

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

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On Point

by Mike Hayden



FREE PARKS for ALL KANSANS!

I have talked about the value of our state parks and the need for stable, long-term funding for our state park system in presentations and discussions all around the state. By the time you read this, the 2006 Legislative Session will be underway, during which the department's primary initiative will be seeking such a funding solution. Rather than repeat a message I've already given in this column, I am going to let those who most value our state parks speak:

"Our state parks provide areas of recreation and enjoyment for us as citizens of Kansas. Placing high value on these assets and investing in them will enhance our own quality of life as well as attract visitors who will contribute to our economy. The parks provide venues for events that bring thousands of outsiders here to see the beauty we enjoy every day. It surprises a lot of folks!"

Judy Billings, Executive Vice President
Lawrence Chamber of Commerce and
Convention and Visitors Bureau

"Growing up with a state park in my backyard has given me a great appreciation for the Kansas Wildlife and Parks system. I know of no place more affordable or accessible than Elk City State Park. My family can be on the lake or at the campgrounds in minutes and feel like we are totally away from the hustle and bustle of our regular routines. You can travel anywhere in the world and not find a more pleasant environment for the whole family than the Kansas state parks system."

Mark Woods
local business owner
Independence, KS

"Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks provide Kansans with safe, family-friendly outdoor locations for activities that ultimately increase the quality of life for residents and park visitors. Parks also provide the critical elements needed to maintain the integrity of our State's natural resources. Jayhawk Marina at Hillsdale State Park has already encountered lower than anticipated visitation due to user fees imposed on marina visitors. Implementation of a permanent, sustainable mechanism for state park funding — other than increased visitation fees — is needed if our state park system wishes to remain a shining star."

R. Scott Robbins, CEO
Jayhawk Marina, Inc.
Hillsdale State Park

"At Lovewell State Park we see a place where nature and family values can be enjoyed without interruption. Families come into our marina together, anticipating what they will do. It's a pleasure to wait on happy, relaxed visitors. State parks offer one of the last affordable retreats for families."

Gary and Lyndell Charbonneau
Lovewell State Park
Marina Concessionaires

"Meade State Park is an oasis in the desert of southwestern Kansas where nearly 300 species of birds can be seen at one time or another during the year. We operate a bird banding station at the park and utilize live birds for school education programs. Each year students from all over southwest Kansas and the Oklahoma panhandle come to Meade State Park for educational programs and to enjoy the unparalleled beauty of this small park. Meade State Park is one of the most diverse and beautiful parks anywhere!"

Tom and Audrey Flowers
Meade, KS

Obviously, parks are important for social, economic, and conservation reasons. However, despite their tremendous value to the state, long-term funding has been uncertain. For the past decade, the amount of State General Fund (tax money) support for the parks has decreased from 60 percent of the parks operating budget in 1995 to less than 16 percent in fiscal year 2005. The Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission proposed increasing fees in the fall of 2004 to compensate, but the proposals were strongly rejected by the public and were not implemented.

Currently Senate Bill 87 is on the State Senate's Calendar. This funding proposal would add a \$4 fee to the motor vehicle registration fee you pay to get your license plate. Money generated by this proposal along with user fees would fund the state park system without reliance on the State General Fund. Your license plate would then allow you entrance to all state parks, year-round, as many times as you like — FREE!

I urge you to contact your local legislators and encourage them to support funding of the state parks.

2006 Photo Issue

Another year has zipped by more quickly, I think, than the last. It seems easier than ever to allow ourselves to be caught up in the hurry and urgency of everyday life and before we know it, another year has come and gone.

However, we can and must take a few moments and savor the past 12 months, the good and the not so good. I'm sure we can all find things that made our lives better. And for those who, like me, count spending time in the Kansas outdoors as something that makes our lives better, I offer you this photo issue.

Photographer extraordinaire Mike Blair made special effort this past year to capture moments of not only stunning beauty, but of fellow outdoor people enjoying their parks, wildlife areas and lakes, too. He also caught some images of some of the hard-working department staff, who make what we love possible and more enjoyable.

