

Elk Hunting in Southeast Alaska, Unit 3

A guide for all elk hunters on what the law requires
and how to make the most of your hunt



Prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game



A note to readers

The information in this booklet will help you prepare for an elk hunting trip in Southeast Alaska. We also recommend that you read through ADF&G's *Hunt Alaska* book and make good use of the hunt planning pages in the back.

It is also important to read the statewide hunting regulations. If you do not have a copy of these materials, please go online to <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=hunting.huntingregulations> or contact us directly.

Thank you.



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Cover Photos:

Rick Swisher, Etolin Island, 2006. Photo by Nick Gefre.

Andy "Drew" Mathews, Etolin Island, 2010. Photographer unknown.

Sylvia "Chris" Longacre, Zarembo Island, 2001. Photo by Rich Lowell, ADF&G.

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Begin with the basics

Where to begin The ADF&G Wildlife Conservation website has a wealth of valuable information for hunters, whether it's your first hunt or a lifelong activity. Begin by visiting the *Hunting* page at www.hunt.alaska.gov. From there you will find links to hunting information, including; license purchase, game management unit maps, emergency orders, bear safety, and wildlife management reports.

Hunt Alaska:
www.hunt.alaska.gov

Planning Your Hunt:
www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=hunting.workbook

Alaska Big Game Hunting Information:
www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=hunting.biggameintro

Alaska Hunting Regulations:
www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=hunting.regulations

Leave-No-Trace Camping:
www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=hunting.lowimpact

Video about bear safety **Staying Safe in Bear Country video:** This video will increase your knowledge of bear behavior and help you prevent negative bear encounters and attacks. Copies are available through Distribution Access at: www.distributionaccess.com. You may also borrow copies from ADF&G area offices. Drop by in person or call one of the following area offices.

- Ketchikan: (907) 225-2475
- Petersburg: (907) 772-3801
- Sitka: (907) 747-5449
- Juneau: (907) 465-4265

Elk in Alaska

Distribution

Fossil bones indicate that a subspecies of elk once existed in interior Alaska during the Pleistocene period, but all of the elk currently in Alaska were introduced from the Pacific Northwest in the last century. Two subspecies of elk have been introduced to Alaska. Roosevelt elk (*Cervus elaphus roosevelti*) are larger, slightly darker in color, and have shorter, thicker antlers than the Rocky Mountain elk (*Cervus elaphus nelsoni*).

The first successful translocation involved eight Roosevelt elk calves that were captured on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State in 1928 and moved to Afognak Island (near Kodiak) in 1929. These elk successfully established themselves on both Afognak and Raspberry islands. The second successful transplant occurred in 1987, when 50 elk were captured in Oregon and moved to Etolin Island (near Petersburg) in Southeast Alaska. Thirty-three Roosevelt elk were released at Dewey Anchorage and spread throughout southern Etolin. They remain primarily south of Burnett Inlet. Seventeen Rocky Mountain elk were released near Johnson Cove and remain primarily west of Mosman Inlet. This is the subspecies believed to have populated Zarembo Island.

General description

In many European countries “elk” are actually what we know as moose (*Alces alces*). Elk (*Cervus elaphus*) are sometimes called “wapiti” in North America. They are members of the deer family (*Cervidae*) and share many physical traits with deer, moose, and caribou. Bull elk are estimated to weigh up to 1,300 pounds (591 kg). They are much larger than deer and caribou, but not as large as the moose which occur in Alaska.

Distinguishing features include a large yellowish rump patch, a grayish to brownish body, and dark brown legs and neck. Unlike some members of the deer family, both sexes have upper canine teeth.

Cow elk are similar in appearance to the bulls, but are smaller and have no antlers. The antlers on prime bulls are very large and sweep gracefully back



Riley Woodford, ©ADFG

Cow, calf and bull elk

over the shoulders with individual tines projecting forward and upward off of the main beam. Elk shed their antlers during the winter each year and grow new ones the following summer. The soft growing antler is covered with “velvet” which is scraped off by rubbing and jousting after the antlers harden in the fall.

Life history

Elk calves are born in late May or early June when abundant food is available for the mother and the mild weather increases the calves’ chances for survival. Birth usually occurs under the cover of dense spruce forests where they are hidden from predators and protected from the elements. Calves are born with protective coloration (light spotted areas on the back which act as camouflage). A few days after giving birth, the mother joins other cow elk with calves. A single cow will often “babysit” the calves while the remaining cows seek food. As summer progresses, elk bands move above timberline and feed on the alpine slopes where breezes keep biting insects at bay and young plants are highly nutritious. By July, the calves, although still nursing, begin feeding on succulent forbs.



