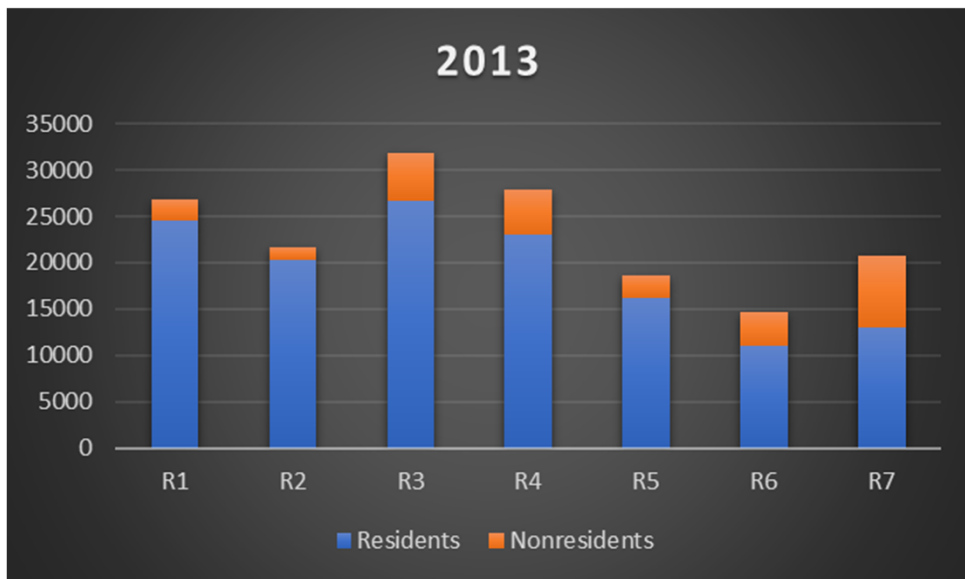




Deer Hunter Distribution by Region

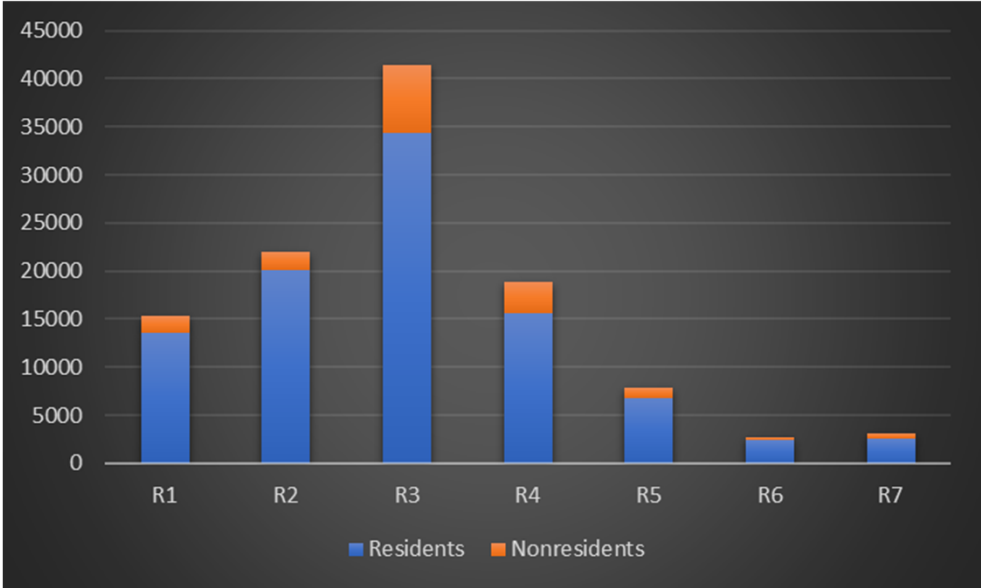
2013

2023

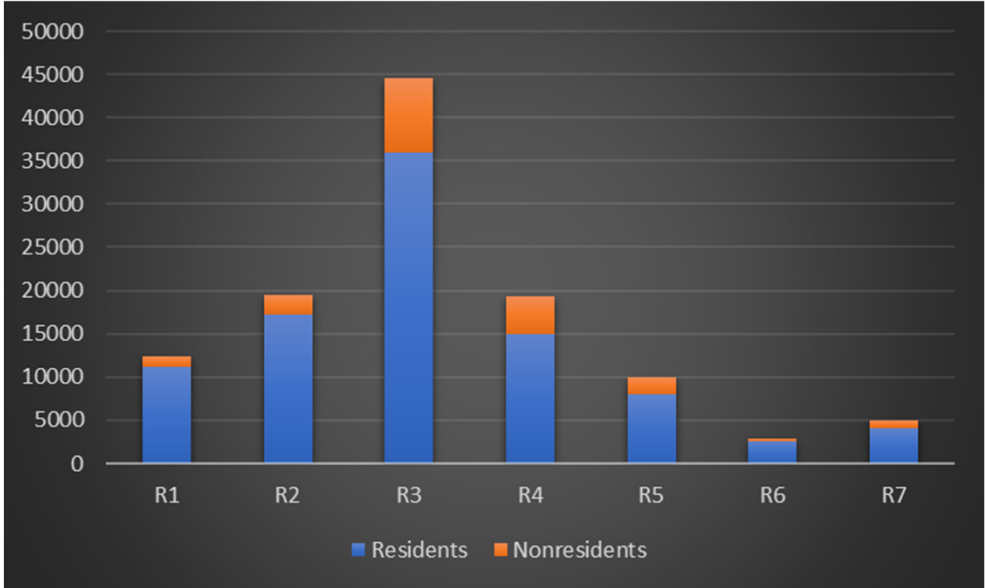


Elk Hunter Distribution by Region

2012



2022



