



Mark Clarke / WV DNR

Elk River Wildlife Management Area is the oldest wildlife management area in West Virginia, purchased by the Conservation Commission as a game refuge in 1938. Elk River WMA surrounds Sutton Lake, and is divided into the Holly River section, and the Elk River section. The Holly River section is north and east of Sutton Lake, and is leased by the state of West Virginia from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Elk River Section is mostly state owned, and lies south and west of Sutton Lake. The WMA is composed of 17,184 acres in addition to the 1,440-acre lake. The Elk River section includes steep hills, ridges and benches, while the Holly River section consists of forested hills and open farmlands. Remote coves in the Elk section contain old-growth forests, with trees 40-60 inches in diameter.

*Eastern hog-nose snake.* Mark Clarke / WV DNR

Viewing information: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers controls the lake level. The winter level is 27 feet lower than the summer level. White-tailed deer and black bear are year-round residents of Elk River WMA. In spring and summer, nesting songbirds are seen and heard. Eastern bluebirds, scarlet tanagers and blue jays add color to the summer forests. The state bird of West Virginia, the northern cardinal, lives here all year. Bald eagles and ospreys frequent Sutton Lake. Wild turkeys forage regularly in the open woods and clearings, and waterfowl are common on the lake and river. The Eastern hog-nose snake lives on the area. In 1990, the DNR Wildlife Resources Section released eight male and 10 female river otters here and nearby in Kanawha County. Otter watching is most successful between dawn and mid-morning.

Directions: Both sections are easily found from the Flatwoods exit off Interstate 79 traveling south on State Route 4. To go to the Holly River section, after 1.1 miles turn left onto Route 15 and proceed to the Holly River section of the wildlife management area. To reach the Elk River section, continue on state Route 4 to Sutton, turning right at the town square, and crossing the bridge onto county Route 19/40. Travel about four miles, then turn left on county Route 17 (Centralia Road). After three miles, enter the WMA along Wolf Creek. The geographic center of West Virginia is located behind the Wildlife Manager's residence. The residence is located on Stony Creek Road, which is a left turn off of county Route 17, seven miles from the intersection of Route 17 and Route 19/40.

Camping: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains campgrounds on both sides of Sutton Lake, adjacent to the WMA. Camping is not permitted on the WMA.

Ownership: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 304-765-2816 or 304-765-2705; West Virginia Division of Natural Resources 304-924-6211.