

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

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KANSAS *View*

by Robin Jennison



Trapped In Tradition

One evening I was sitting in the kitchen, staring out the window and drinking ice tea. I was having a high-level meeting with myself about serious world issues — should I clean my shotgun in preparation for the upcoming bird season or see if the fish were biting at a local farm pond. Fishing was beginning to win the argument. The last time I cleaned a shotgun, I ended up purchasing a new similar shotgun (to utilize the parts value of the old shotgun that I couldn't piece back together).

A frantic knock on my door totally derailed my train of thought and ended any potential action, which I feel could have probably changed the world. It further steeled my resolution to keep my garage door shut during the day for the common good of — well, me.

It was my next door neighbor. Jim is a little high strung on his calm days. That day he was a Category 2 hurricane. I've always thought it was my scientific duty to raise that level to a 4 or 5. On this day, it would be an easy task. It seems his wife had decided to have a garage sale the next morning, and she had further decided that Jim was going to contribute by way of selling certain sporting good items that she felt were no longer of any use to him. I was chuckling to myself as he listed his most precious outdoor items that were banished to the discount bins. Wives can be real "fun erasers" if they feel like the mates' fun interferes with quality time spent together.

Two items jumped out as he rambled through his list. When he said bamboo fly rods I felt my jaw go slack, and maybe a little drool slipped out of the side of my mouth. "Are you drooling, Robin?" he asked. "No, No. Had some dental work done today," I quickly recovered.

Here's a little known fact about items that wives

pick out for garage sales: if they have already picked an item to sell once, it can be pulled out, but they will find it, and it will be re-consigned, usually at a lower price. I kept that in mind as Jim talked.

The other intriguing items were traps. I hadn't known Jim to trap in recent years, and I knew that across the country the number of trappers was declining. Low fur prices have made the long hours of hard work required in trapping less attractive. It's a shame, too. Trapping has always been a valuable conservation tool in the management of furbearing species, and the heritage and history behind it takes us back to the earliest days of the exploration of our country.

But as Jim talked, I learned that he was still passionate about trapping. He had trapped all types of furbearers in Kansas. He had treated his traps with dye and wax. He had skinned, fleshed, and stretched his fur and marketed it. Trapping is an activity that still shows the true pioneer spirit of America.

I truly was fascinated by his testimonial, and I was so inspired that I requested we run a trap line this winter. I wanted to experience the thrill of catching a 'coon and to feel just a little like Jim Bridger. Jim said he would tutor me before leaving for home to check and make sure that the wife hadn't further desecrated his memories.

I went to my bedroom and set the clock for 5:30 a.m. I wanted to hit that garage sale first thing.

"Why are you getting up so early?" my wife inquired.

"Because Jim doesn't." Already I could see the hurricane warnings going up. ♡



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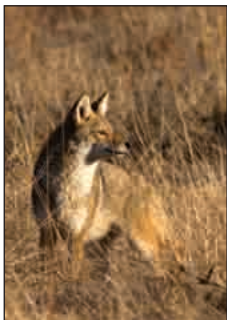
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Front Cover: A Kansas coyote scans the landscape for its next meal. Mike Blair snapped the photo. **Back Cover:** Winter fishing can be excellent for open-water species like white bass and wipers. Mike Miller snapped this photo of a fat white caught from Milford Reservoir on a cold November day.



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Editorial Creed: To promote the conservation and wise use of our natural resources, to instill an understanding of our responsibilities to the land.

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ATTRACTING BLUEBIRDS

Editor,

We were elated to get a nesting pair of bluebirds in our house after trying for a couple of years. They are such a delight to watch. I set my camera on a tripod in the house and took some pictures, some in a dogwood tree that was just leafing out and some on the house. I plan on having enlargements made of a couple of them to hang in our home. Maybe you can use them in the magazine sometime. I thoroughly enjoyed your photographic issue. It was awesome!

Thanks for a great magazine,

*Clint Langstraat
Wellsville*

LIKES MINED LAND

Editor:

Just a quick note on Mark Shoup's article about the Mined Land Wildlife Area. I hunt all over Kansas, both on my own hunting lands and state land. The Mined Land WA is my absolute favorite place to hunt. Mr. Riggins has done an excellent job with the area. I had no idea about all the obstacles he has had to deal with. Great job to all involved. It is an outdoorsman's paradise.

*Brian Spini
Lane*

HUNTING with Kent Barrett HERITAGE

Experience

As I have grown older, I've learned that things my elders tried to teach me while I was young really are correct. This was brought home to me yesterday when I read an article on a whitetail deer vision research project at the University of Georgia. The research was being conducted to reduce the number of deer-vehicle collisions. But its application to deer hunting is fascinating.

Not all eyes are created equal, and structural differences can mean functional differences. Human eyes see a wide range of colors because of three types of cones (photoreceptors) in the eye. One type is sensitive to light in the very short blue range, one is sensitive to middle lengths in the green range, and the other is sensitive to light in the long red range. Deer have only two types of cones. They lack the cones in the long red-orange range. Deer have an oblong pupil with the distribution of the photoreceptors on the retina in what is referred to as a visual streak. Deer also lack a color pigment in the lens that acts as a UV light filter. Human eyes have this filter to protect the eye from UV light damage that other-

wise could cause blindness. Deer don't live long enough to get cataracts. Deer see 20/200 – legally blind, they have reduced depth perception, and cannot change focus as objects get nearer.

You may ask, "How does this affect me, the deer hunter?" First, deer see at least some color. They can't pick out a red tomato on a green vine as red appears as black. A hunter orange vest would not cause alarm as it would be seen as gray or black, but a blue shirt would stand out. These vision characteristics explain some other deer behaviors. The broad band enhances surveillance of a broad area, increasing ability to detect movement while providing better night vision. Deer are more active at night because they can see in the dark, and they may not move out of the road because they don't perceive the vehicle as getting closer. Yikes!

So Grandpa's red and black, plaid hunting jacket would appear to a deer as shades of black or gray. The color or pattern of camouflage clothing is less important than minimizing movement. Sit down and be still was the right call. Not washing your hunting clothes each time you come home from the hunt was sound advice. To a deer, the UV brighteners in today's laundry detergent make your clothes shine like velvet Elvis under a black light. Bottom line: get out there, wear your hunter orange and enjoy the hunt! Grandpa knew what he was talking about.

NEW TNC STATE DIRECTOR

The Nature
Conservancy 

Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has named Rob Manes the new Kansas state director of the conservation organization. Before attaining this position, Manes spent six years as TNC's director of conservation for Kansas, where he was responsible for establishing conservation easements with private landowners, overseeing management of all TNC-owned properties in Kansas, ecological planning for all Kansas priority regions, and leading collaborative efforts for renewable energy and agricultural conservation issues.

Manes brings extensive experience in natural resource management, having spent nearly 20 years with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and five years with the Wildlife Management Institute in a variety of leadership positions. He is originally from Pratt and received his bachelor of science with a biology emphasis from Kansas State University in 1982 and master of environmental science from Friends University in 1991.

Former state director Alan Pollom assumed a new role with TNC as senior conservation specialist for Kansas and the Central U.S. Division. In his new position, Pollom will focus on cross-border conservation planning and strategy relating to preservation of the Flint Hills tallgrass region, as well as representing TNC as a major stakeholder in wind energy issues.

—KDWPT News

Birding in Kansas this fall and winter should be very interesting. The drought that plagued much of our state the past year has made conditions difficult for birds in Kansas, whether they are year-round residents, migrants passing through or winter visitor. Crop failure, sparse vegetation, dry marshlands and various other difficulties will impact all Kansas wildlife species this winter. The southern and south-western sections of Kansas will be fairly inhospitable, while northwest and northcentral parts of the state that received ample precipitation should have decent habitat and food available.

The Christmas Bird Count events this year and early next year should provide a good measuring stick as to what these varied conditions mean for wintering. The official Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season runs from December 14 through January 5 each year. Most of the larger counts in the state are turned in to the National Audubon Society for publishing and are conducted in the first couple of weeks of the count period. Many of us who do multiple counts will drag it out, doing a final count for Audubon up to the last day possible. The Kansas Ornithological Society will publish CBC data from Kansas efforts for at least one and probably two weekends after that, giving some of us who stay busy with other CBCs a little extra time to survey some more of our favorite areas. Check out the web site, www.ksbirds.org for more information on Kansas Christmas Bird Counts.

I have some concern for what we will find (or not find) in some of my favorite survey areas, including Quivira NWR, Cheyenne Bottoms, the Cimarron National Grasslands at Elkhart, and a few others. Quivira has suffered through a really rough patch of weather, with very little measurable rain for most of this year. As I write this, the Big Salt Marsh has been totally dry for a couple of months and a recent rain of a couple of inches probably did not even fill the cracks in the ground. Waterfowl and crane migration has just begun, and my guess is that those species' migration patterns will shift east this year. Hopefully, they will find more favorable habitat conditions at some of the reservoirs that were not adversely affected. Cheyenne Bottoms will offer some habitat because of management capabilities that allow water to be stored and pumped into pools. The Cimarron National Grasslands has been in extreme drought this year, and with other complicating factors, including untimely fires and high winds, that habitat

BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

has been dramatically altered. I imagine birds will be very hard to come by in the whole southwest part of Kansas this fall and winter.