Doug Lindstrand, AWCC

Elk calf

Beginning in August, bands of elk congregate and form herds consisting of cows, calves, yearlings and an occasional mature bull. Nearby, but separate from the herd, small bands of mature bulls can be found. During September, the bulls join the main herds and mating activities (the rut) begin. Large herds are scenes of vigorous activity as mature bulls challenge each other vocally, emitting a high pitched whistle or “bugle,” an eerie but thrilling sound. Occasionally, pushing and shoving matches are initiated by large bulls to lay claim to mating privileges. Smaller bulls may attempt to take advantage of this situation and run past the sparring challengers to mate.

By mid-October most breeding activities cease. The herds may begin to disperse into smaller bands as they move into wintering areas. The winter months are spent in lower valleys and in the dense spruce forests and small openings near the coastline searching for food.

Food habits

Elk are hardy animals whose large body size and herding tendencies require tremendous amounts of food. From late spring until early fall, elk, which are mainly grazers, feed primarily on grasses, forbs, and

other leafy vegetation. By late fall they become browsers, feeding on sprouts and branches of shrubs and trees. Elk can become their own worst enemy as large herds often damage their food supply by excessive stripping, trampling, and over cropping of staple food plants, including willow, elderberry and blueberry. For this reason, it is important to keep elk herds from becoming too large in relation to the available food supply.

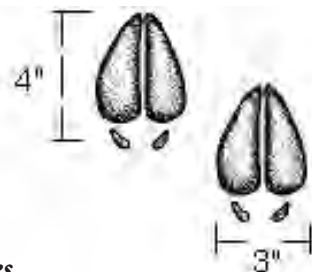
Population

Approximately two-thirds of the 50 elk introduced to Etolin Island in 1987 died from predation, starvation, and accidents within 18 months of release. Despite the high mortality, the elk population increased to an estimated 100 – 125 animals by the early 1990s and elk successfully dispersed to neighboring islands, establishing a second breeding population on Zarembo Island. By 1996, the Unit 3 elk herd had increased to an estimated 250 animals, and was deemed capable of sustaining a limited harvest of 20 bulls. The first Unit 3 elk hunt occurred on Etolin Island in 1997 when 29 permits were issued. Precise population estimates for elk on Etolin and Zarembo islands are not available and are difficult to obtain due to problems in sightability, rough terrain, dense vegetation, and the sporadic distribution of elk over relatively large areas. A current subjective estimate of the elk population on the two islands is approximately 300-400 animals, with about 90 percent on Etolin, and the remainder on Zarembo. Although we continue to receive “unconfirmed” reports of elk having spread to other islands and portions of the mainland, elk numbers away from Etolin and Zarembo are believed to be low. Factors which may limit the growth of elk populations include hunting, starvation, disease, poaching, predation by wolves and bears, and a lowered birth rate when the animals become too numerous to be supported by the available food supply. Timber cutting and the development of logging roads also impact an area’s carrying capacity for elk.



Scat

In winter, scat is dry and hard, forming elongated pellets. In summer, pellets begin to loose shape and form clumps of soft deformed pellets.



Tracks

Elk hooves are larger and rounder than deer, and smaller than moose with a narrow gap within the inner portion.

Hunt history

Elk on Etolin and Zarembo islands have been hunted for food and trophies since 1997, with a bag limit of one bull. The number of elk draw permits issued annually steadily increased from 25 permits in 1997, to a high of 175 permits in 2005 and 2006, before being reduced in 2007 to 125 available permits. In addition to drawing permits, each year, the department makes up to 4 Governor's elk permits available to nonprofit organizations based in the state that are established to promote fish and game management and the use of fish and game populations for hunting and fishing. These organizations in turn make the Governor's elk permits available to the public via auction or raffle.

Rugged terrain, thick vegetation and inclement weather make Southeast Alaska elk hunting a difficult and challenging pursuit. The endeavor of packing up to 700 lbs. (320 kg) of meat from a remote kill site back to camp is often heightened by the presence of black and brown bears that may lay claim to elk meat in the field. From 1997 to 2012, the Unit 3 elk harvest ranged from 1 to 19 per year, with an average annual harvest of 9 elk per year. During this period the success rate for elk hunters ranged from 1% to 28% annually, with an overall success rate of 13%. See the back of this booklet for a summary of the complete hunt history.



Michael "Mike" Whisenant, Etolin Island, 2004.

Applying for hunts

Draw hunts Drawing hunts are available to both residents and nonresidents. Drawing hunts require an application fee and are awarded once annually by lottery. The application period extends from November through mid-December for the next regulatory year's hunts. ADF&G publishes a *Draw Hunt Supplement* that provides information on available drawing hunt opportunities and area boundaries.