Regional Changes in Hunter Distribution

Deer (2013-2023)

- Greatest Increases
 - Region 6: +3,434
 - Region 3: +1,553
- Greatest Decreases
 - Region 1: -4,559
 - Region 5: -4,299

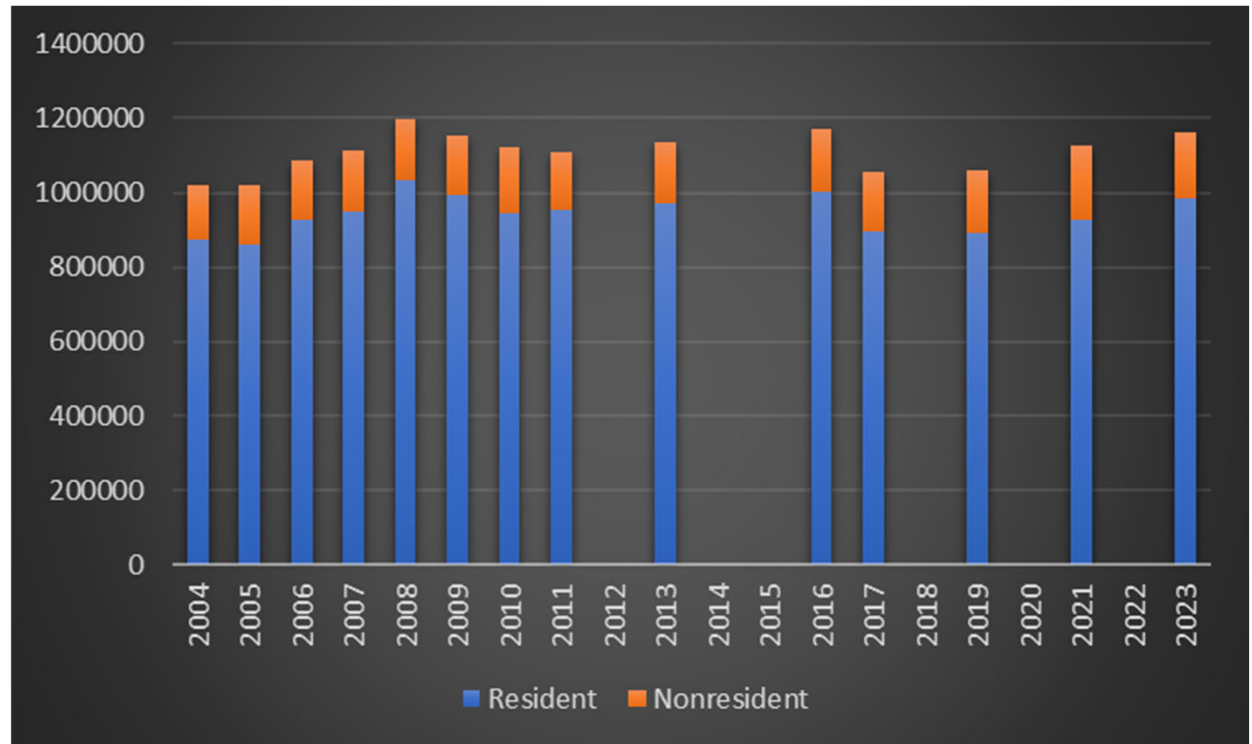
Elk (2012-2022)