Even though it's been a year for weather extremes, including record stretches of 100-plus-degree days, violent storms, and hail, there will still be birds showing up here in Kansas. How long they stay or what they will find when they get here is another matter. The conditions in Oklahoma and Texas are even worse, so it will be very interesting to see what happens over winter and into the return spring migration. From information I've seen, whooping cranes could be in for another major set back on their wintering grounds of the Texas Gulf Coast. Drought conditions there have caused

another poor year for blue crab and a significant reduction in wolf berries, both of which are important to cranes. Mortality may be high for this species that is in a very precarious position already.

Even though this has been a doom-and-gloom writing, I have to remember that birds are resilient. They have evolved to withstand many climatic variations, one extreme to another. For most of our species, this is a bump in the road that hopefully will not last too long or be disastrous. I do wonder how much a species such as the whooping crane can take, though. We keep putting more pressure on them with cell phone towers, wind turbines, and power lines thrown up as potential obstacles in migration. I hope that more can be done as far as research

of placement of these structures and efforts to minimize potential negative impacts on this species. I was thrilled to be able to see 76 of these majestic birds in one day a couple of springs ago at Quivira, but I fear that will not be something repeated in my lifetime.

I'd encourage all of you interested in birds and bird watching to get out and enjoy what this time of year brings. Even if bird numbers are down, there will still be plenty of opportunity for fresh air, exercise and fellowship among friends. I hope to see many of you in the field!



POSITION ON LESSERS

Editor:

I am wanting to know what Kansas' stance is on the lesser prairie chicken becoming listed as threatened or endangered. Furthermore, is Kansas working on any type of Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCA/A) or similar document to help prevent listing? I spoke briefly with Dave Chadwick in Boise, Idaho, at the last Western Governors Wildlife Council meeting, but I didn't get his email address.

*Dewayne Miller
Junction City*

Dear Mr. Miller:

KDWPT has not taken a public position on the proposed listing rule be developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the lesser prairie chicken. However, we did support a letter written by the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) to the USFWS opposing their decision to move forward with a proposed rule.

In my personal opinion, a federal listing will hamper our ability to conserve lesser prairie chickens in Kansas by negatively affecting our relationship with private landowners and potentially limiting the amount of funding available for conservation. A listing will also provide the USFWS with little regulatory authority over the issues that are really negatively affecting populations in those areas where they are declining (i.e. inadequate fire frequency and grazing practices on private land).

To date, we have not developed a CCA/A for Kansas. I personally don't think they provide much benefit to the conservation of the species. The private landowners who typically enroll in a CCA/A are those people who are already managing their properties in a ben-

IT'S THE LAW

with Kevin Jones

WEAR that PFD

Laws are enacted to protect the common, public good. This may be accomplished with statutes or regulations, depending on the significance of the need. Most of the laws enforced by KDWPT officers are regulatory in nature, directing the season dates for hunting or fishing or the bag and creel limits. These laws were enacted to ensure the proper management of our wildlife by regulating human activity.



Another function of the law is to direct our activity to protect individual and public safety. Usually we, as a society, prefer to exercise our individual freedom of choice and conduct our lives accordingly. However, there are situations where the need may be so high and the means of protection too often ignored that creation of a law requiring a certain safety measure is enacted. An example is the regulation that requires personal flotation devices (PFD), or life jackets, to be accessible to all adults onboard a boat and that children 12 and under wear them.

At this time of the year, we are deep into the hunting season, and the fun and excitement of the summer's recreational boating has past. So why talk about a boat safety now? The answer is simple. Even though recreational boating is not common in late fall and winter, boats are frequently used for hunting. That fact that people are now hunting often causes them to overlook the fact that while they are in a boat, they are boaters first and hunters second.

Boating accidents occur during the fall and winter months, and it's not uncommon for our officers to learn that PFDs were not accessible. Apparently, victims of these accidents are not thinking water safety first; after all, they are going hunting, not waterskiing. Boating safety is even more important during this time of year because cold water is deadly.

Today we have a number of life jacket options available. We are no longer restricted to the bulky, oversized equipment of the past. Inflatable life jackets are hardly noticeable to wear, particularly when worn over a coat. Yes, they do cost more than the older styles, but compare their cost to the value of a human life, particularly your own. (See Boat Safe on Page 13) Accidents by definition are not expected, and being immersed in cold water compounds the risk to life. Actually wearing a life jacket is the best insurance to surviving an unexpected fall into the water. Just remember, if you are wearing an inflatable life jacket, it needs to be worn on the outside of your coat.

Be assured, KDWPT officers enforce boating laws throughout the year, and our zero tolerance of PFD violations will be enforced. We do this for two reasons. First, our officers do not like to have to recover downing victims and inform the family of this tragedy. And second, but most importantly, they want to ensure that everyone comes off the water alive and gets safely home to their family.





AN INTRODUCTION TO THE INFLATABLE PFD

While there are many choices when it comes to picking a PFD that will keep you safe on the water, the best personal inflation device (PFD) is the one you wear. For some activities, foam vests are a great choice, but a less familiar option is the inflatable PFD. They are US Coast Guard-approved and come in a variety of styles and colors – even camouflage.

An inflatable PFD is a more comfortable and lightweight option than the traditional buoyant life jacket. When deflated, they are compact and extremely comfortable to wear. They are inflated using a CO2 gas cylinder, which can be manually deployed, though some styles will automatically inflate when immersed in water. Once the PFD is inflated, you will see the yellow bladder stored inside the outer lining. Once inflated, this bladder will give you twice the buoyancy of a foam vest and will turn most wearers face up in the water. Most traditional life vests will not do this.

There are two types of Inflatable PFDs—automatic and

manual. The automatic inflation system PFD has a dissolvable tablet that will trigger the CO2 gas cylinder to deploy within seconds of being immersed in water. The manual inflation system PFD works by pulling down sharply on the ‘Jerk to Inflate’ tab on the bottom of the device. An automatic device can also be inflated manually, and all inflatable PFDs can be inflated at any time by blowing into the oral tube.

Which type of inflation mechanism you choose will depend upon what type of activity you will be participating in. Manual inflating PFDs are perfect for when there is a reasonable chance that you will end up in the water, but you’re confident that you’ll be able to pull the inflation cord when you need it. For example, paddling, kayaking, or wade fishing. Automatic inflating PFDs are your best choice if you don’t expect to end up in the water, but want the confidence that if the unexpected happens, your PFD will inflate when immersed – a few examples would be sailing or powerboating.

Once the PFD has deployed, the CO2 cylinder and the tablet (for automatic devices) are easily replaced by following the instructions on the owner’s manual. Re-arming kits are available where you purchased your PFD or online. It is recommended you always carry a re-arm kit with you in on the boat case you need to use your PFD. There will be a green dot showing on the inflation mechanism once you have replaced the cylinder properly. If a red dot shows, you have a used CO2 cylinder or no cylinder in your PFD.

Inflatable PFDs are only approved for use by persons 16 years of age or older who weigh at least 80 pounds. The sizing is considered universal and will fit up to a 52-inch chest. They are not approved for use while water skiing, tubing, riding a PWC, and most whitewater activities. Inflatable PFDs are only recommended for persons who know how to swim. For more information in all types of personal flotation devices, contact Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism at 620-672-0770 or visit www.kdwpt.state.ks.us.



official way for chickens. To increase lesser prairie chicken populations, those landowners who are managing their properties otherwise would need to enroll.

There really is no incentive for those people to enroll in the program because they realize that a listing won't even give the USFWS the authority to regulate their standard farming/ranching practices. However, CCA/As might be used as a justification by the USFWS to not list the species, and for that reason we might create one, but their value to conservation of the species is very small, in my opinion.

The best programs for increasing lesser prairie chicken numbers are the programs administered by state wildlife agencies, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Farm Service Agency because they do provide landowners with real incentives to improve their management (i.e. cost-sharing, sign-up incentive payments, and/or annual rental payments).

—*Jim Pitman, small game research coordinator, Emporia*

AN UNUSUAL TEAL HUNT

I really enjoyed your article about teal hunting in the recent issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. It reminded me of a rather unusual hunt that occurred about 40 years ago. At the time, I was living in Ponca City, Okla. A friend and I decided that we should go to the Cheyenne Bottoms for a hunt. He had a Cessna 174 (I think) and a small motorcycle which he had cut in half so it would fit in the luggage compartment. Flanges had been welded to the cut pieces so it could be bolted together.

We flew up and landed at a grass strip south of Hoisington and then took back roads to the NW backside of the Bottoms. We had nothing except our guns and ammo with us. However, there were teal everywhere and I think we limited out in

FISH SQUEEZER

with Tommie Berger
(Retired but not yet tired)

The Rewards of Working With Youth

Well, my last day for real work for KDWPT was September 16, but it seems that there are lots of things to do since my schedule did not just end that day. I had the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop on my agenda for the weekend of September 24 and had a wonderful time those three days teaching the ladies how to fish and identify a lot of our Kansas critters. I intend to keep that program on my agenda indefinitely if they will continue to put up with me.

In fact, there are a number of things that I intend to keep on my agenda. I intend to continue to work with my kids, whether it is Outdoor Adventure Camp, 4-H Sportfishing or Shooting Sports, Archery in the Schools, Pheasants Forever youth shooting and fishing programs, local T-ball and baseball, or any other youth activities that come along. These youth programs have been my bread and butter all through my career, and now I can devote more time to the work that I love!