- Apply for a draw permit**
1. Check the current *Draw Hunt Supplement* for your hunt number(s).
 2. Purchase a valid hunting license if you do not already have one. (This license requirement does not apply to residents under the age of 16)
 3. Submit your draw permit application online at www.hunt.alaska.gov

Registration hunts Most registration hunts are available for both residents and nonresidents. Generally, registration hunts do not limit the number of permits; however, a few registration hunts limit the number of available permits on a first-come, first-served basis. Registration permit hunts allow the department to closely track the number of hunters participating in a hunt and the number of animals harvested so that hunting season can be closed by emergency order if a harvest goal is met. For more information visit the registration hunt page at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=huntlicense.registration>. Each Registration permit hunt has its own application period and season dates. Applications for registration permits are typically accepted anywhere from a week to a few months before the season begins for each hunt. Check the hunting regulations to find out when the application period begins for the hunt you are interested in applying for.

Apply for a registration permit Registration permits are issued at ADF&G offices and, in some instances, they are available at locations in or near the hunt area. In most cases you must apply in person, but some hunts allow applying through the mail. It is also possible to obtain some registration permits online.



Ed Toribio, Etolin Island, 2005.

Elk hunting seasons

Hunt DE-318 represents the archery-only elk season during the month of September. The old month-long DE-322 elk rifle season has been eliminated and replaced by two separate drawing permit hunts (DE-321 and DE-323), each two weeks in duration. The DE-321 elk drawing season extends from Oct 1 to Oct 15, while the DE-323 season extends from Oct 16 to Oct 31.

Regardless of which drawing permit you hold (DE-318, DE-321, or DE-323), **YOU MAY ONLY HUNT DURING THE SEASON DATES SPECIFIED ON YOUR PERMIT.**

DE-318 Archery only season

- Season dates: Sept 1 to Sept 30
- Bag limit: one bull by drawing permit
- 5-day notification of kill
- An IBEP (International Bowhunters Education Program) card is required

DE-321 rifle season
(any legal method)

- Season dates: Oct 1 to Oct 15
- Bag limit: one bull by drawing permit
- 5-day notification of kill

DE-323 rifle season
(any legal method)

- Season dates: Oct 16 to Oct 31
- Bag limit: one bull by drawing permit
- 5-day notification of kill

RE-325 elk registration permit hunt

- Registration permits available Nov 1
- Season dates: Nov 15 to Nov 30
- Bag limit: one bull by registration permit
- 5-day notification of kill

General season elk hunt

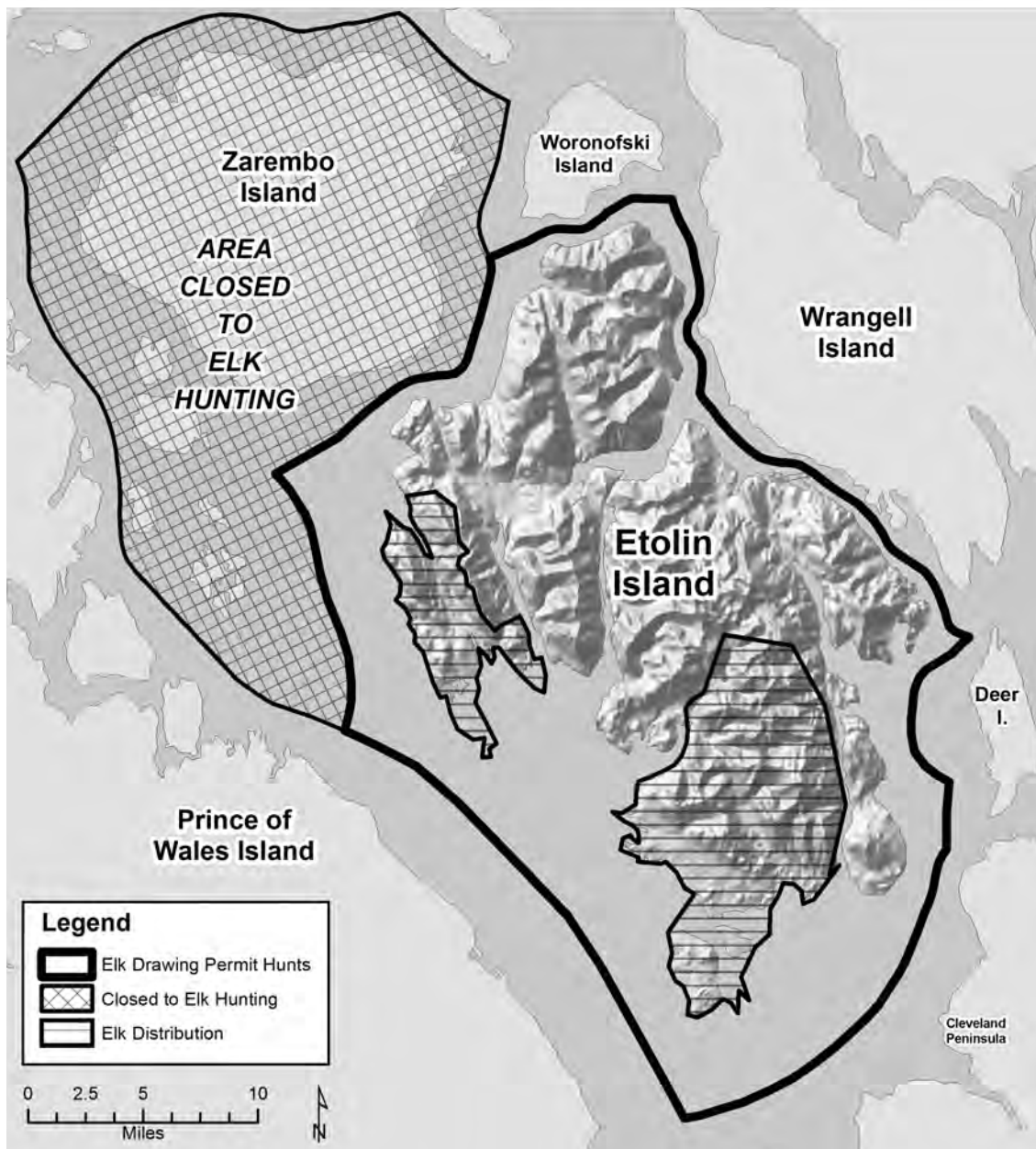
In an attempt to impede the dispersal of introduced elk to other areas, the Alaska Board of Game authorized a liberal 5-month elk season in Unit 1, Unit 2 and that portion of Unit 3 outside of the drawing permit area; **except for Zarembo, Bushy, Shrubby and the Kaskevarof islands which are now CLOSED to all elk hunting.** All that is required to hunt elk outside of the drawing permit area is a valid Alaska hunting license; no registration permit, or harvest ticket is required. There is a requirement that all successful hunters report any elk taken outside of the drawing permit area to Alaska Department of Fish and Game **within 5 days of kill.** This reporting requirement will allow the department to monitor the dispersal of elk away from Etolin and Zarembo islands.