- Greatest Increases
 - Region 3: +3,165
 - Region 5: +2,192
- Greatest Decreases
 - Region 1: -2,989
 - Region 2: -2,577



Statewide Deer Hunting Days 2004-2023

- Resident: +112,163
- Nonresident: +32,519
- Overall: +144,682

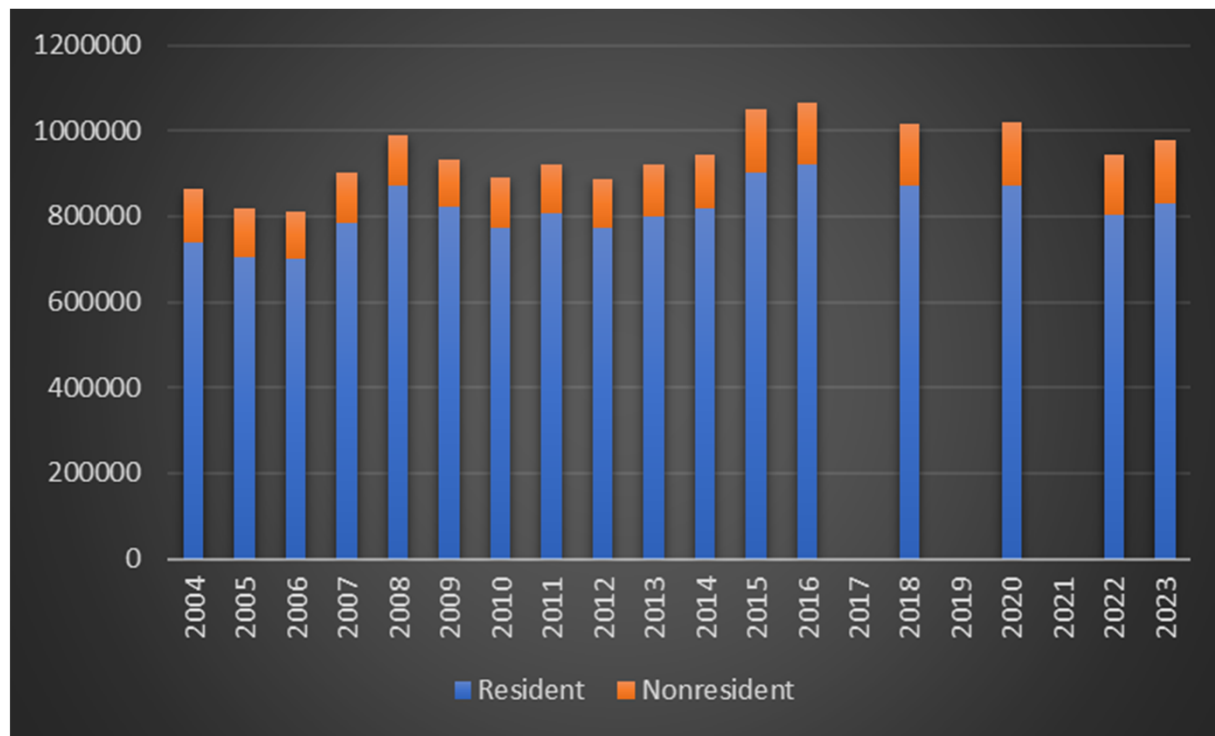


*No data available for 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2022.