I have been asked the question, "Why do you like working with kids so much?" I guess it is the satisfaction of seeing kids enjoy the great outdoors as much as I do; seeing a youngster catch their very first fish, harvest their very first pheasant or deer, or shoot their very first prairie chicken; seeing youngsters grow up into responsible sportsmen and women; or seeing a few grow up to pursue a career working as a biologist or an environmental lawyer. If I have even so much as barely touched their life in such a way as to have a minute part in their being a

better citizen and sportsman, it has all been worth it.

Nick Lawson from rural Sylvan Grove is a good example of why I do what I do. Lawson just got back from the 2011 State 4-H Shooting Sports Tournament that was held October 1. He participated in the archery portion of the tournament.

Nick started out in my 4-H Shooting Sports archery program back in the mid-2000s when my son Fritz was old enough to get into shooting sports, and I started an archery program for the 4-H kids in Lincoln County. He had a real interest in archery, as well as shotgun shooting, and at 16 he is now well on his way to being a top shot. He is now qualified to shoot at the 4-H National Shooting Sports Match, which will be held next June in Nebraska.

My local archery program has grown to not only 4-H youngsters but non 4-Hers, as well. I have several young ladies who will compete well in archery tournaments if they get the opportunity. Nick has participated in the 4-H Sportfishing program, as well as Pheasants Forever youth hunts. I was on a mentored hunt with Nick when he killed his first whitetail deer, a nice buck taken off the Wilson Wildlife Area.

If you adults and mentors think that you are not making a difference, think again! Get involved with any type of youth education, whether it is Hunter Education, Bowhunter Education, Furharvester Education, Aquatic Education, PASS IT ON activities, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, whatever. The rewards are immeasurable!

2011 State 4-H Shooting Sports Tournament

Nick Lawson

Recurve Senior Division:

3-D 1st Place
FITA 9th Place
Overall 2nd Place

Nick Lawson

Open (Compound) Senior Division:

3-D 1st Place
FITA 3rd Place
Overall 1st Place

Nick Lawson

Kansas State 4-H 2011 Archery:

Top Shot Award

Letters . . .

30 to 40 minutes. We arrived back in Ponca about four hours after we left. Truly one of the most unusual hunts I have ever been on.

*Bob Ohmart (grew up in Scott City),
Katy, TX*

TRAIL CAMERA PHOTO



Wanted you to have this picture to use as you please. This was taken off my trail camera at my farm, near Lebo.

*Jerry Clark
Lebo*

On The Web with Mark Shoup

GLOBAL WARMING EXPLORE THE UNKNOWN



GLOBAL WARMING SOLUTION?

Last September, National Public Radio dedicated almost 20 minutes to a report about a man who is building a machine to remove carbon dioxide from the air. The project seemed pretty far-fetched to me. After all, how many and how big would such machines have to be to have an impact? And on what energy source could they run that wouldn't ultimately pump more CO2 into the air?

I didn't hear these questions addressed, but my immediate thought was, "Why don't you just plant a billion trees to suck the carbon dioxide out of the air, with oxygen as the byproduct?"

A few days later, I ran across a website from our friends at The Nature Conservancy (TNC) called "Plant a Billion Trees." Talk about serendipity. Always on the cutting edge on conservation issues, TNC may have hit on something.

To find out more, visit www.plantabillion.org.

EXPLORE THE (PREVIOUSLY) UNKNOWN

For anyone interested in the wide diversity of life on Earth, www.ARKive.org will surely satisfy. Most people are concerned about endangered species, and this website has an entire section dedicated to these rare creatures. But the "Featured Species" section – a slide show displayed prominently on the home page – is dedicated to those previously unknown creatures that have been discovered just in the few years of this young century.

You've likely never heard of them: kipunji (a Tanzanian monkey), pygmy three-toed sloth, Goodman's mouse lemur, Fuerte's parrot, Kaempfer's woodpecker, Gunnison sage grouse, Tiger's treefrog, and Triton bay epaulette shark are among the fascinating creatures previously unknown.

Viewers are introduced to the site through a video by famous British broadcaster and naturalist Sir David Attenborough. Videos are the site's strongest medium. One of the most fascinating is of a large gull's tenacious (and successful) attempt to steal fish from an osprey.

While some of this site may be politically controversial (such as the "global warming" link), this should not deter anyone who loves wildlife from visiting what may rightly be billed as "the ultimate audio-visual guide to life on Earth."

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"... AND NO RUBBING OR SCRAPING FOR TWO WEEKS."





Sharing The Harvest

Each year, fall brings the hope of wild game meat in the freezer for the hunter. Hunters pursue game, including doves, ducks, geese, quail, pheasants and deer as much for the food quality of the meat as for the recreation. In recent years, I have mainly pursued deer for the meat and to fulfill my interests in experimenting with different dishes. It has been several years since I've downed a limit of ducks, geese or pheasants. My bird hunting usually results from a buddy's invite, and we usually decide who takes home the birds so there is a meal. A neighbor recently brought me a limit of teal he managed to scratch down. Sharing game is a great tradition, but it's important to know how meat has been cared for. You'll be feel confident with the meat quality if you know the hunter or if

you were along on the hunt. However, each meat and season has its own set of precautions that should be followed.

For example, I am cautious about deer shot during warm weather or one that was not cleanly killed. I want to know how quickly the animal was field dressed and the meat cooled. And I may not be interested in sharing upland birds with hunters who have been in the field all day. It's possible that some of those birds could have been dead for up to nine hours, laying in the back of a pickup while they traveled country roads from field to field.

On the other hand, if they offer me some pheasants that had been field dressed and packed away in a cooler of ice with a leg still attached, I jump at the chance. I appreciate getting deer taken during the rifle season in December or the January antlerless-only season when the weather is typically colder. But I don't commit right away. They will likely want to share the story of the hunt, and you can get any

information you need to decide if the meat will be fit to eat. If I decide to take a deer, I will offer and prefer to field dress it myself. Ducks and geese are generally harvested during cold weather that will help cool the meat.

Each circumstance should be evaluated. Don't eat any game that may be questionable. I don't accept frozen meat unless I know and trust the hunter. You know nothing about how frozen meat was handled post-harvest, and likely the hunter's version of the hunt may be vague in respect to meat care. I most certainly will not do a community grind of deer meat. Any problems someone else may have had, you now have.

It's great to share game, but remember that when giving or receiving game meat, a dated note with the donor's name, address, license or permit number and signature must accompany it.



FISHIN' with Mike Miller

What's So Hot About Winter Fishing?

Saying that fishing can be hot during the winter is kind of an oxymoron, and it's certainly an overused cliché. But the truth is that a serious angler should never overlook fishing when the weather turns cold. It may be daunting to consider launching your boat when the air temperature is below 40, but when conditions are right, you can be comfortable, safe and catch lots of fish.

Until last winter, most of my winter fishing trips targeted crappie. When the water temperature cools below 50 degrees, crappie gather in large schools and hang out along creek channel ledges and deep-water brush piles. Finding fish is the challenge but once they're found, you can often catch them. Winter crappie anglers depend on good sonar equipment and usually fish jigs and jigging spoons vertically. When it's good, it's really good.

However, crappie aren't the only fish winter anglers enjoy. Last November, a friend and I launched a boat on a foggy, freezing day at Milford Reservoir. Dressed more like duck hunters in our insulated jackets and bibs, we cast along the south side of the Wakefield Causeway. I'd heard fantastic fish

stories last fall about the wiper and white bass fishing at Milford, but I was worried I'd waited too long. I didn't have to worry much longer. On my fifth cast I hooked a very nice white bass. From then on, we caught large white bass and wipers at a regular pace. It was some of the best fishing I've experienced in terms of numbers and quality.

Dressed appropriately, we were comfortable. And best of all, we had the lake to ourselves. Everyone else was either bird hunting or had sense enough to stay indoors.

White bass and wipers will often move to the upper ends of lakes in late fall, following warmer water and shad. And there is a theory they are beginning to stage for the spring spawning run that's several months away. The key seems to be rip-rapped or rocky shorelines where creeks and rivers flow in. We were casting eighth-ounce jigs tipped with white twister-tail grubs, but I'll bet anything white, silver or chartreuse would have worked.

If you decide to give winter fishing a try, dress in layers and dress for weather much colder than you expect. Even when the forecast says 50 degrees, it will be colder on the water. And wear a life jacket. Not only will it help with insulation, it might save your life if you fall in icy water.



PROFILE:

with Mark Shoup

Leonard Jirak

Leonard Jirak grew up on a farm north of Marion Reservoir, near the small town of Tampa. One of 12 siblings, he worked on the farm as soon as he was able, tending milk cows, hogs, beef cattle, and some 3,000 laying hens, all by hand. Despite this hard work, before Jirak was even in school, his father made time to carry him on his shoulders while he checked trap lines, and he took the kids fishing every Sunday. When he got old enough, Jirak ran his own lines every winter.

"Kids were considered an asset, and we had a lot of work to do," he explains. "But as soon as I could trap on my own, that's what I did every winter before doing chores. That was my only income until I left home."

Hunting and fishing were integral to Jirak's youth, as well. "That was a fair part of our food for the table. We hunted for recreation and food. We ate a lot of rabbits and squirrels and a ton of fish. But I didn't see my first deer in Kansas until I was in high school."