- Season dates: Aug 1 to Dec 31
- Bag limit: one elk (either sex)
- 5-day notification of kill

Know where to hunt elk

Hunt Area: Unit 3, that portion bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of Stikine Strait and Clarence Strait, running southwest following the midline of Clarence Strait, down to its intersection with Ernest Sound, then northeast following the midline of Ernest Sound, excluding Niblack Islands, to its intersection with Zimovia Strait, then northwest following the western shoreline of Zimovia Strait to its intersection with Chichagof Passage, then west along the midline of Chichagof Passage to its intersection with Stikine Strait, then west and south along the midline of Stikine Strait back to the point of beginning.

DE318, DE321, DE323 and RE325 Elk Drawing Permit Hunts



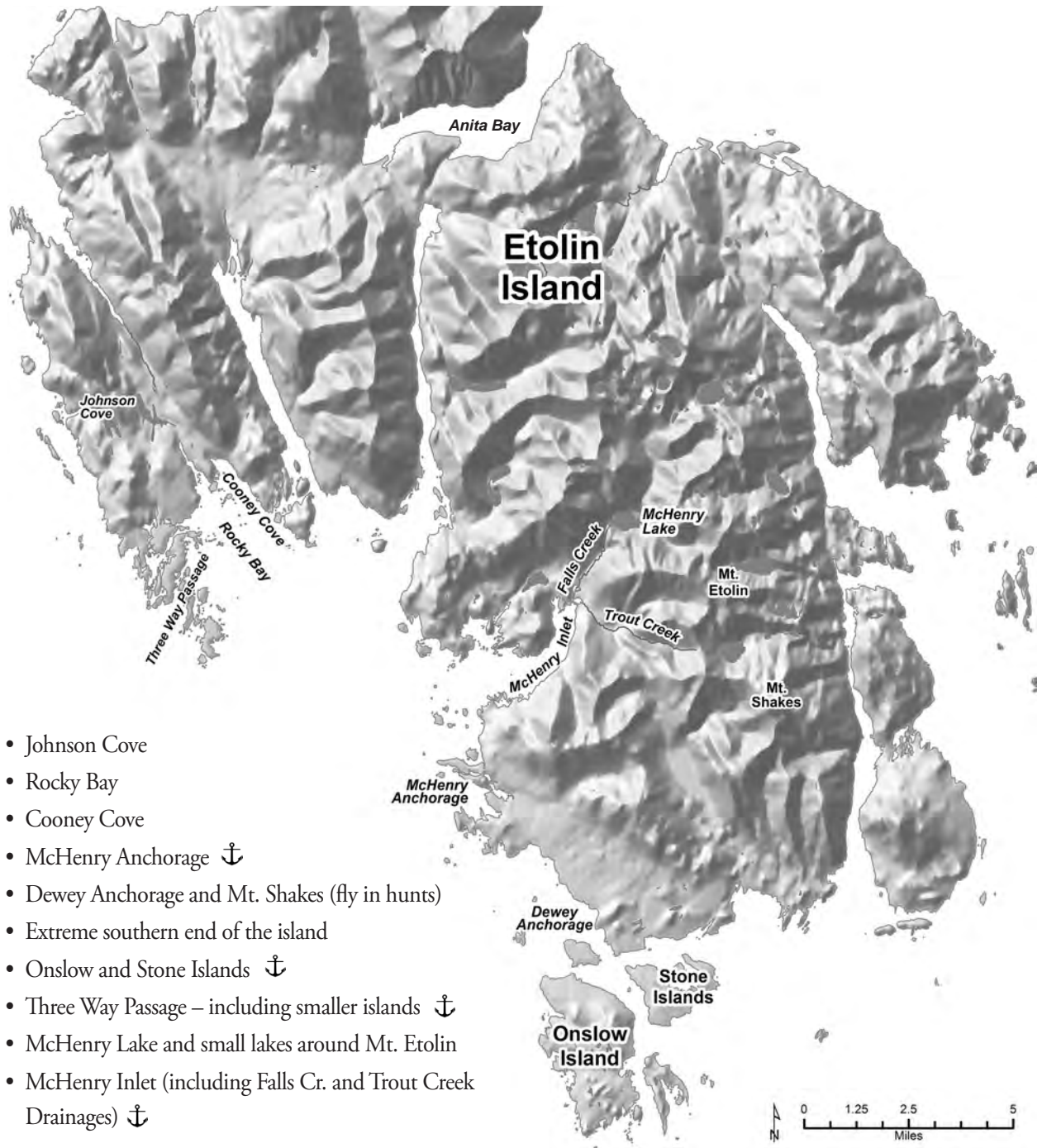
Zarembo, Bushy, Shrubby and the Kashevarof islands are all closed to hunting

Where to find them

Hunters should concentrate their efforts south of Anita Bay along the western, southwestern, and extreme southern portions of Etolin Island.

Don't overlook the smaller islands in Three-Way-Passage or along the southern coast of Etolin. Elk are strong swimmers and are occasionally observed on these small islands.

The southern portion of Etolin Island is generally better in late October.



- Johnson Cove
- Rocky Bay
- Cooney Cove
- McHenry Anchorage ⚓
- Dewey Anchorage and Mt. Shakes (fly in hunts)
- Extreme southern end of the island
- Onslow and Stone Islands ⚓
- Three Way Passage – including smaller islands ⚓
- McHenry Lake and small lakes around Mt. Etolin
- McHenry Inlet (including Falls Cr. and Trout Creek Drainages) ⚓

⚓ *Indicates good anchorage*

