

Saskatchewan Wildlife Survey Report

Elk Survey

2026 WMZ 48 Survey

Background

Wildlife Management Zone (WMZ) 48 is located in east-central Saskatchewan and encompasses a diverse landscape of agricultural land, pastures, and wooded areas that provide important habitat for elk in the region, including portions of the Porcupine Hills. Between January 27 and February 13, 2026, Wildlife Unit staff conducted an aerial survey of elk within the zone. The primary objectives of the survey were to update elk distribution and abundance information and to support ongoing management planning in response to recent observations and stakeholder reports of increased elk activity.

Survey areas were selected using multiple information sources, including observations from the Ministry of Community Safety and Conservation Officer Service, as well as reports provided by landowners, pasture managers, and local hunters. Priority areas included locations with recent elk sightings, known wintering areas, pastures and surrounding habitats, and areas historically used by elk. Portions of WMZ 48 with little or no recent elk observations were not surveyed, these un-surveyed areas are characterized by less suitable winter habitat, lower historical elk use, or a lack of recent stakeholder reports indicating elk presence.

Elk populations in WMZs 48, 56, and 57 (Porcupine Hills) are managed collectively, with harvest quotas and management targets set for the combined area. A historical population objective for the Porcupine Hills was established at 5,200 elk, based on habitat availability and management considerations at the time the Saskatchewan Elk Management Plan was developed (Government of Saskatchewan 2005).

Survey Method

The survey was conducted using a Eurocopter AS350 SD1 and a Eurocopter AS350 B2 helicopter over two survey periods between January 27 and February 13, 2026. The majority of survey work occurred from January 27 to February 2, followed by an additional six flight hours on February 12–13 to complete remaining areas. The flight crew consisted of a pilot, a navigator/data recorder, and two trained observers. A total of 49 hours of flight time were completed. Survey results represent a minimum count of elk within the zone at the time of survey, based on direct visual observations.

The survey focused on priority areas informed by stakeholder input and prior elk activity data. To optimize resource use and reduce costs, the survey was limited to areas with known elk activity rather than attempting total coverage of WMZ 48. Observers recorded the number of elk, group size, and GPS coordinates for each sighting. The results reflect only those animals detected and counted during the flights.

Results

A total of 3,945 elk were recorded in 247 groups, with observed group sizes ranging from 1 to 302 individuals. The estimated herd composition was 45 calves and 23 bulls per 100 cows. In adjacent zones, six groups totaling 92 elk were observed immediately south of WMZ 48 in WMZ 39, six groups totaling 190 elk were observed immediately north of the zone in WMZ 49, and six groups totaling 181 elk were observed immediately west of WMZ 48 in WMZ 40.

This survey represents the first comprehensive, zone wide aerial elk survey completed in WMZ 48. As such, the results provide a valuable baseline for future population monitoring and for evaluating trends relative to previous habitat-based population objectives and any future surveys conducted in the zone.

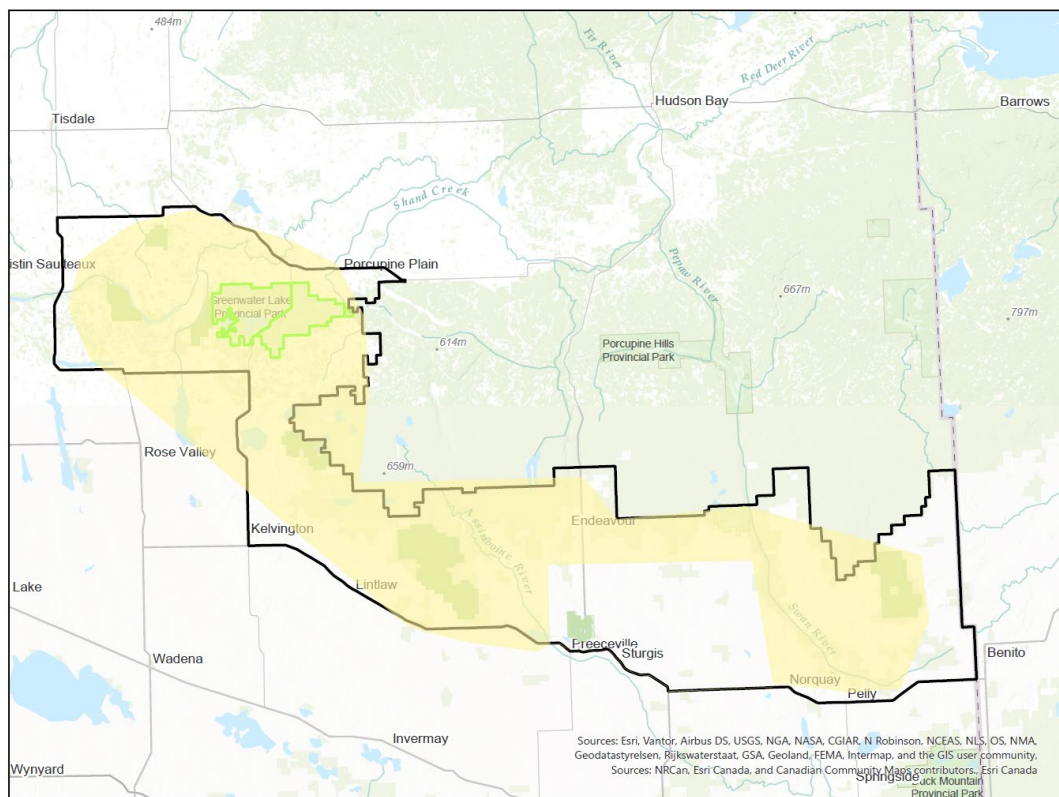


Figure 1. Map of Wildlife Management Zone 48 in Saskatchewan. The surveyed area is displayed in yellow.

References

Government of Saskatchewan. 2005. *Saskatchewan elk (Cervus elaphus) management plan: Update*. Saskatchewan Environment, Regina, Saskatchewan.