In 1968, he graduated from Center High, a consolidated school near Rock Springs. "I didn't know there were careers in fish and wildlife management," he explained, "but that's what I wanted to do. I didn't really want to go to college because I didn't think my grades were good enough. Then I took the ACT and SAT tests and scored really high, so my counselor thought I would do okay in college. My college counselors encouraged me to study biology. And the coaches encouraged me to try out for football, so I got an academic scholarship and a scholarship to kick and play offensive guard at Emporia State."

Jirak did well in college by studying hard. In 1972, the Kansas Legislature passed a bill called SASNAK (Surging Ahead for Skippers, Nimrods and Anglers of Kansas), which provided funding for the state to hire 60 new fisheries and wildlife biologists. In July of 1973, while working on his masters degree, Jirak was hired by the Kansas Fish and Game Commission (now KDWP) as a fisheries biologist at Webster Reservoir. He would stay with the agency until his retirement last Sept. 16.

"I did it for 38 years, 38 wonderful years," he says fondly. "What a privilege and what a responsibility."

Not to say that Jirak cruised through college and into a dream job. Along the way, he took jobs in a packing plant and in power line and bridge construction, and he was a graduate student naturalist at the Roth Natural History Reservation near Emporia for 1 1/2 years.

Because of a downsizing, the Webster job only lasted about three years, and Jirak was transferred to Hartford, near John Redmond Reservoir in Coffey County. (Today, Jirak has 120-acres and a home next to the lake.)

"The move was fine with me," he said. "I love field work. That's all I ever wanted to do, and it's good for the area. I figure my position has about a \$2.5 million-a-year economic impact."



Jirak cites his father as his greatest influence. "His mentoring was great. He didn't coddle us, but he spent time with us and taught us about the outdoors. I carried that influence to do a good job in my career. I wanted to produce better fishing, to make a difference."

When asked what Jirak considers his most satisfying accomplishment, he doesn't hesitate. He refers to Coffey County Lake:

"My biggest accomplishment that is going to have the longest impact is getting a nuclear power plant cooling lake open to public fishing. That took 20 years, but it will be there for generations. We have a great relationship with them, and it's the best public relations project they've ever had. They were just talking about it when I came down there, and it took from 1976-1996 to get it opened.

"I started by eliminating rough fish from 10-acre construction ponds and restocking them with bass, bluegill, and crappie. These were flooded when the Wolf Creek Power Plant went into operation in the early 1980s, so the lake was well-planned for a high-quality fishery before it was ever filled. When it did, the brood fish were already there. Now it's one of the best fisheries in the state, and it was no accident. The power plant folks were great to work with. It's been good for both of us.

"One of my favorite things was giving kids a good place to fish," he adds. Jirak has developed seven special kids fishing ponds. On one kids pond several years ago, 160 kids caught 2,960 pounds of fish in two hours, the biggest a 22-pound channel cat.

Although Jirak has retired, he's still concerned for the agency to which he gave 38 years. "I hope we keep the resource in mind and try not to commercialize it. I hope we keep resource management our priority. I hope our mission statement remains to manage the wildlife for the people of Kansas, period."

It's been a great ride for Jirak, and as he moves on to other endeavors, he reflects fondly on his career. By the time of his retirement, Jirak was responsible for fish management on 20 impoundments.

"My whole life history is good. I thought I was a dummy in high school because my grades were just average. I just rode to Emporia State with a friend who was being recruited, and the counselors there ended up convincing me to go to college, too. I was scared because I didn't do well in high school, but I got really good grades in college. So this is what I was destined to do. I'm just tickled to have had this opportunity."

Jirak's destiny was the Kansas sportsman's windfall. We wish him well.

HUNTING SPOTS

with Marc Murrell

Just Ducky!

Duck hunting has always been special to me. My first game bird ever killed with my dad was a pond-ridden scaup when I was 9 years old. Several volleys from a single-shot .410 did the duck in, and the mold was set.

One of the things I've looked forward to since becoming a father was introducing my twin boys, Brandon and Cody, to the world of waterfowling. Although they started hunting turkeys at 7 years old, I haven't been comfortable enough to let them swing a shotgun on flying game until recently. They've proven they're responsible and safe on several dove hunts the last couple years, so we've all looked forward to hunting ducks this fall.

We took advantage of the youth waterfowl season in the Low Plains Early Zone on Cheyenne Bottoms. There's something wonderful about that place, and I was excited to share it with my boys. Our first hunt was on the Saturday afternoon of the youth season opener. As we cruised through the marsh in our duck boat, the boys got a kick out of my Go-Devil mud motor as it propelled our boat through flooded vegetation and muck. Hundreds of ducks flushed, and my confidence soared. We finally decided on a hunting area and started pitching decoys and readying a make-shift blind.

Duck movement was slow at first, but

eventually the ducks started to move, and the boys got ready. Several dad-approved shots were missed before Cody connected first. He cleanly folded a bluewing teal and ol' Dad couldn't wait to retrieve it. It wasn't long and Brandon did the same thing on a tough crossing shot.

Duck movement got better as sunset approached. Both boys had opportunities, and Cody ended his day with three bluewing teal while Brandon managed two pintails and a couple bluewings. They probably only shot 20 times between them, a much better success rate than their dove hunting, which has been measured in boxes of shells, rather than singles.

"I like duck hunting a LOT better," Brandon said of the comparison. "Ducks are a LOT bigger, slower and easier to hit!"

They would have likely had more ducks, but Dad was in the decoys taking photos with only 15 minutes of shooting light left, legal and camera, as the sun set.

"You gotta be kidding me!" Cody hollered.

"What?" I asked was the problem.



"There are ducks landing right behind you, Dad!" he said. "Hurry up!"

The next morning brought 47 degrees and a brisk 15 mph wind, which made for a chilly ride into the marsh. Both boys shivered and were anxious for shooting time. Pre-dawn is magical in the marsh, and we had an impromptu identification-by-sound lesson. They learned the sounds of various ducks, coots and other birds.

As it got light, hundreds of ducks flushed from their flooded roosting areas. We watched most as they flew too high and fast for good shooting opportunities. We had enough birds give us a look, although the action wasn't as good as the night prior. But once again, they managed a few with Cody killing two bluewing and one greenwing teal and Brandon getting another pintail. The boys' first duck hunt was truly a big adventure and a rousing success.

It wasn't long on the ride home before they were nestled into coat-pillows and reclined seats and the snooze was on. As I drove, I couldn't help but feel truly blessed. I have two wonderful boys who enjoy the outdoors. I had looked forward to this moment for more than a decade and was thankful I could share my passion for duck hunting with both of them. I hope for many more hunts, and I hope they'll have the same opportunity some day with kids of their own.



The Price Of Recreation

The Parks Division just wrapped up a very difficult prime recreation season. Extreme heat gripped Kansas most of the summer and kept our customers indoors more than usual. Blue-green algae bloomed in many lakes, brought on by the extreme heat and lack of rainfall, causing restrictions on human contact with the water and keeping more visitors away. Coming at a time of budget cuts and rising fuel and utility costs, this reduced visitation restricted an already very tight Parks Division budget. Reluctantly, the division requested to increase the rates on utilities within the parks to keep pace with rising utility costs. At the October KDWPT Commission meeting, amendments to the regulations increasing utility rates and reducing the annual camping fee (to \$150 if purchased during the off-season) passed. The Commission also approved reduced rates at select cabins during January through March, as well as a pilot program to allow pets in a few cabins throughout the system.

The division is looking at a number of other options to continue to provide healthy, safe and low-cost outdoor recreation to the citizens of Kansas and visitors from other states. Many ideas are being considered, but will have to be investigated thoroughly to ensure that we maintain a balance that supports good stewardship. One of those options is to do away with the second vehicle permit, in preparation for a future restructuring of the vehicle permit fee system. This will be decided at the December Commission meeting.

To run state parks, there is a cost that the public rarely sees. Each park has much of the infrastructure of a small city: water, sewer and electric lines, roadways, sewer and water plants, recreation areas that need mowed, and public buildings that must be cleaned and maintained. Infrastructure requires regular maintenance that can be costly and time-consuming. We also must staff the park to provide essential customer and support services: people to process the site and cabin rentals, pay the bills, and answer questions; law enforcement patrols to ensure a safe experience; and maintenance workers to keep everything attractive to our visitors and running smoothly. Most of the time, these services are provided by a staff-to-visitor ratio that is one of the most efficient in the nation, assisted by a number of seasonal employees and volunteers. All are dedicated to providing a quality experience and keeping costs down.

However, compared to the cost of dinner and a movie for two, the cost of an entire weekend of camping in a Kansas state park is a bargain. A Kansas state park annual vehicle permit costs about 10 percent of what an average annual gym membership costs, but the park is open 365 days a year. But beyond the cash value of visiting a Kansas state park is the value to your spirit of being outdoors with the opportunity to connect with the natural environment, to share it with the people who mean the most to you, to move, to see, to hear, to touch, to feel, to dream. So take a child fishing and listen to his or her spin on the experience. Lay on the lakeshore and find shapes in clouds. Look up from your campsite and study the stars and wonder what's out there. See a bumble bee buzz around the wildflowers and understand how nature works or watch a hawk soar and imagine yourself with it. Get into nature, and see how much it gives back to you.