Reporting requirements

Successful hunters If successful, report online at www.hunt.alaska.gov, in person or by phone to Petersburg, Ketchikan or Wrangell Fish and Game offices within 5 days of kill.

Petersburg- 907-772-3801

Ketchikan- 907-225-2475

Wrangell- 907-874-3822

Successful hunters **MUST** submit a 5-inch section of the lower jaw with front teeth to the Petersburg Fish and Game office. The department also requests that successful hunters send a photo of their elk antlers.

Unsuccessful hunters If you hunted unsuccessfully or did not hunt, you may report online or by mail within 15 days of the end of the season.

Must have equipment

Southeast Alaska is a temperate rainforest making it critical to be prepared for wet weather. Be sure to bring the following:

- Tent (waterproof dome with full coverage fly)
- Tarp for roofing over tent and/or cooking area (16' x 20')
- Rope or heavy twine
- Hip boots & rubber boots (leather boots not recommended)
- Durable rain gear
- Binoculars (water-proof recommended)
- Spotting scope (15, 20 or 45 power) with tripod
- Fiber-filled sleeping bag
- Small cook stove (fires are difficult to start with wet wood)
- Insect repellent and/or head net
- Hunting license and drawing permit
- Appropriate caliber rifle or bow



Chris Foster, Etolin Island, 2012.

Transporting hides and meat

Labeling requirements

All wildlife parts (meat, hide, horns, antlers, etc.) that are packaged for transport out of the state of Alaska, or between states, must be clearly marked with the following information attached to the outside of the shipping container: name and address of the shipper and consignee, and an accurate list of the package's contents, including the number of each species.

