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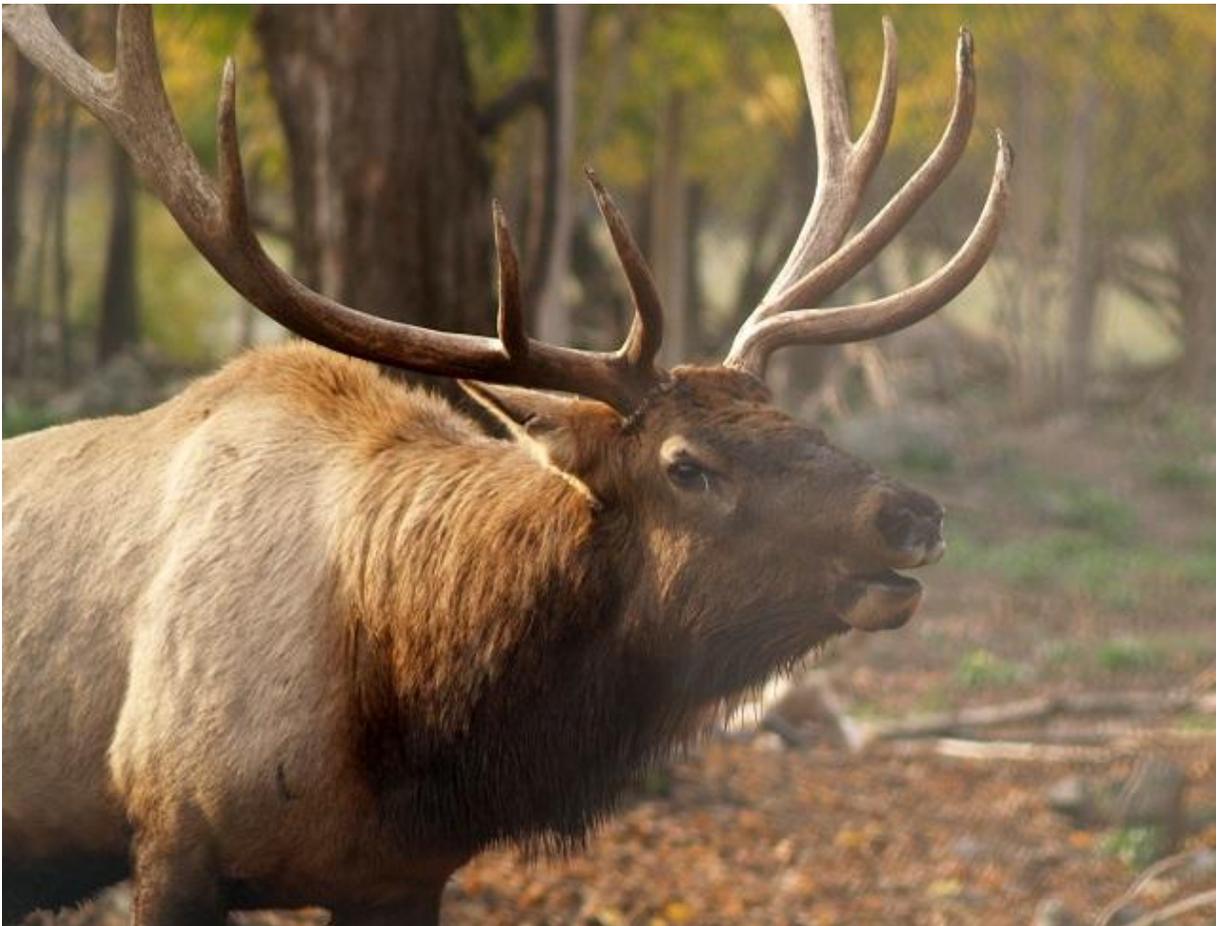
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Northern Michigan's Elk Herd Thrives for 100+ Years



GAYLORD, MICHIGAN – In Gaylord, Michigan, elk viewing isn't just a pastime - it's a bucket-list-worthy adventure. Home to one of the largest free-ranging elk herds east of the Mississippi, our area offers a rare chance to witness these magnificent animals both in captivity and in their natural habitat. Gaylord's recently enhanced Elk View Park and the untamed Pigeon River Country State Forest offer unique and distinct viewing opportunities.