Prairie Dog State Park

by **Ron Kaufman**

Prairie Dog State Park at Keith Sebelius Reservoir west of Norton, in Norton County, hosts two vintage 19th century buildings - a renovated adobe house and Hillmon Schoolhouse, a one-room school.

The adobe house is the only one in Kansas on its original location and preserved as a museum. The house was probably constructed in 1892 by the John Spencer family. It was built with bricks formed from a mix of mud and straw, called adobe. A horse walking in a circular trench to which dirt, water, and straw were added was used to create the proper consistency. Once the adobe bricks were laid in place, they were covered with a smooth finish coat of adobe. The adobe is still visible on the interior walls.

The house remains in its original location. As the state park was being built, a volunteer group worked to preserve the building. They fixed the roof, walls, and windows, cleaned the interior, and furnished it with donated antique furniture. The Adobe Home has recently been extensively renovated. The grounds around the adobe house feature a wooden-wheel windmill, and a two-horse, dirt-moving wagon unearthed during the dam's construction.

Hillmon Schoolhouse is the second iteration of the school. The original was a combination dugout and log structure overlooking



the Sappa Valley in northwestern Norton County about 1 ½ miles south of the Kansas-Nebraska line. It had two windows, a door in the rear, and desks fashioned of wood slabs with pegs for support. The current building was built in 1886 about ½ mile south of the original. It hosted community, church and school events for many years. It was moved to Prairie Dog State Park in the late 1960s and was dedicated at its current location in September 1969.

Prairie Dog State Park is located about three miles west of Norton, south of US-36 Highway on K-261 Highway.

Go With The Flow

with Mark VanScoyoc

Kansas streams are more resilient than you might think.

As the cool fall weather helps us to forget about the scorching temperatures of this past summer, some may wonder about the lower levels of water in our streams and rivers and what effect this had on the fish and other inhabitants in these areas. Droughts have occurred in Kansas long before it was settled. While it may be uncomfortable and potentially disastrous for us, it is a natural occurrence that all life in the state has been able to endure and persist many times over and will into the future if given the chance.

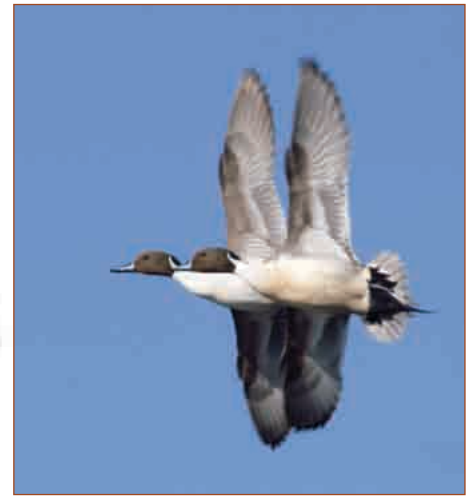
Biologists are often asked, "Where do the fish go when the water dries up?" Think of it this way, while water levels were receding everywhere this past

summer, fish and other aquatic organisms were retreating to deeper areas. These areas could have been pools in large river systems or simply areas where more water was available further into the main-stem. There is a misconception that freshwater mussels burrow into the mud and can "hibernate" indefinitely. While some of these mussels will attempt to move to better areas and hold out for better conditions, eventually they will die and end up as easy snacks for raccoons and other animals. It's important to remember that stream fish play a vital role in the life cycle of mussels, distributing them in preferred areas they would not be able to reach any other way (many mussel larvae will attach

to gills of fish during a stage of their life). So when the fish come back after extended drought periods, so will the mussels, as long as there are not other obstacles in their way. The dry creek beds today are healthy and virile streams of next year.

These dry stream channels can be great areas to explore. It gives anglers the opportunity to scout out fishing holes they wouldn't otherwise be able to see. The surrounding wooded areas are also potential havens for many species of birds for the birdwatcher to experience. Regardless, take the opportunity to get outside and enjoy these areas no matter if they're wet or dry.

"DOUBLE UP" FOR DUCKS



Ducks Unlimited (DU) is asking duck hunters and other waterfowl enthusiasts to "double up for the ducks" by purchasing two federal duck stamps this year.

This effort is part of a larger campaign currently being led by DU to increase the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25. Since 1934, the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the federal duck stamp, has added more than 5.3 million acres of waterfowl habitat to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The program is a highly efficient way for waterfowl hunters to invest in the future of their sport by conserving habitat; 98 cents out of every dollar is spent to acquire land and protect waterfowl habitat. Additionally, acquiring land under the National Wildlife Refuge System not

only expands habitat protection but also expands hunting opportunities and access.

While the federal duck stamp has proved a valuable conservation tool, its buying power has not kept pace with inflation. The cost of the stamp has not increased since 1991 – 20 years – marking the longest period in the program's history without a price increase. Simply put, \$15 is not what it used to be. Based on the Consumer Price Index, the stamp would need to cost \$24.26 today to have the same buying power that \$15 had in 1991. The total buying power of the duck stamp has decreased by 64 percent since 1991.

—KDWP News

Outdoor Youth Event a Success

The Council Grove 8th Annual Outdoor Youth Event was conducted on Saturday, Sept. 24 at Council Grove Reservoir. Fifty-one youngsters participated in this free opportunity to enhance shotgun, air rifle, and archery shooting and safety skills. The event is part of KDWP's "Pass It On" Program, designed to recruit and retain Kansas hunters, particularly youngsters.

The afternoon began with a hearty lunch provided by the Flint Hills Chapter of Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation (QUWF), followed by a brief orientation of the event.

Participants were then divided into four groups and allowed to visit each of four different stations for nearly one hour. Two of the stations provided students with opportunities to learn fun wing-shooting techniques with youth model 20-gauge shotguns and flying clay targets. A third station provided opportunities to

develop archery skills. At the final station, students shot air rifles at swinging metal targets.

Shotguns, shells, bows, arrows, targets, and eye and ear protection were provided by KDWP. Area KDWP staff would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their assistance with this successful event: Flint Hills Chapter of Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Ace Hardware, S&S Outfitters, Ray's Apple Market, and KDWP's "Pass It On" and Hunter Education Programs, Mike Miller, Wayne Doyle, Kent Barrett, Jesse Gehrt, Randy Benteman, Rick Sellers, Mike Lowry, Neal Whitaker, Rick Haug, C.L. Henton, Don True, Faron Adams, Chris Myers, Dennis DeLay, Allan Cashman, and numerous parents.

—Brent Konen,

Council Grove Wildlife Area manager, Council Grove



Special Hunts And Youth Seasons Introduce Youth To Hunting

The photo of Paige Burleigh, Altamont, speaks volumes. Paige was selected to participate in a special youth deer hunt on the Grande Osage Wildlife Area (land that once was part of the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant near Parsons) during the youth deer season in September. She spent 12 hours in a deer blind waiting patiently for her opportunity, and it paid off with a buck that any hunter would be proud to take home. Area manager Rob Riggan, who took the photo, reported that several of the young hunters took their first deer, and some even filled two deer tags.



New Marsh Enemy Number 1

Most visitors to Cheyenne Bottoms are of the opinion that cattail represents the most problematic invasive plant for the marsh. While cattail is a plant that presents its own management challenges, phragmites (*Phragmites australis*) has replaced it as “Marsh Enemy Number One.”

Phragmites, or common reed, is a rapidly expanding cane-like perennial grass that is found throughout eastern Canada and the United States. It is most abundant along the Atlantic Coast and tidal wetlands as far south as North Carolina. It occurs in all eastern states, and populations are expanding, particularly in the Midwest. It is most often found around ponds, lakes, sloughs, along ditches, streams and fresh or brackish marshes. The plant can spread by seed but most often by creeping rhizomes. Dense stands of common reed are usually on areas where soil has been exposed or disturbed. It can grow to as tall as 12 feet and form dense stands of up to 200 stems per square yard. Recent research has confirmed the existence of native North American plants and introduced European plant lines. It has been suggested that the invasiveness of phrag-



mites is attributable to introduction of more aggressive European lines.

So what is the problem with phragmites? The plant alters the structure and function of diverse marsh ecosystems by changing species composition, nutrient cycles and hydrological regimes. Dense stands in North America have been studied and found to decrease native biodiversity and quality of wetland habitat, particularly for migrating waders and waterfowl species.

Phragmites was first noted on Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area in 1996. A small clump of the plant appeared in the middle of a large, solid stand of cattail in Pool 2. In 1998 an infra-red aerial survey estimated that phragmites covered

0.6 acres of Cheyenne Bottoms. However, the very small clusters of the plants could not be detected. Every year since that first sighting occurred, efforts have been made to kill the plants using herbicides. That sounds like it would be a fairly easy goal – kill all the plants on a skimpy 0.6 acres. However, the plants are not that cooperative. The 0.6 acres is spread out over the entire pool in clumps varying in size from a few stems to some as large as a typical living room. In addition to the difficulty in finding them all, you have to be able to get to them. Many times the water is too deep for ground based equipment but too shallow for a boat and too big and far out to walk to and spray with hand equipment. In 2010 staff noted an enormous increase in coverage. In addition, water levels were such that few of the phragmites clusters could be sprayed by equipment available on the wildlife area. As a result, 2011 found us looking at a problem bigger than we could handle and still accomplish all the other work necessary to prepare for the fall migration. We were forced to call in the “air force.”