Transporting across US/Canada border

If you plan to ship or transport any wild game parts or products out of the United States, including transporting from Alaska through Canada to the Lower 48, federal regulations require that you complete a **Declaration of Importation or Exportation of Fish and Wildlife** (Form 3-177). This form is available online at:

<http://www.fws.gov/le/declaration-form-3-177.html>.

The forms are also available from:

- U.S. Customs Office (907) 225-2254
- ADFG Area Offices in Ketchikan, Haines, Tok, Juneau, Petersburg, Wrangell and the Alaska Wildlife Trooper's office in Klawock.

Transporting firearms

There are a few restrictions on the transportation and possession of personal firearms in Alaska. State law prohibits the following:

- Fully automatic firearms
- Rifles with a barrel less than 16"
- Shotguns with a barrel less than 18"
- Rifles or shotguns less than 26" in total length

If you are driving and transporting a firearm to or from Alaska to conduct your hunt and you do not have a Canadian firearms license, you will need to report your firearm(s) to U.S. and Canadian Customs at the border. Nonresidents who transport firearms through Canada are required to complete a nonresident Firearms Declaration form, pay a \$50 (Canadian) fee, and have the Declaration confirmed by a customs officer. No handguns may be transported through Canada. Once confirmed, the Firearms Declaration form will act as a temporary license and registration while in Canada and is valid for 60 days.

Firearms Declaration forms are available by calling: 1(800) 731-4000 or online at www.cbsa.gc.ca.

Avoiding problems with bears

Alaska is bear country. As a hunter you are in the midst of it, especially when you are hunting! Following are a few pointers to help avoid unpleasant encounters with bears:

Both black bears and brown bears occur on Etolin Island, although brown bears are not plentiful. Nonetheless, hunters should take the usual safety precautions while hunting and camping in bear country.

While brown and black bears are usually reluctant to bother people, occasionally there are close encounters. Close encounters can usually be avoided if hunters take precautions while hunting, properly handle and cache their meat, and keep a clean camp.

While hunting elk, you are going into bear country during a time when most natural foods (fish, berries, vegetation) are waning and bears are anxious to get the last bit of food before they head into their dens. You will probably be walking through brushy areas making as little noise as possible, thereby increasing your chances of surprising a bear.

Brown bears will usually either avoid people or try to bluff their way out of an uncomfortable situation. Generally, the only time they attack is when they feel threatened. The threat could be to their cubs, their food, or their personal space. When threatened, they will continue to fight until they feel a threat is neutralized, or they see a way to escape. Most bear attacks occur when hunters surprise bears in brushy areas, when bears defend hunter-killed carcasses that they have found before the hunter arrives, or while the hunter is packing meat.



Traveling in bear country

Avoid surprising a bear by making noise (sing, clap, talk) when not actively hunting. Be alert along noisy streams, in thick brush, and when visibility is poor. Enter thickets upwind so your smell will warn bears of your approach. If you smell decomposing meat while on the trail, STOP! It may be a bear's food cache. Bears often cover their food with branches/forest litter and sleep nearby between feedings.

If you see a bear stay calm. If a bear does not notice you – quietly leave the area from the same direction you arrived. Keep your eyes on the bear. If a bear does notice you – face the bear, wave your arms and talk to it calmly. Try to appear larger by standing close to others in your group. A bear will usually retreat once it identifies you. Firing a rifle may frighten a bear, but don't count on it.

If a bear approaches you, stand your ground. Never run from an

approaching bear! If a bear approaches you calmly and directly, it may be curious, seeking food, or on very rare occasions, predatory. Stand your ground and act aggressively. Fight back if a bear strikes or bites you!

If you surprise a bear at close distance it may feel threatened and act defensively – especially if it has cubs or food. Continue to stand your ground. If a bear strikes or bites you – lie on your front, protect your face and neck, and remain still. Once the bear thinks you are no longer a threat it will likely leave.

Camping in bear country

Choose your campsite wisely. Don't camp on bear trails or near high use areas such as salmon streams.

Be meticulous and keep a clean camp. Store food and unwashed cooking utensils in clean, air tight containers to minimize odors. Garbage, food, and beverage cans should be hung in a tree or stored in a bear resistant container and brought back to town for disposal. Never cook, eat, or store food in your sleeping tent.

Remember that other hunters may soon use your campsite, so make sure it is at least as clean as when you got there. Garbage, food, and beverage cans should be brought back to town for disposal. Paper and other combustibles can be burned daily, but be sure to clean up any unburned materials immediately.

Hunting in bear country

Be especially cautious when hunting in brushy areas, and avoid hunting and camping near bear feeding areas such as salmon spawning streams. Do not make camp on or near bear trails.

Hunt with a partner. Leave a note in camp with a daily itinerary.