Allow yourselves a few moments to leisurely thumb through this issue and live vicariously through the images. You've earned it. And before you know it, spring will be here and it'll be time to start again!

Mike Miller



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Front Cover: Nothing can brighten a winter day like the sight of a male cardinal. Mike Blair photographed this beauty with a 600mm lens, f/9.5, 1/500th sec. **Back:** A big catfish brings a smile to this 3rd grader's face at a school fishing picnic. Photographed by Mike Blair, 55mm lens, f/11 @ 1/250th sec.



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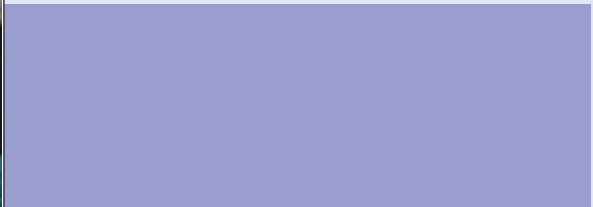


Winter

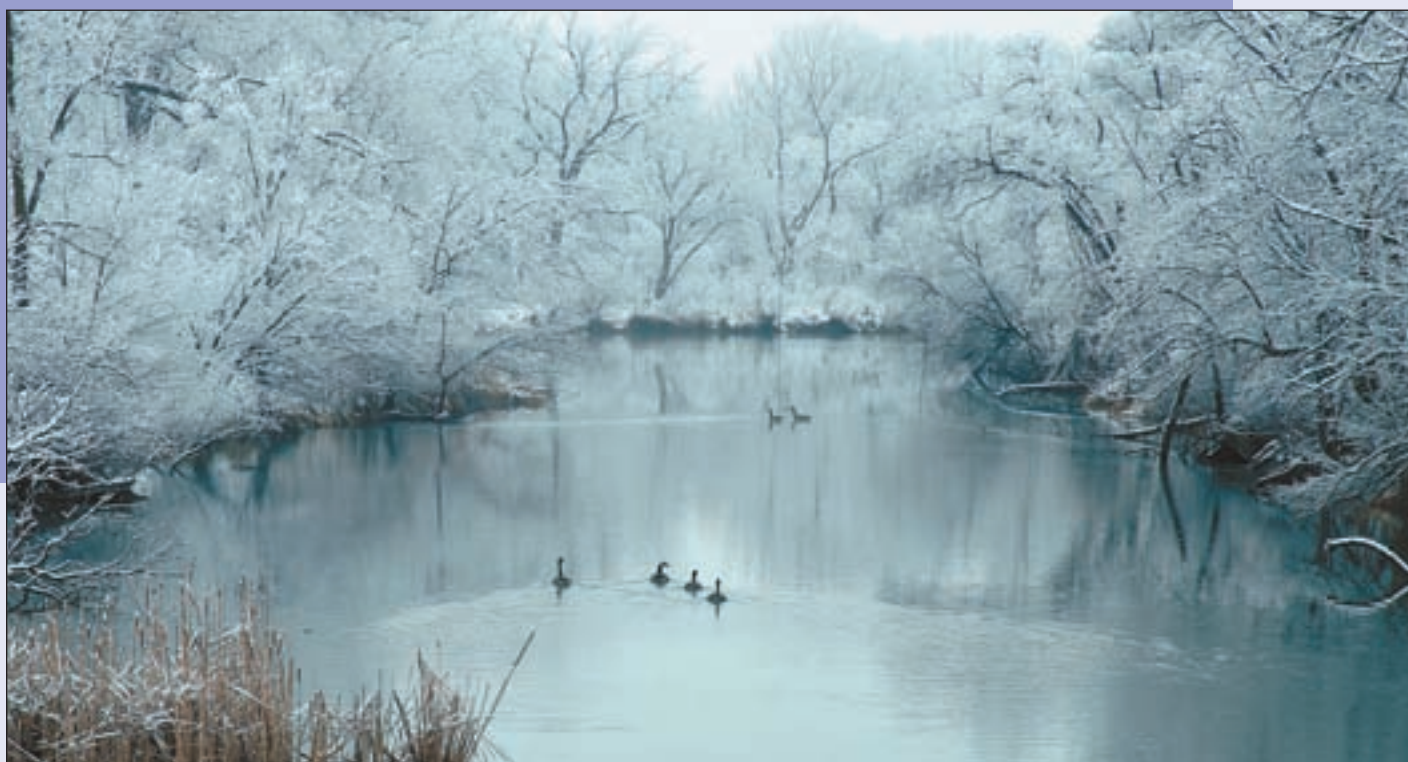
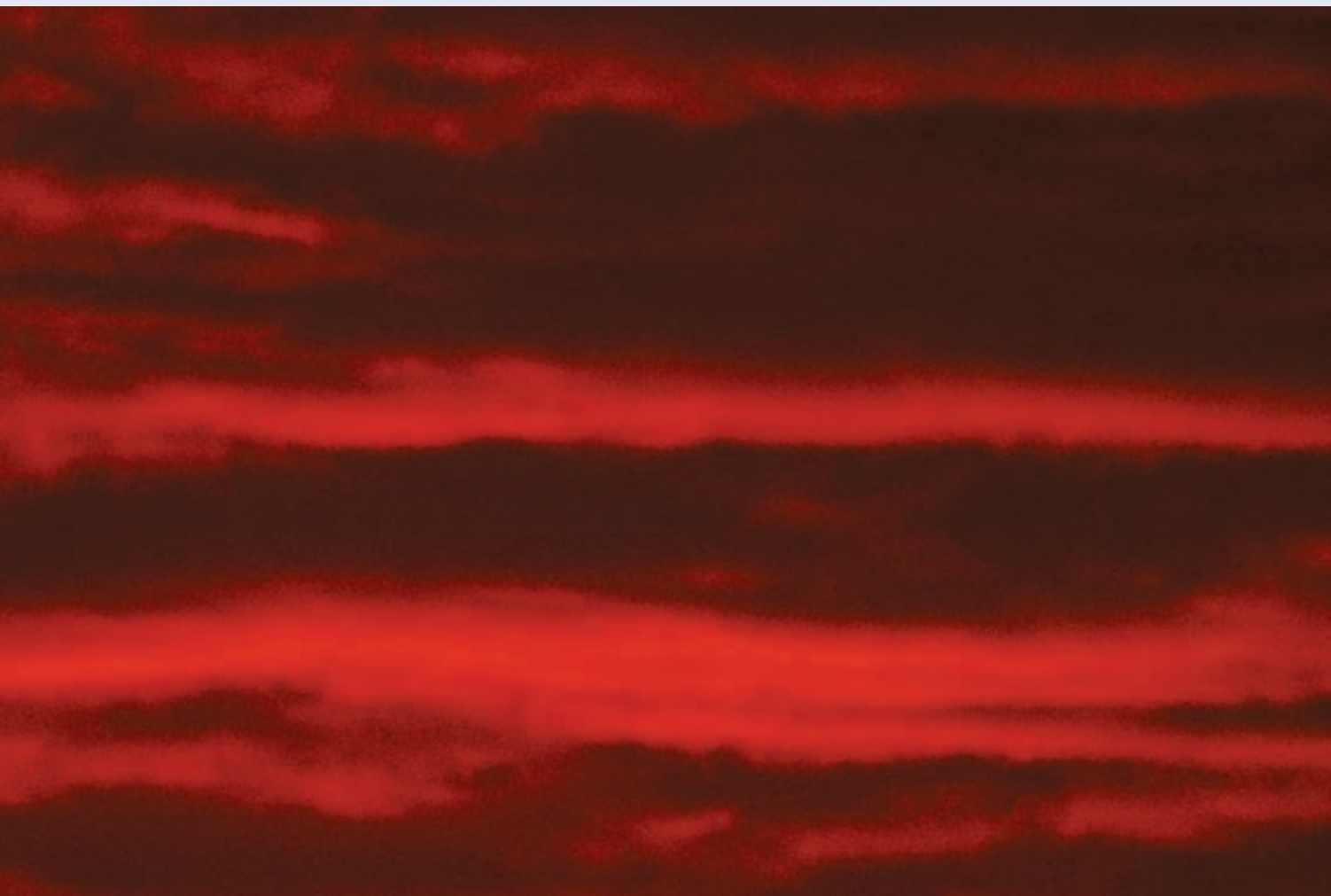
