A helicopter was used for one day to spray clusters of phragmites we could not get to due to water conditions or simply being in the middle of huge cattail stands. These stands were located in all pools on the wildlife area, but mostly in Pool 2. The helicopter was more appropriate than a conventional airplane sprayer due to the small and scattered nature of the plants to be sprayed. Helicopters can move much slower and deliver herbicides to smaller targets with greater precision than an airplane. The staff sprayed as many of the clumps as possible using tractors and ATV's, and that effort, coupled with the helicopter work, amounted to an estimated 60 acres being sprayed.

We are hopeful we can keep up with the spread of this plant. Use of a helicopter may have to become a part of our tool box every few years, but we plan on doing the bulk of the phragmites control ourselves. Time will tell how successful we will be.

– Karl Grover, Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area Manager



Jim Glynn photo

The best times of your life just got less expensive



Mike Blair photo

He'll be 16 before you know it and off to college in the blink of an eye. Don't miss a single chance to be in the field with your son by purchasing a multi-year youth hunting license.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism offers resident multi-year hunting and fishing licenses for youth 16-21. For a one-time investment of \$42.50, you can give your teenager a hunting or fishing license that will last until they turn 21. A combination multi-year hunting/fishing license is \$72.50. (Regular one-year licenses are \$20.50, so if you buy your daughter the multi-year fishing license for her sixteenth birthday, you'll save more than a hundred bucks!)

And you'll be investing in more than time with your teenager. Your license dollars help fund Kansas' wildlife and fisheries management and conservation programs.

You can purchase a multi-year youth license wherever licenses are sold, through the website www.kdwp.state.ks.us or by calling (620) 672-5911.

Resident multi-year licenses are perfect for:

- ✓ Birthdays
- ✓ Graduations
- ✓ Holidays
- ✓ Special celebrations



2011 Sportsmen's

TURKEY

2011 FALL TURKEY:

- Season: Oct. 1 - Nov. 29, 2011 and Dec. 12-31, 2011; and Jan. 9-31, 2012.

BIG GAME

DEER:

- Youth/Persons with Disabilities: Sept. 10-18
- Archery: Sept. 19 - Dec. 31, 2011
- Muzzleloader: Sept. 19 - Oct. 2, 2011
- Early Firearm (Subunit 19 only) Oct. 8-16, 2011
- Regular Firearm: Nov. 30 - Dec. 11, 2011
- Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan.1 - Jan. 8, 2012
- Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season (DMU 19 only): Jan. 9 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Special Extended Firearms Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan. 9 - Jan.15, 2012 (Open for unit 7, 8 and 15 only.)

ELK (residents only)

Outside Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader: Sept. 1 - Oct. 2, 2011
- Archery: Sept. 19 - Dec. 31, 2011
- Firearm: Nov. 30 - Dec. 11, 2011 and Jan.1 - March 15, 2012

On Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader and archery: Sept. 1 - Oct. 2, 2011
- Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits: Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2011 Antlerless Only
- Firearm First Segment: Oct. 1-31, 2011
- Firearm Second Segment: Nov. 1-30, 2011
- Firearm Third Segment: Dec. 1-31, 2011

Antelope

- Firearm: Oct. 7-10, 2011
- Archery: Sept. 24 - Oct. 2 & Oct. 15-31, 2011
- Muzzleloader: Oct. 3 - Oct. 10, 2011

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

DOVE (Mourning, white-winged, Eurasian collared, and ringed turtle doves)

- Season: Sept.1 - Oct. 31 and Nov. 5-13, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 15
- Possession limit: 30

EARLY TEAL

- High Plains Season: Sept. 17-25, 2011
- Low Plains Season: Sept. 10-25, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 4
- Possession limit: 8

EXOTIC DOVE

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- Season: Nov. 20, 2011 - Feb. 28, 2012
- Daily bag limit: No limit
- Possession limit: No limit

RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- Season: Sept. 1 - Nov 9, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 25
- Possession limit: 25

SNIPE

- Season: Sept. 1 - Dec. 16, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 8
- Possession limit: 16

WOODCOCK

- Season: Oct. 15 - Nov. 28, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

SANDHILL CRANE

- Season: Nov. 9 - Jan. 5, 2012
 - Daily bag limit: 3
 - Possession limit: 6
- Online crane identification test must be completed before obtaining a Sandhill Crane Permit.

Calendar

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

DUCK

- Season: High Plains
Oct. 8-Jan. 2, 2012 and Jan. 21-29, 2012
- Season: Low Plains Early Zone
Oct. 8-Dec. 4, 2011 and Dec. 17-Jan. 1, 2012
- Season: Low Plains Late Zone
Oct. 29-Jan. 1, 2012 and Jan. 21-29, 2012
- Season: Low Plains Southeast Zone
Nov. 5-Jan. 8, 2012 and Jan. 21-29, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 6 (see regulations)
- Possession limit: twice daily bag limit

CANADA GEESE

- Season: Oct. 29-Nov. 6 and Nov. 9-Feb. 12, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 3

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

- Season: Oct. 29-Jan. 1, 2012 and Feb. 4-12, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 2

LIGHT GEESE

- Season: Oct. 29-Nov. 6 and Nov. 9-Feb. 12, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 20
- Conservation order: Feb. 13-April 30, 2012

SMALL GAME ANIMALS

SQUIRREL

- Season: June 1, 2011 - Feb. 29, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 5
- Possession limit: 20

RABBITS (Cottontail & Jack rabbit)

- Season: All year
- Daily bag limit: 10
- Possession limit: 30

CROW

- Season: Nov. 10, 2011 - March 10, 2012
- Daily bag/Possession Limit: No Limit

FISHING

TROUT

- Oct. 15 - April 15, 2012
- Daily creel limit: 5

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- Early Season (East Unit): Sept. 15 - Oct. 15, 2011
- Regular Season (East and Northwest Units):
Nov. 19, 2011 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Regular Season (Southwest Unit):
Nov. 19 - Dec. 31, 2011
- Daily Bag Limit: 2 (East and Northwest Units)
1 (Southwest Unit)
- Possession Limit: twice daily bag

PHEASANTS

- Season: Nov. 12, 2011 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Youth Season: Nov. 5-6 2011
- Daily bag limit: 4 cocks in regular season, 2 cocks in youth season

QUAIL

- Season: Nov. 12, 2011 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Youth Season: Nov. 5 - 6, 2011
- Daily Bag Limit Quail: 8 in regular season, 4 in youth season

FURBEARERS

TRAPPING

- Season: Nov. 16, 2011 - Feb. 15, 2012
Badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel.

RUNNING

- Season: March 1 - Nov. 1, 2011

BEAVER TRAPPING

- Season Dates (statewide):
Nov. 16, 2011 - March 31, 2012

OTTER TRAPPING

- Season Dates (statewide):
Nov. 16, 2011 - March 31, 2012
- Season bag limit: 2
Statewide quota of 100 otters. Otter harvest must be reported within 24 hours of take. Call 1-855-778-6887 to check status of quota or to report the harvest of an otter.

Call 'em Up





Mike Blair photos

by Kirk Miller
Greensburg

It can be difficult for Kansas hunters to decide what to pursue in November. Great deer hunting, tremendous bird hunting, fantastic waterfowl hunting, all beckon avid hunters. However, later in the winter, when seasons are waning or closed, there is still a great opportunity for predator hunting. Calling predators is exciting, and best of all, you can have the fields to yourself.

The holidays are over. The Christmas lights are neatly stored in the garage. Your freezer is full of venison, and there is a new set of horns hanging above the barn door. The pheasant dog is snug in a warm bed of straw dreaming of the November hunts you shared. It's the winter lull. Nothing to hunt and too cold to go fishing. What's a fella to do? How about some predator hunting?

Kansas offers sportsmen some of the most diverse and exciting hunting opportunities in the nation. Thanks to a diverse landscape, Farm Bill programs, healthy populations and an innovative access program, Kansas is a great place to hunt predators.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which created nearly 3 million acres of native grass in Kansas, has had a significant impact on all wildlife, especially in western Kansas. The dense stands of warm-season grasses that make up CRP created escape cover for a multitude of both game and nongame wildlife species across the state. The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's Walk-in Hunting Access Program (WIHA) has opened more than 1 million acres of private land to hunting, and much of it in western Kansas is also

enrolled in CRP. It is no secret that these tracts of land offer outstanding hunting opportunities for upland birds, deer and turkeys. However, predator hunters can also take advantage of the WIHA land.

There is no real secret to calling predators. Coyotes, bobcats, fox, racoon and even badgers can be successfully called in Kansas. In order to call and hunt furbearers, you will need a furharvester license. To call and hunt coyotes, you need a hunting license. If you were born on or after July 1, 1966, you need complete an approved furharvester education course, offered online through KDWPT's website – www.kdpwt.state.ks.us. Since coyotes are not considered furbearers in Kansas, there is no closed season. If you are just getting into calling, I would recommend that you focus

on coyotes.

By January, meals are getting hard to come by for the critters in the woods. Predators need fuel to get them through the cold nights of winter. It is not hard to take advantage of this need. Few predators will turn down the opportunity represented by the sounds of an easy



Beginning callers will have to decide what kind of call they want. Mouth calls are inexpensive and effective, but they will require some learning and practice. Electronic callers are more expensive, but they are more versatile and can play a variety of calls. Mike Blair photos

meal. The most commonly used sound is the cry of a wounded cottontail rabbit.