Use elk and deer calls with extreme caution. Some bears are attracted to strange noises.

Make a clean kill. A poorly placed shot can allow an elk to run a long distance, leaving a blood trail for a wandering bear to cross and follow. Practice with your rifle or bow, and select only clear shots within range of your skill level.

Go to the kill site with caution after shooting an elk. Approach it with the wind at your back and make noise so that you avoid surprising a bear. Stay alert and watch for bears.

Move meat away from brushy areas as soon as possible. Leave the gut pile and excess bones or hide for the bears, and flag them with biodegradable material to warn other hunters.

Hang meat out of reach of bears. Put meat in game bags and hang them from a tree, or stash in an open area away from the kill site.

If a bear has claimed your kill, do not try to drive it away. The meat is probably already soiled, and Alaska State Regulations prohibit killing a bear to retrieve hunter-killed game.

Store meat, hides, and blood-soaked clothing away from your camp. It is best to hang them in a tree well away from camp and at least 15 feet off the ground.

Never trim hides or meat around your camp, the scraps will attract scavenging bears long after you leave. Dispose of scraps where they can be carried away by river or tide and quickly cleaned up by other scavengers.

Meat care: from the field to your table

The following tips will help ensure the proper care and preparation of your elk meat.

Get ready before
the hunt

Get your brain in shape. Learn more about butchering and meat care from your local library, butcher, or Fish & Game webpage.

Get your gear in shape. Collect and test all of the equipment you need for butchering, hauling, and caring for your meat. Here's a short list to consider: skinning knife, butchering knife, trimming knife, sharpener, bone saw, tarp, heavy-duty game bags, plastic bags, heavy-duty backpack, paper towels, rope, and a first-aid kit.

Get your freezer in shape. Plan how you will get the meat home.

Contact local butcher shops or get your equipment ready for home butchering. Be sure you have enough room in your freezer or someone to give the meat to when you return.



Mark Galla, Etolin Island, 1997.

Don't shoot if you can't pack it all out

Before you pull the trigger or nock an arrow, make sure you are up to the task of packing the animal out. The failure to salvage all edible meat of big game is a very serious offense. Preserving the quality of game meat is one of the hunter's chief responsibilities. You must transport all edible meat to your departure point from the field **BEFORE** transporting antlers from the kill site. Remember, the antlers come out last!

Getting a big bull elk out of the woods is not going to be easy. The live weight of an adult elk can range from 600 to 1,350 pounds. You can expect to have from 200 to 475 pounds of boned out meat. Keep this in mind if you plan to venture far from camp in search of bulls. In terms of packing an elk out of the woods and caring for the meat, hunters should treat a Southeast elk hunt like a remote moose hunt.

Keep your meat cool, clean, dry and on the bone

As the old saying goes, "Once you pull the trigger, the fun stops and the work begins." There are several ways to gut and butcher big game animals. Whichever way you choose, remember to keep it cool, keep it clean, keep it dry, keep it on the bone, and keep it in breathable cloth bags! Heat is the greatest threat to good meat. To cool the meat, remove the hide as quickly as possible and get the meat away from the internal organs. The generally wet weather and mild temperatures found in Southeast Alaska during September and October will cause meat that is not "painstakingly" cared for to spoil rapidly! Successful hunters should make every attempt to cool the meat as rapidly as possible and keep it as clean and dry as possible. Once back at camp hang your meat beyond the reach of bears in durable game bags with a tarp suspended above it to keep it dry while it develops a hard crust.

Protect the meat from bacteria

Once all the meat is hung, spray it with a citric acid mixture. Food-grade citric acid can be purchased at most pharmacies. Mix two ounces of citric acid to one quart of water, and spray the meat until the mixture runs off. The mixture should dry quickly and will help prevent bacterial growth. Then keep it clean by placing it in breathable cloth bags for transport.

Prepare your meat for the freezer

When you get the meat back to town, you can either butcher it yourself, or take it to a professional to be cut and wrapped. If you decide to do it yourself, learn about meat cutting and preservation before you get out your knives and freezer paper.

What you can't use- give away

If you can't use all the meat you harvested, you may give it away. Make sure that you fill out a "Transfer of Possession" form (available in the hunting regulations book), keep a copy and give one to the recipient of the meat. Remember that any meat you plan to give away should be in the same or better condition as the meat you would keep for yourself.

Bowhunting

In 2000, an early archery hunt was instituted in order to provide a limited number of hunters with the opportunity to take advantage of the rut, when bulls can be called to within bow range.

Elk are tough animals to bring down and can travel great distances even when well struck with an arrow. Archers are urged to be extremely mindful of shot selection. Always wait for a broadside shot, and only shoot at elk well within YOUR effective range.