Statewide Elk Hunting Days 2004-2023

- Resident: +89,909
- Nonresident: +24,333
- Overall: +114,242

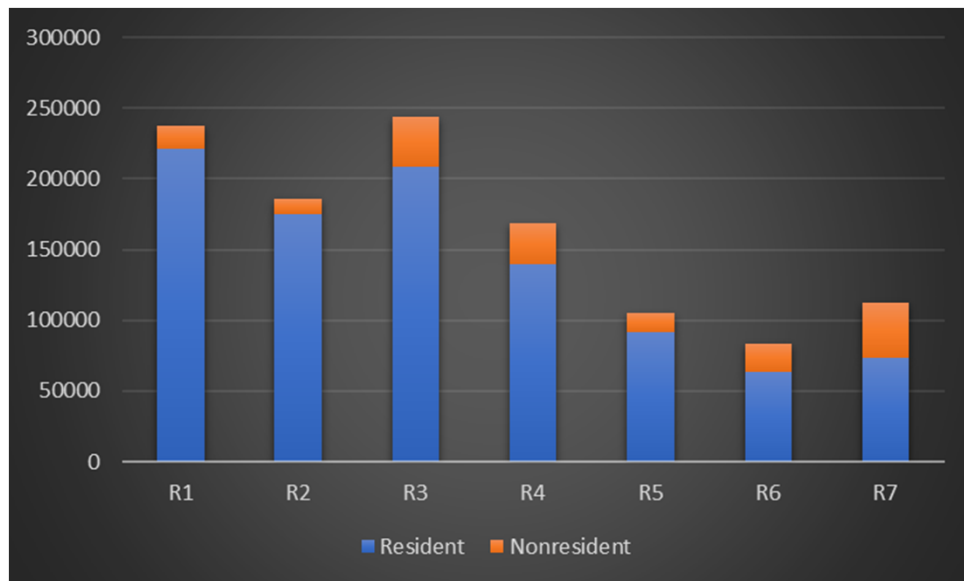


*No data available for 2017, 2019, 2021.