Beginning callers should start simple when selecting a call and there are two basic types to consider -- hand calls or electronic. Both have advantages and weaknesses. Like most technology, electronic predator calls have blossomed over the past 10 years. The choice of brand and sound is limitless. Electronic calls can be a good choice for the beginner who has not yet mastered the sounds of wounded prey on a mouth call. If purchased with a remote, the call can be set away from the caller, drawing the predator's attention away from the shooter. Electronic callers do have some drawbacks. They can be expensive, and you will need a battery or power source. Most electronic callers are heavy, which means extra weight that must be carried in and out of the hunting area.

Hand calls are the traditional method of calling predators. Learning to master correct sounds on a hand call can be quite satisfying. When selecting which hand calls to buy, two choices stand out. Open reed and closed reed calls are the most common hand calls available. Open reed calls get their name due to the fact that they have a sound reed that is not encased in the tube of the call. Open reed calls are slightly harder to master. You must manipulate your tongue pressure on the call to make the desired sounds. There are two major advantages to open reed calls: once you learn to use a quality call, you can create a wide variety of sounds, including wounded prey as well as coyote vocalizations; and open reed calls will not freeze up from continuous blowing during freezing conditions.

The easiest call to master is the closed reed call. It contains the sound reed inside the tube of the call. No manipulation of the mouth or tongue is required. The hunter



Rather than hiding behind cover, it's best to sit with cover to your back, breaking up your outline, as the author shows here. It's important to be able to see an approaching coyote before it sees you and to keep movement to a minimum. Kirk Miller photo

simply blows air through the call, and the correct sound is heard. The main drawback to the closed reed call is its tendency to freeze up in cold weather. Once the call freezes, your hunt is over until you have thawed it out. For the beginning caller, the closed reed call is the best bet.

An audio tape, video tape or CD can help a beginning caller learn the proper sounds, if you don't have an

experienced caller to help. Basic instructions include keeping your call series' short since a rabbit has very small lungs. It is best to blow the call in short, desperate cries.

Now that you've made your decision on which call you will buy and learned some basic calls, what's next? Most Kansas hunters already have the remaining gear in their closets. Camouflage clothing that will blend in with the late-winter

landscape is a given. Most predators have outstanding vision. You will want to include a facemask and gloves in your attire. I also have a small hunting seat that I carry to sit on. It seems like everything in Kansas wants to bite, sting, or poke you when you sit down. There is nothing worse than plopping down on a locust or hedge thorn in the

predawn of your hunt. I recently moved to southwestern Kansas, and I learned what sand burrs are on my first outing. East or west, a seat is a wise idea. You have a call and full camo, now you need to select a gun.

I have had countless youngsters and inexperienced predator callers ask me what gun they should buy. My response is usually, "What kind

of gun do you have?" There is a great debate about what guns work best for predator hunting. The focus of the best coyote gun debate usually revolves around fur damage; however, for beginners that shouldn't be a limiting factor. Really, any centerfire cartridge will work fine for coyote calling. If calling in heavy cover where shots are likely to be close, a shotgun is a good option, as well. My first called coyote was killed with a Savage 30-06. As I graduated up as a predator caller, I chose to go with a smaller caliber rifle for flatter shooting over longer distance. I now carry a Savage 110 in .223 caliber.

Call, check; camo, check; gun, check; now what? Let's go hunting! When I first visit with people about coyote calling, they usually respond with, "Yeah, I've tried it a couple times. Went out back behind the barn and blew the call, and nothing showed up." Actually, the setup for calling coyotes is the most important aspect of success or failure. All predators hunt by sight, sound and smell. When calling, you are focusing on the animal's sense of hearing, but if a coyote can hear the sound of a dying rabbit it will make every attempt to first visualize it, then smell it. The hunter should consider these things when selecting a stand location.

The following are the most important things to consider when deciding where to call. First, pay attention to the wind. Select a location that forces the coyote to come into the open in order to get down wind of your location. Estimate the location from which you think the coyote will come to your calling. I prefer a slight breeze when calling. Right to left breeze is most desired



Many of the Walk-In Hunting Areas are open through the end of January and can provide excellent predator calling opportunities. Bird hunting pressure usually drops off after December. Kirk Miller photo



as it is easier to swing to the left on a circling coyote for a right-handed gunner. Second, avoid facing the sun. Forcing the coyote to look into the sun gives you an advantage. Coyotes moving into the sun will stand out which gives the hunter the drop. Once you see the white patch of a coyote bouncing across the prairie, you will understand this principle. Seeing the wiley coyote before it sees you will obviously improve your chance of success. Use shadows to hide your location. Always setup in front of cover, never behind or in it. As long as you have something to break up your outline, you will be fine if you sit still. Movement on stand is a big reason for failure. Third, chose your entry into the stand carefully. Do

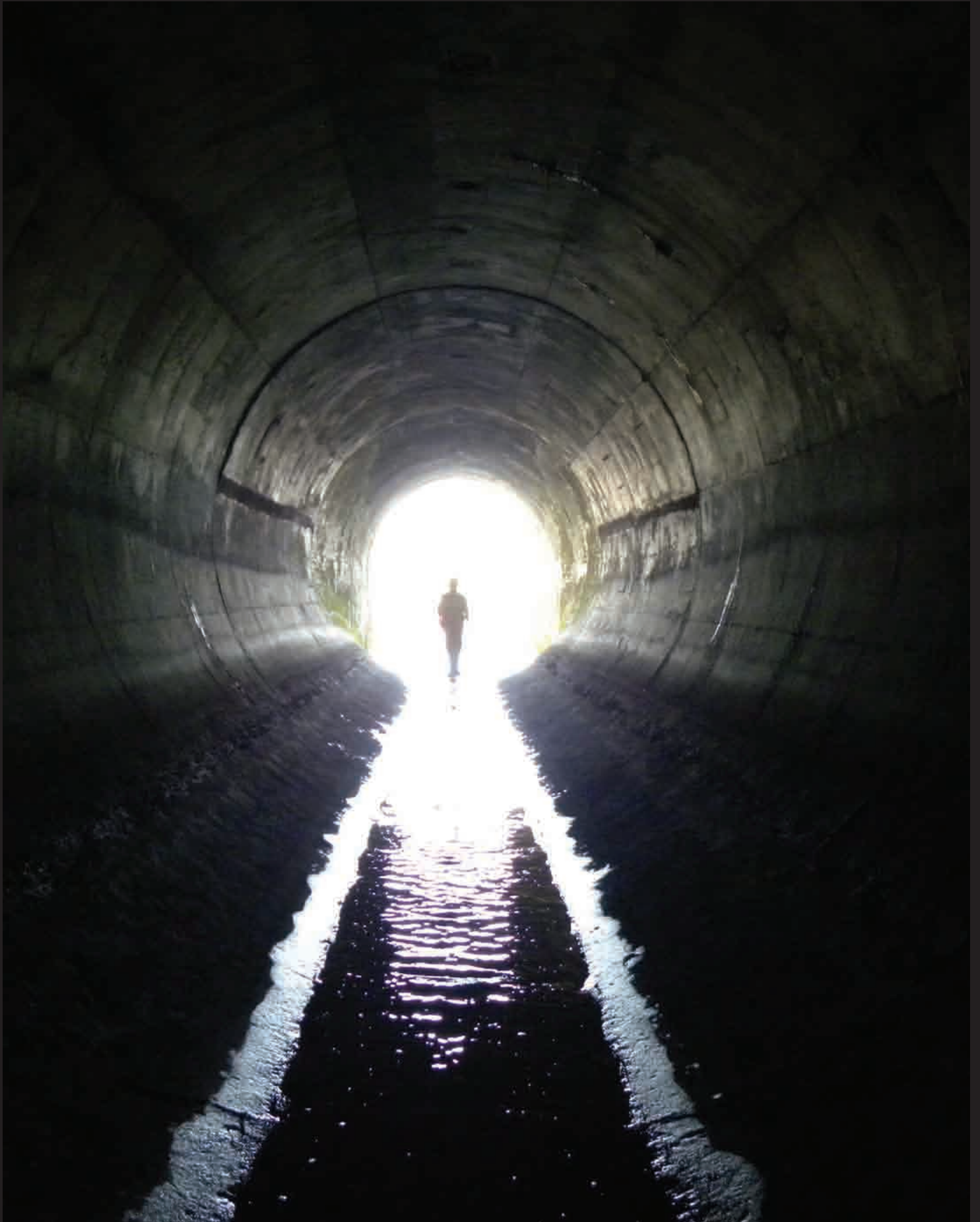
not blare the radio or slam the truck door. Walk into your location quietly. Try to find low spots on your approach to prevent being detected by coyotes within eyesight.

The last advice I can give is to acquire large amounts of land to hunt on. A coyote can hear your calls from more than a mile. In open country, it is not uncommon to bring a coyote from vast distances. A good rule is: the more open the country, the greater distance you should plan between calling stands. Since moving to western Kansas, I've found great hunting on WIHA, which offers almost limitless opportunities through the end of January when the leases end. Fortunately, coyotes can't read WIHA signs. Even though they may be bedded or patrolling land adjacent to the public tract, they will have no problem coming to the hunter who has strategically located a good calling stand on public ground.