Fall color season and the best time to view elk conveniently coincide. While elk viewing is a popular year-round activity, the best months are September and October when the males (bulls)

are trying to establish dominance for mating rights with the females (cows). They are highly active during this time, making loud vocalizations (bugling), and breaking brush with their antlers to impress cows and intimidate their rivals. Typically, Elk are active throughout the daylight hours, but dawn and dusk are prime viewing times.

Gaylord's Elk View Park

For a guaranteed sighting during any season, the City of Gaylord maintains an elk herd and provides viewing areas for the public to watch these impressive animals. Under the City's care, roughly 40 elk call the park home.



In July 2025, the main viewing area was moved to a new location just south of the Gaylord Elk's Lodge on the corner of Elkview Dr. and Commerce Blvd. The new park's amenities include ample parking, a pavilion, restrooms, playground equipment and a universally accessible viewing platform. This platform sits above the feeding area for the herd, providing an excellent vantage point to check them out. Improvements continue, and eager elk viewers can look forward to the installation of interpretive signage in the near future.

The herd is contained on 108 acres. City staff feed the animals corn, hay and sugar beets, plus vitamins. The herd started with 3 elk obtained when a local nature center closed. Currently, several of the bulls weigh well over 800 pounds and stand roughly 6' tall. The bulls will don their massive horns during the fall and winter, dropping them in the spring.

Live Webcam

In 2025, the Gaylord Area Convention & Tourism Bureau partnered with the Otsego County Commission on Aging (OCCOA) and the City of Gaylord to bring elk viewing right to the comfort of your own home. Once the new viewing platform was completed, a webcam was installed that looks over the primary feeding area.

Free of charge and available 24/7, the webcam can be accessed at www.gaylordmichigan.net/get-outdoors/elk-viewing-in-the-gaylord-area/.

The Pigeon River Country State Forest

The majority of our area's free-roaming elk herd calls the Pigeon River Country State Forest home. Stretching over 120,000 acres through three counties, this habitat consists of both managed open areas and natural forests. Through cutting timber, planting crops and controlled burns, the Pigeon River Forest creates unspoiled surroundings for these creatures.

Several elk viewing areas have been established within this natural habitat. These are not the only sites where you can see elk, but they are located in known elk-gathering spots. Most viewing locations are accessible by road, but some may require walking or hiking. The official viewing sites are marked by the DNR, although elk range far and wide in the area and may not always be present. The best viewing is done from your car since elk are accustomed to seeing cars. Use binoculars or spotting scopes for best results and do not approach elk. Despite their generous size, they are timid animals and will not tolerate much disturbance.

Spectacular Viewing Areas:



1. The small, cleared parking area and field on Fontinalis Road, about three miles north of Sturgeon Valley Road near the Cheboygan County line.
2. At the DNR-signed elk viewing area on East Sturgeon Valley Road, about eight miles east of Vanderbilt.
3. Less than one mile north of the Osmun Road and Clark Bridge Road intersection in the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

Those interested in observing elk can receive maps and information on popular viewing areas through the Gaylord Information Center at 319 West Main St. or online at www.gaylordmichigan.net.

History of Elk in Michigan

While many visitors to the Gaylord area enjoy catching a glimpse of our prestigious elk herd, few know the local history of these magnificent animals.

Once native to northern Michigan, elk went extinct in our region in the late 1800s. Our current free-roaming herd can be traced all the way back to 1918, when seven Rocky Mountain elk were relocated to the Gaylord area from the western United States. After growing steadily to near 1,500 elk in the early 1960s, their numbers plummeted to only 200 in the mid-1970s due to poaching and reduced habitat quality.

Over the past four decades, extensive public and private wildlife management has greatly contributed to the success of the current elk population. An aerial survey in 2016 found an estimated population of 1,300 animals, which makes this one of the largest free-roaming elk herds east of the Mississippi.



Elk are so revered in the Gaylord area that they were adopted as the county's official wildlife mascot in 2025. A resolution to recognize elk as the official wildlife mascot of Otsego County was voted on by the governing Boards of the Gaylord Area Convention & Tourism Bureau, City of Gaylord, Otsego County and Downtown Development Authority. Upon passing, an elk seal was created and is being used to help promote one of the area's most unique assets.

For additional information on elk viewing, please visit www.gaylordmichigan.net.