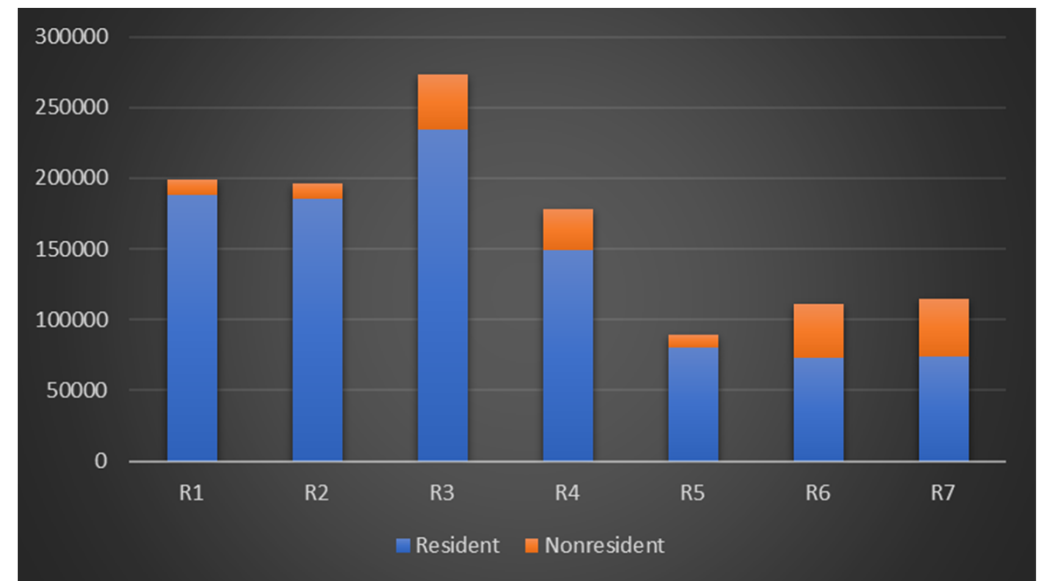


Deer Hunter Days by Region

2013

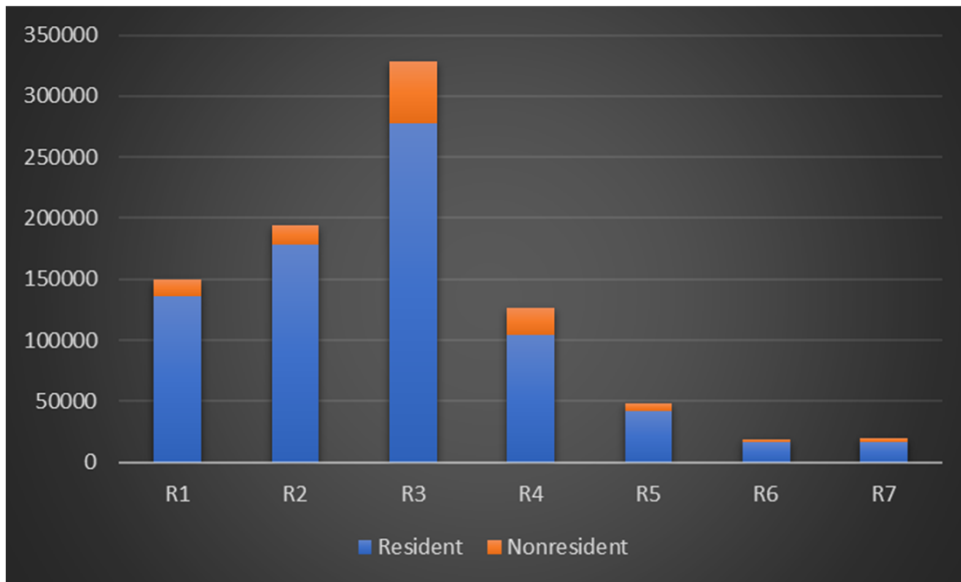


2023

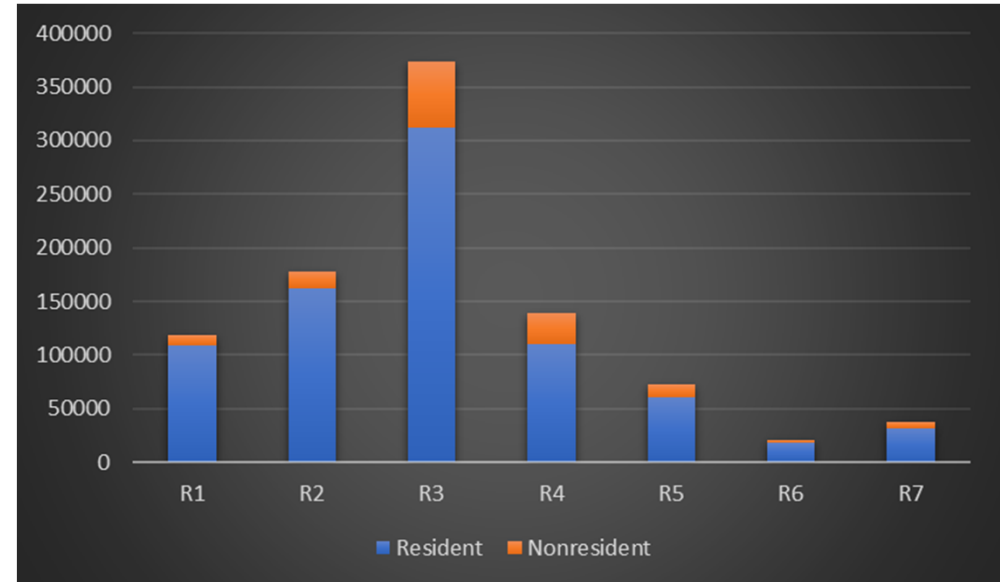


Elk Hunter Days by Region

2012



2022



Regional Changes in Hunter Days

Deer (2013-2023)