Spring

















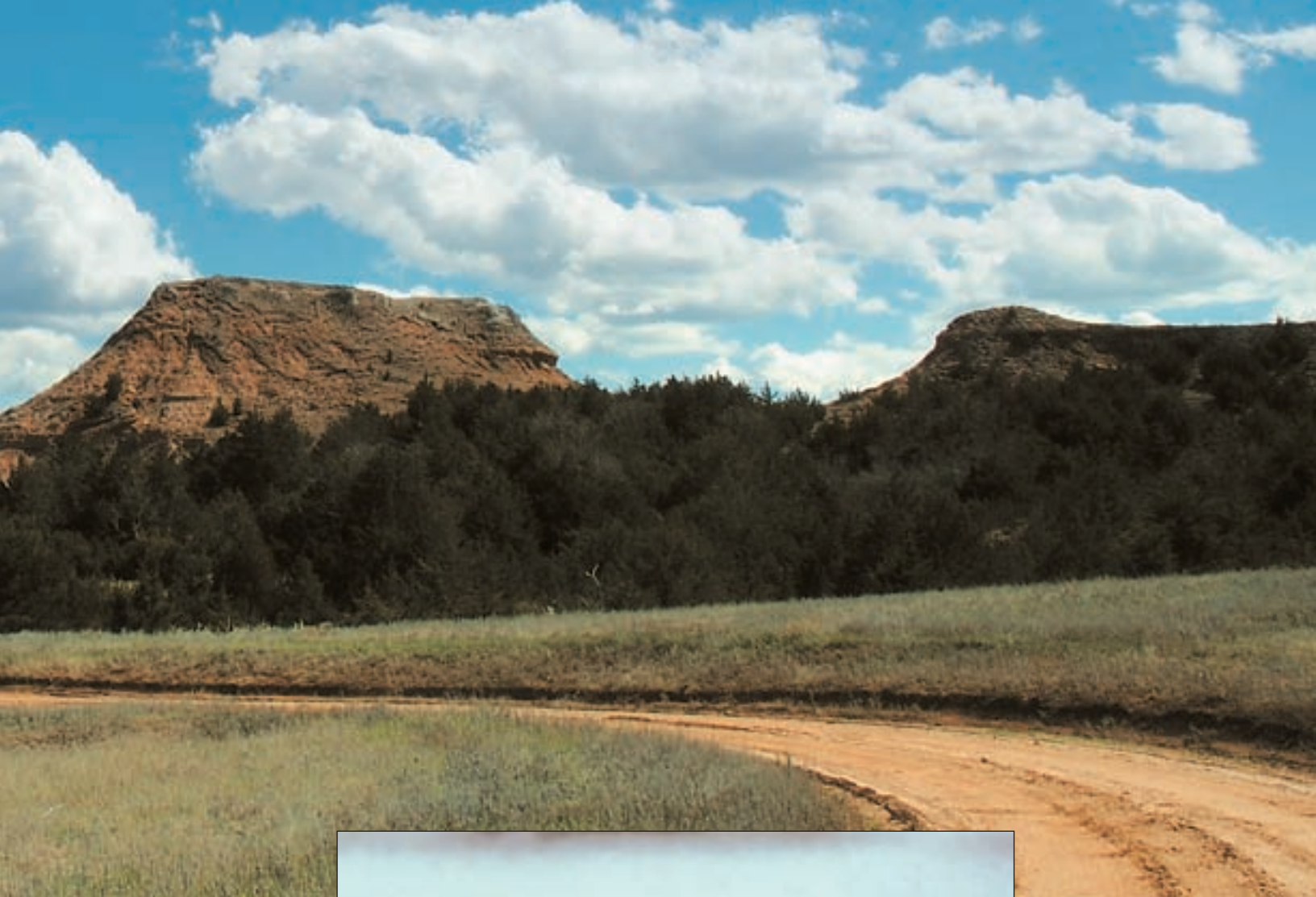


Summer



























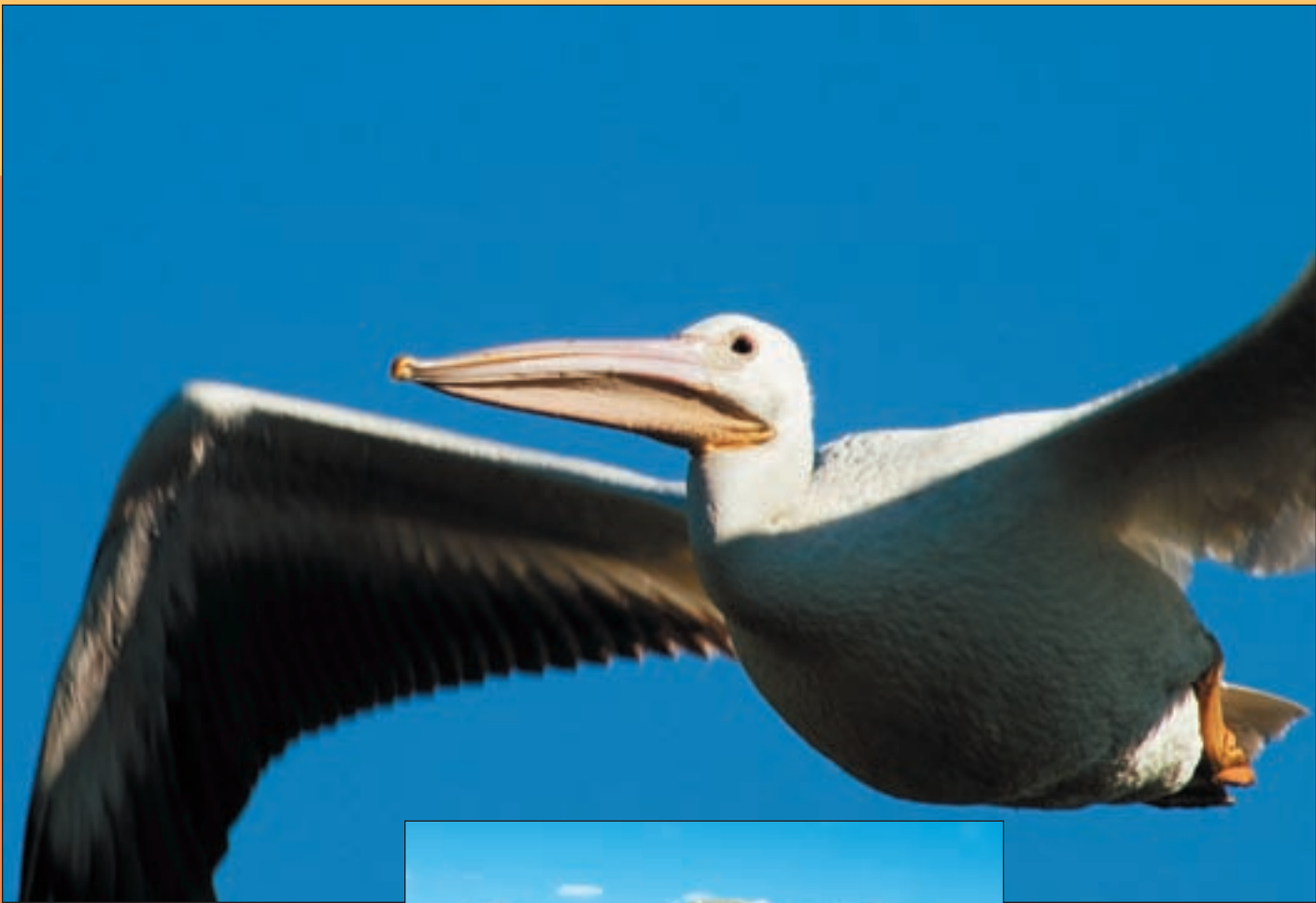


Fall









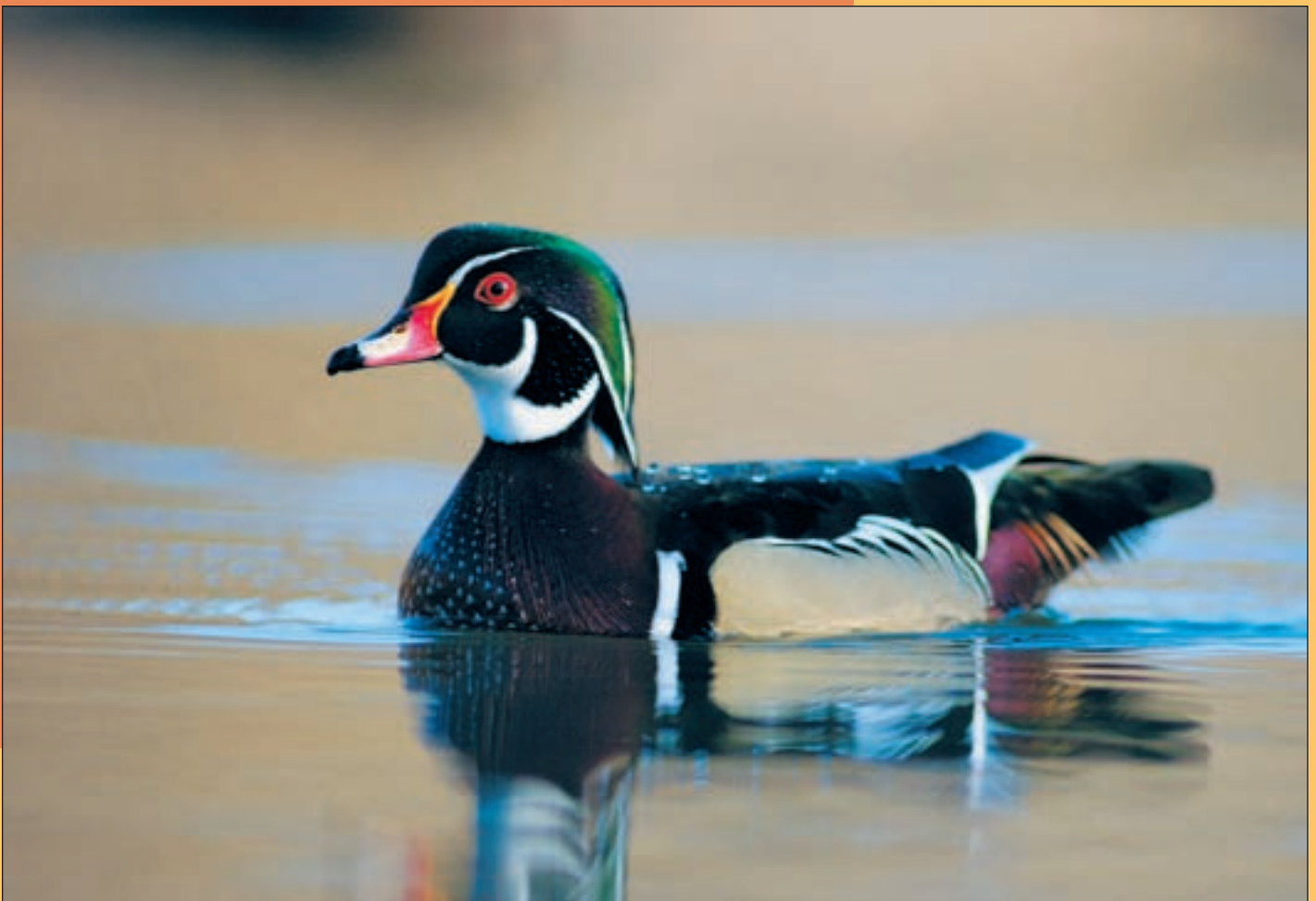


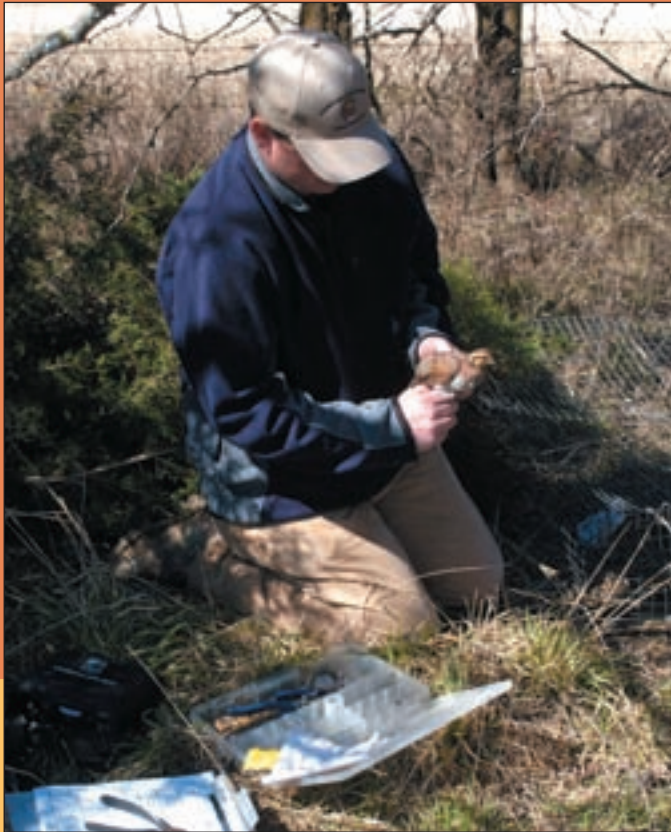














Backlash

by Mike Miller

Reasons You're Lucky To Live In Kansas (or wish you did)

Kansas has been in the news lately, mostly the brunt of jokes surrounding our Board of Education's science standards. And there was the Subway advertisement that included the phrase, "Another reason you're lucky not to live in Kansas." I don't take the media's views on our state too seriously, because I don't believe those in the entertainment, excuse me, television news business, are in touch with the real world. I have a little different take on life in the Sunflower State.

