

Kentucky's Elk Country Corridor

OUTDOOR RECREATION

A spectacular array of natural environments awaits outdoor enthusiasts in the Kentucky's Elk Country Corridor. The region is graced with national forests, state parks, wildlife management areas and nature preserves. With elevations ranging from 675 to 3,273 feet, the region's varied terrain offers exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities for every skill level. The experienced outdoor enthusiast can enjoy rugged adventures including mountain biking and overnight hiking. A more relaxed outdoor experience can be found on the area's lakes, golf courses and nature trails. Participants in all forms of outdoor activities are treated to extraordinary scenery that features rounded mountains, rolling hills, narrow valleys, lush forests, fields of wildflowers, sparkling waterways, and an exciting selection of birds and wildlife.

The national forests, state parks and wildlife management areas provide excellent **wildlife viewing** opportunities. Sightings can include beaver, black bear, deer, duck, egret, elk, fox, groundhog, hawk, muskrat, owl, river otter and turkey. After an absence of over 150 years, elk can once again be seen in Southeastern Kentucky. The herd, reintroduced into the area in 1997 by Kentucky's Department of Fish and Wildlife Resource, has grown to 3,000. In September, visitors can hear the distinctive bugle of the male elk during mating season. The late autumn, winter and early spring months provide the best elk viewing opportunities. Several annual festivals celebrate the region's magnificent elk herd.

Hikers of every skill level can find ideal **hiking** trails in the Elk Country Corridor. Rugged mountain paths provide day and overnight trips for experienced hikers including High Ridge Rock Trail's challenging 6-hour hike in Bad Branch State Nature Preserve. The casual hiker will find a wide selection of shorter trails including self-guided hikes in nature preserves and historic areas. **Mountain biking** conditions are excellent. Avid bikers can enjoy trails including Little Shepherd, Redbird Crest and Buckhorn Loop. Many of the region's trails can also be used for **horseback riding**.

The waterways in the Elk Country Corridor offer excellent **boating** opportunities. Fishing boat and pontoon rentals are available seasonally on Buckhorn and Carr Fork Lakes. Canoeing is possible on the Poor Fork River. Canoeists can enjoy Class I and II small shoals and rapids on this scenic river that varies in width from 20 to 40 feet. The best conditions are usually found from January through mid-April. Access is available off US 119 near Harlan. The Middle Fork of the Kentucky River passes through Leslie County and offers good flat water canoeing. There are currently no outfitters in the area. Canoeists must have their own equipment. Several waterways provide **fishing** opportunities. Anglers can test their favorite bait on a variety of species including bass,

bluegill, catfish, crappie, muskellunge, red ear sunfish and walleye. Favorite fishing spots include Buckhorn Lake, Carr Fork Lake, Pan Bowl Lake, and Bert Combs Lake.

The following are just some of the outdoor recreational areas available in the Elk Corridor:

Daniel Boone National Forest (859-745-3100) is located in the mountains of Southeastern Kentucky. A portion of the 700,000-acre forest occupies Clay and Leslie Counties. The land is generally rugged and characterized by steep forested ridges and narrow valleys that offer abundant wildlife, lush vegetation, magnificent scenery, and numerous recreation opportunities. Activities include hiking, camping, boating, fishing and biking.

Jefferson National Forest (540-265-5100) is located mainly in Virginia. An 845-acre section of the forest, stretching into Letcher County along KY 932, offers extremely steep and mountainous terrain. Activities include mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and wildlife viewing. Squirrel, deer, turkey, grouse, and raccoon are abundant. Black bear, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, flying squirrel and grey bats also reside in the native forest.

Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park (606-398-7510) is located on a 1,200-acre mountain lake on the edge of the Daniel Boone National Forest. The 850-acre park offers a beach, hiking trails, marina with boat rentals, swimming pool, bicycle rentals, miniature golf and tennis and volleyball courts. Buckhorn Lake is known for its muskellunge. Other species include largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, crappie, channel catfish, bluegill and redear sunfish. The lake is accessible from KY 1833. Buckhorn Loop Trail begins off KY 1833 near Hazard. The terrain on the 45-mile loop trail is mountainous and primarily forested. A two-mile hike is offered on the Leatherwood and Moonshine Trail. There are excellent opportunities to view wildlife in the park including ranger-led elk tours, owl prowls and bird walks.