To date, several elk have been successfully taken with archery tackle. Bowhunters have also reported stalking bulls unsuccessfully in the following areas on Etolin Island: Three-Way-Passage, Rocky Bay, Cooney Cove, McHenry Anchorage, McHenry Lake, Mt. Etolin and Mt Shakes.



Rich Lowell, ADFG

The late Jack Hicks, the first hunter to take a Unit 3 elk with archery tackle, with a 7 x 7 bull he took on Etolin Island during the 2000 archery-only season.



Bowhunter Kurt Kuehl with the 6 x 6 he took on Etolin Island during the 2001 archery-only season.

Combo elk-deer hunt

Etolin Island provides good deer hunting opportunities. While those with elk drawing permits will likely be biting off more than they can chew by pursuing both species, the promise of a Southeast deer hunt might be an excellent way to entice a friend to join you on your elk hunt. The additional help will be most welcome should you successfully harvest an elk and need to pack it some distance back to camp.

The elk drawing permit seasons overlap with much of the Unit 3 deer season. In the Unit 3 elk drawing permit area, deer season extends from Aug 1 to Nov 30 with a 2-buck bag limit.

Wilderness restrictions

The South Etolin Island Wilderness encompasses 83,642 acres on and around the southern portion of Etolin Island. This Wilderness was designated by Congress in 1990 in order to preserve and protect the natural ecosystem from being developed. Wilderness areas are strategically managed to continue the preservation of undeveloped ecosystems for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Specific management practices that are required within wilderness areas include:

Motor vehicles Possession or use of motor vehicles is prohibited (except motorboats and floatplanes).



Motorized equipment Possession or use of motorized equipment without authorization is prohibited.



Structures Construction of structures without authorization is prohibited.



Tree cutting The damaging of live, mature trees is prohibited.



To seek authorization for some of the above items, contact the U.S. Forest Service Wrangell Ranger District at (907) 874-2323.

Leave-no-trace principle

While visiting the wilderness or other national forest areas for hunting and other recreational activities, always try to “leave no trace” of your campsite. If the leave-no-trace principles and management practices are performed by everyone, the South Etolin Island Wilderness will be treasured and enjoyed by many present and future generations. Thank you.

- Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- Find a suitable campsite and keep it small. DO NOT create one by clearing ground cover or cutting vegetation.
- Camp, wash, and dispose of grey water at least 200 feet from lakes and streams for riparian zone protection and to stay clear of bear paths.
- Bury human waste 6 inches deep and at least 200 feet from water sources.
- Remove all garbage and burn toilet paper. PACK OUT what you PACKED IN.
- Replace the campfire with a lightweight stove. If you have to make a campfire, keep it small to minimize the impacts. Use a fire pan; avoid the bases of live trees, and be aware of overhead vegetation.
- Use existing dead logs to avoid damaging live trees and plants.
- Respect wildlife and other visitors in the surrounding area.
- Dismantle fire rings, field tables and all site modifications.

Elk research

Precise population estimates are not currently available for elk on Etolin and Zarembo islands due to problems associated with rough terrain, dense vegetation, difficulties with sightability, and elusive elk behavior. As a result, the current distribution, status, and trend of the Unit 3 elk population is not well understood. Until recently, information about elk abundance and distribution on Etolin and Zarembo islands had been limited to opportunistic observations during survey flights and from anecdotal observations by agency personnel, hunters, and the general public.

Since 2008, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, with support from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, has been conducting elk research on Etolin and Zarembo islands. Because it is difficult to find and see elk in the region's rugged terrain and dense vegetation, we've determined the best way to achieved research goals is through capturing and radio-collaring a sample of elk throughout their current range. As a result, while hunting you may encounter one or more elk that have been captured and fitted with GPS radio collars and numbered visual collars.



Rich Lowell, ADFG

Elk fit with a numberd visual collar

The ultimate goal of this research is to gather information that will be used to refine our elk management strategy, provide for hunter harvest, and allow for the continued growth of the Unit 3 elk population. The primary objectives of this collaring effort are to: (1) identify daily and seasonal movements of elk on Etolin and Zarembo islands; (2) delineate summer and winter ranges of elk and identify calving and rutting areas; (3) identify habitats that are important to elk; (4) facilitate locating herds for minimum population estimates and age and sex composition counts; and (5) improve our understanding of elk ecology in Southeast Alaska. Hunter reports of radioed elk is always appreciated and can be provided to Alaska Department of Fish and Game staff in our Petersburg, Wrangell, Ketchikan, Douglas, and Sitka area offices.

One last reminder

It is always the hunter's responsibility to know and comply with the law

Be informed.

Hunt safe—hunt smart—hunt legal.



Ed Toribio

October 1st sunset



Chris Foster, Etolin Island, 2012.

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