If Kansas is the laughing stock of the U.S., you wouldn't know it by listening to the nonresident bird hunters who visited in November and December. I'm sure there were some who were disappointed, but most had the time of their lives. Most have been coming for years, and a year with great bird numbers, like this one, is icing on the cake. I recently visited with a hunter from Missouri who had just returned home from a Kansas hunting trip. He was inquiring about the season dates for next year so he could make plans because, as he put it, "we had the most amazing hunting experience."

I know the hunting has been good this year, but I also know that an "amazing hunting experience" occurs because of more than just lots of pheasants. My perspective is unique because I hear from such a wide variety of people, but the longer I'm in this job, the more convinced I am that lots of birds or monster bucks or lunker fish aren't really the necessary ingredients to enjoying the outdoors. To be sure, seeing 100 pheasants flush from the end of a CRP field adds measurably to one's enthusiasm for how successful a hunt is. But I'm more convinced than ever that the opportunity to hunt and the people you're with are the real key ingredients.

We hunt Kansas for lots of reasons. And we all remember those trips when lots of birds were seen, limits taken, or a huge buck appeared. However, my most indelible experiences are those with family and



friends. People are the only connecting threads in those great memories.

When a nonresident inquires about hunting in Kansas for the first time, questions focus on bird populations, public land, best areas, and access to private land. Those who've been coming to Kansas for years still call, but they are much less concerned about bird numbers. They like to hear the numbers are up, but what they're most looking forward to is reconnecting with people — their hunting partners and their Kansas friends — and reconnecting to a prairie land they've grown to love.

Kansas is a great place to live and play outdoors for lots of reasons. We have plenty of wide-open spaces, great sunsets, world famous bird, turkey and deer hunting — and great people. It will always come around to the people.

I won't get into the debate on creation or evolution, nor will I worry if Kansas is considered backward. It works pretty well for me, and according to the many visitors I talk with, it works for them, too. ♡