Carr Creek State Park (606-642-4050) features 29 acres situated on Carr Fork Lake. Facilities include a beach, bathhouse, boat rentals, camping, fishing, and full service marina. Carr Creek Lake offers an opportunity to catch largemouth bass, Kentucky bass, smallmouth bass, crappie, channel catfish, walleye, and bluegill. The 710-acre lake is located on KY 15 in Knott County. The marina is open year around. Boat rentals are available seasonally. A portion of Buckhorn Loop Trail passes through Carr Fork State Park.

Starfire Wildlife Management Area (606-785-5881) is a joint effort by Starfire Coal Co. and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife. Located on the site of a former strip-mine near Highway 80 northwest of Hindman, the wildlife preserve is now home to Canada geese, wild turkey, and free ranging Elk.

Beech Creek Wildlife Management Area (502-564-4336), located near Manchester on Beech Creek and Litton Roads, is home to squirrel, deer, rabbit, fox, raccoon, groundhog, and grouse. The 1,260-acre preserve offers a varied landscape with sloping hills, ridge top flats, open fields, and narrow valleys. Bert Combs Lake offers fishing for rainbow trout, largemouth bass, channel catfish, bass, crappie, and bluegill.

Redbird Wildlife Management Area (606-598-2192) features a hilly terrain that is home to elk, deer, bear, turkey, squirrel, raccoon, and grouse. The 26,000-acre preserve is located off US 421 near Hyden. Activities include camping, hiking, biking and wildlife viewing. Redbird Crest Trail is suitable for mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding. The 65-mile loop trail, accessible from KY 66, features several sections with steep, difficult climbs.

Pine Mountain Wildlife Management Area (502-564-4336) offers an abundance of wildlife including elk, deer, black bear, squirrel, fox, raccoon, turkey, grouse, hawk and owl. The 6,000-acre preserve, located off US 119 near Whitesburg, has a mountainous terrain with elevations reaching 2,900 feet. A portion of Little Shepherd Trail stretches through the area. The multi-use 38-mile trail is frequented by hikers, bikers, horseback riders, and even an occasional motorist. Hiking is considered easy on most of the narrow, gravel road that features several scenic overlooks and huge rocks.

Lilley Cornett Woods (606-633-5828) is one of Kentucky's few remaining tracts of virgin forest. Wildlife in the 250-acre forest includes elk, bear, fox, deer, river otter, muskrat, beaver, raccoon, hawk, egret, wood duck, turkey, and grouse. The area is open seasonally and throughout the year by appointment. Call ahead for hours.

Bad Branch State Nature Preserve (606-573-2886), accessible from KY 932 near Whitesburg, is home to Kentucky's only nesting pair of common raven. Other wildlife includes black bear, turkey, elk, deer, hawk, and owl. The 2,444-acre preserve stretches across Bad Branch Gorge and up the north face of Pine Mountain. High Ridge Rock Trail, a portion of Pine Mountain Trail, offers a 7.4-mile marked loop. The hike is considered strenuous and takes approximately 6 hours to complete. Highlights of the hike include Bad Branch River and Bad Branch Gorge with its 60-foot-high waterfall. Rather than continue to the upper watershed, hikers can opt for a moderate 2-mile hike to the falls.

Robinson Forest (606-666-5034) located southeast of Jackson off KY Hwy 476, comprised of over 14,000 acres, in Breathitt and Knott Counties, and is managed by the University of Kentucky Department of Forestry. The plant communities in the forest are an excellent example of a mixed mesophytic type forest. The forest is also home to variety of wildlife including raptors and elk.

Big Hickory Golf Course (606-598-8053) is located on RR 5 near Manchester. The par 36 course features rolling hills and several water traps. The long tree-lined fairway on #3 is a favorite of golfers.

Raven Rock Golf Course (606-832-2955), located on US 23 near Jenkins, is known for its water hazards and rolling greens. Number 2, the signature hole on the par 35 course, features a challenging 170-yard tee shot over a ravine to the green.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Experienced **fishing guides** in the region include:

- ~ Striker Guide Service on Buckhorn Lake, 606/487-8033
- ~ Buckhorn Guide Service on Buckhorn Lake, 606/436-6501
- ~ Tommy Hall's Guide Service on Buckhorn Lake, 270/242-6712