- Greatest Increases
 - Region 3: +29,942
 - Region 6: +27,176
- Greatest Decreases
 - Region 1: -39,080
 - Region 5: -15,750

Elk (2012-2022)

- Greatest Increases
 - Region 3: +45,021
 - Region 5: +24,482
- Greatest Decreases
 - Region 1: -31,309
 - Region 2: -16,421



Hunting Access



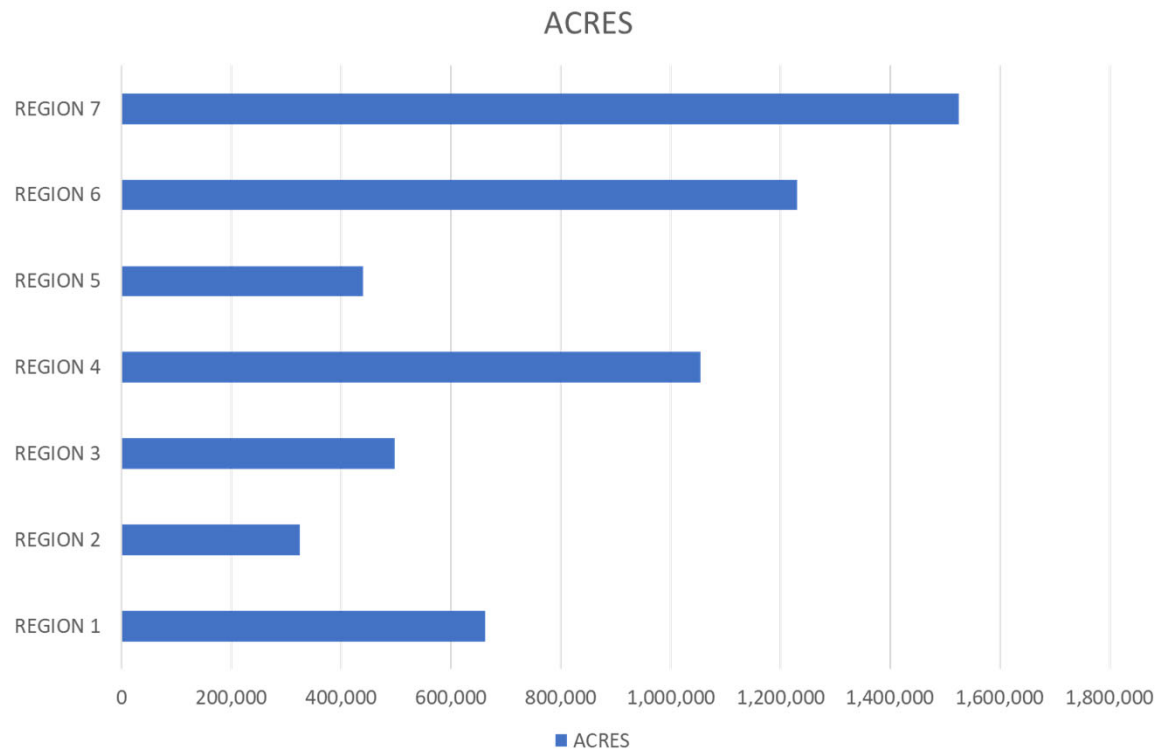
Block Management 2013-2023

- Enrollment has declined by 891,405 acres
- Hunter days have increased by 230,942

Region	Change in Acreage	Percent Change
1	-99,377	-13%
2	-179,507	-30%
3	-23,600	-4%
4	-51,976	-4%
5	-173,818	-25%
6	+146,716	+12%
7	-428,647	-17%

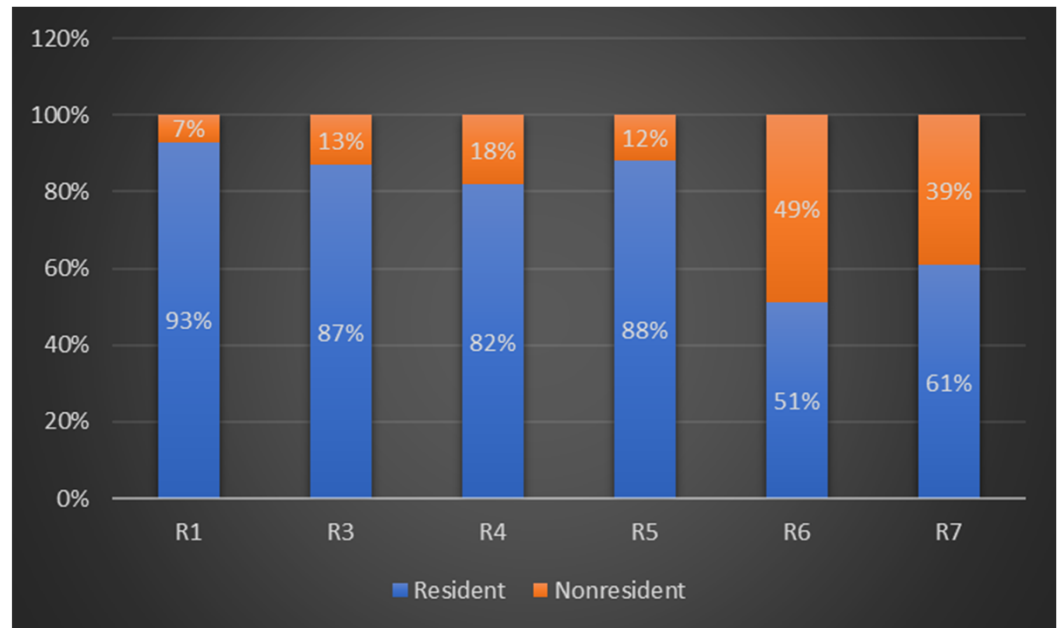


Block Management Acreage by Region



Block Management - Residency of Hunter Days by Region for 2023

- Regions with the greatest percentage of nonresident hunter days
 - Region 6: 49%
 - Region 7: 39%



*The percentage for residency of hunter days listed above represents 1% of the total hunter use in Region 1. The reported percentage of resident and nonresident hunters for Region 1 does not likely represent the true values. Data for Region 2 has not been reported since 2019.



Summary of Recent Trends

1. Overall, resident license sales were nearly identical for 2022 and 2023. Nonresident license sales have slightly increased since 2022.
2. Nonresident license revenue decreased in 2022 but hit a new high in 2023, remains on an upward trajectory.
3. Resident Upland Bird License sales have increased since 2022 and remains on an upward trajectory. Nonresident sales are remaining steady.
4. Resident General Deer and Elk License sales have slightly increased since 2022.
5. Deer B License sales have decreased for both residents and nonresidents since 2022, both remain on a downward trajectory.



Overall Summary of Trends

1. Resident and Nonresident license sales have increased since 2014.
2. Resident hunters have decreased, Nonresident hunters have increased since 2012.
3. Hunter efforts have shifted from West to East.
4. Hunters are spending more time in the field.
5. Private land open to hunting has decreased over time.



Expected Trends in the Future

1. Nonresident license revenue will continue to increase due to CPI price increases and stable demand for Nonresident Combination Licenses, as well as a statutory price increase on Migratory Bird Licenses (House Bill 217).
2. Deer B License sales will continue to decrease, particularly for nonresidents due to passage of Senate Bill 281 in legislative session 2023.