I have been a lifelong resident of Kansas, and I enjoy the abundance and diversity our state has to offer its sportsmen. Through extensive wildlife management and practices by our Department of Wildlife, Kansas hunters are privileged to have long seasons and generous bag limits. I look forward to upland bird season and deer season each fall. Spring will find me chasing tom turkeys, hunting morel mushrooms or maybe angling for spawning crappie. One thing is for sure though, when Mother Nature brings the cold still days of winter there is one place you will always find me: chasing predators! 🦊



The author's son, Payton shows a bonus bobcat that came to a call on a WIHA tract in December (above left). Charles Thronesbery shows off a Sumner County coyote. photos by Kirk Miller



JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

Okay, maybe not to the center of the earth, but the author did travel into the bowels of the Kanopolis Reservoir Dam. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers drained the stilling basin and was conducting an inspection of the dam's outlet structure. Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism biologists assisted by salvaging game fish stranded in the basin.

text and photos by Mark Shoup
associate editor, Pratt

I didn't expect to find myself beside an underground ocean in a forest of redwood-sized mushrooms haunted by prehistoric creatures, but the journey deep into the outlet conduit to the gates beneath Kanopolis Reservoir Dam had much the feel of entering a volcanic tunnel leading deep into the Earth.

It began with a September invitation from Dan Hays, operations project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Kanopolis and Wilson reservoirs, to visit the Kanopolis facility while a KDWPT crew cleared the stilling basin of fish, so the Corps could clean it prior to a periodic inspection.

On the morning of Sept. 26, KDWPT fisheries biologists were just unloading their gear as I arrived on the road above Kanopolis Stilling Basin. Corps staff were already in the basin, shoveling rock and debris from about a 14 inches of water. A large diesel engine pumped water from a sump in the lower left corner of the basin. A few curious "civilians" leaned against the fence above the basin, watching the ant-like activity some 40 feet below.

Hays met me at my pickup with the requisite hardhat, which I donned as we walked over the fence to watch. Below us, Corps staff continued to shovel and scrape the basin walls, and our guys, seines over their shoulders, worked their way up the basin to where the water level stopped and a freshly-made wooden ladder — a foothold for walking up the outlet tunnel (the "conduit") — was laid out on the basin floor. Wakes from fish large and small darted around and between the legs of these intruders.

The action was rapid, with little wasted movement. Recently-retired fisheries biologist Tommie Berger was on hand to assist biologists Dave Spalsbury and Mark Shaw and their aides, Don Bradbury and



Ryan Pinkall. One crew quickly stretched a large seine the entire width of the basin nearest the conduit while another placed a second seine in front of a row of large concrete baffles.

The Corps sump pump helped, lowering the water level. As the first seine was pushed toward the

row of baffles and the second seine stretch out on the other side, fish fins were exposed, and another crew began scooping them up with dip nets.

While all this was happening, the crane went into action, slowly lowering a large bucket into the basin. The bucket quickly filled with large channel catfish, white bass, and a few wipers and small flatheads. Then it was lifted up and swung 180 degrees to the waiting fish truck. After the first dump, biologist Dave Spalsbury reached into the tank and quickly plucked out a 5-pound channel catfish for me to photograph.

"They'll lower the bucket in and out until they've gotten most of the sport fish, and then they'll start on carp and other rough fish," Hays explained. "We've had several people express an interest in taking the rough fish, and what your folks don't give away will be buried."



In the photo at the top of the page, a fish bucket is lowered as Corps staff pump water out of the basin. Above, KDWPT fisheries staff use seines to capture trapped fish.



Large concrete baffles slow water during high-flow releases, protecting the stilling basin apron and river banks below the outlet structure. But catching fish around these structures during the salvage proved tricky.

Today's take would be small by historic standards. They took approximately 100 channel catfish, 30 bigger white bass, 12 flatheads, 12 saugeye, and a few wipers to put back in the lake. About 5,000 rough fish were removed.

"We've learned quite a few things over the years," Berger, a 38-year veteran of the department told me later. "When we first started doing this, the Corps would just completely close the gates and pump the basin down. We once took seven tons of fish out of a stilling basin. Then someone got the wise idea to open the gates for 10 to 15 minutes to flush most of the fish out of the basin. It made our job a lot easier, and it saved more fish downstream."

As the fish salvage neared completion, Hays and I walked down to the apron. Our guys were busy gathering up the last of the fish. Corps staff from the Kansas City District Office; Kanopolis, Milford, Pomona, and Wilson reservoirs; and Pome de Terre Lake in Missouri attacked the basin, shoveling out rock and debris and scraping walls with shovels.

"When they get all this debris cleared out with shovels, we'll come in here and power blast everything, from the apron all the way up to the conduit, which is actually an imbedded steel liner drilled through bedrock and grouted in place," Hays explained. "We need to be able to see any flaws in the structure and repair or record them

as necessary." He pointed out some obvious holes in the apron and embankment — a mixture of rock and mortar — that would be repaired.

"Well, are you ready to go up the conduit?" Hays asked.

"You bet," I replied. My subconscious reminded me that reliance on the safety of man-made structures can be a leap of faith. Especially now that I could see the 14-foot diameter tunnel burrowing into the Earth.

"I want to let you know ahead of time," he warned, "the conduit makes a sharp turn up there, so it's pitch black once you get that far."

"Okay," I croaked. *I'm okay with this*, I told myself, still mindful of what was ahead.



KDWPT Fisheries staff used dip nets to catch fish trapped between seines. The effort saves fish and makes cleaning the basin easier for Corps staff. Sport fish were saved for restocking and rough fish were given away to the public or disposed of.

As the men netted the last of the fish and gathered up their seines, Hays and I slogged through the water in the basin toward that wooden ladder, a welcome foothold on the slippery concrete slope that narrowed up to the tunnel. Once inside, the air was still, and every sound echoed off the walls as we slogged through a stream of water still flowing about 4 inches deep. *What's with this*, I thought vaguely. Hays gave me a flashlight and led the way with one of his own. He stopped occasionally to point out slight flaws in the tunnel that engineers would record for monitoring. Thus reassured, I marched on, the sound of our splashing and voices amplified as they echoed off the tunnel walls. I stepped on something slick. Several soft-shelled turtles and a few small channel cats had apparently been reluctant to go with the flow.

About 150 yards in, the tunnel

made its turn. Hays had not been joking. Looking back was fruitless; all natural light was gone. I walked on behind Hays, flashlight firmly in hand, shining it up and around my

encasement. For a few minutes, I heard other voices bouncing through the tube, then quiet again, except for the noise Hays and I made. (Mark Shaw later told me



Larger wipers and channel catfish were among several sport fish species that were returned to the lake. Other species, including flathead catfish, carp and drum were also caught.

that he and a few of our other guys had been following without flashlights but chickened out when the light at the end of the tunnel went out beyond the bend.)

After about 15 minutes, I began to wonder, *How long is this tunnel?* After 30 minutes of sloshing (well, maybe 20), I felt a rush of cool air and saw a faint light ahead. I realized I'd been sweating. At the tunnel's end was the "notch" — a chute that, with the lake lowered, gushed fresh, open air and light where water normally drains over the dam once it reaches conservation pool.

On both sides of this chute, gates 6 feet wide, 12 feet high, and 1 foot thick held the lake back. And they leaked at the bottom. I reminded myself that the dam is more than 60 years old, completed in 1948. A little leakage — actually, spraying — of water around the bottom of each gate was to be expected. Hays seemed unconcerned. I didn't have to do the math at the time; my imagination took care of that. But I did later. Assuming that Kanopolis holds approximately 50,000 acre-feet of water at conservation pool, that translates to 16.3 billion gallons, or 130 billion pounds of water behind those two gates. At this point, we were one-half mile into the tunnel. Somehow, I just couldn't imagine myself sprinting out of there like Indiana Jones trying to outrun the big cue ball.

Convinced that all was well with the gates, Hays and I lingered, picking up numerous and colorful crayfish that combed the water at our feet. Then it was time to make the trek back, echoing through the cool water. It was exhilarating, and when we looped back around the bend, seeing the light at the end the tunnel — literally — was an eerie experience. Hays was an apparition ahead of me as light from the perfectly circular opening sprayed around his silhouette. I paused to watch, take in the moment, and



Recently retired fisheries biologist Tommie Berger (holding saugeye) volunteered to help with the salvage. Berger was the fisheries biologist at Kanopolis for more than 20 years.

snap a photo. Then we were out in the glorious daylight of the real world again.

That was half the tour. We climbed out of the basin.

Next up: the control tower. I've seen these small skyscrapers at the end of dams all over the state, but I never knew their purpose. Hays was about to show me. The drive was about a mile from the stilling basin, following a circuitous route from

the Corps offices to Highway K-141, which crosses the dam. We stopped at the long walkway to the tower, and Hays unlocked the gates and opened the tower doors.

The tower's interior is an impressive piece of engineering considering its age. (Some of the labor was provided during WWII by German prisoners of war interred at Salina.) At the entryway, we were perhaps 50 feet above water level. The



KDWPT and Corps staff empty a bucket holding sport fish into an aerated fish box. All sport fish were stocked back into Kanopolis Reservoir.



A makeshift "ladder" provided secure footing on the slippery concrete ramp leading to the conduit through the dam, where Corps staff entered to inspect the structure.

ceiling some 20 feet above houses an I-beam carriage rack with a huge wench and numerous cables stretched taut into a rectangular abyss. This rack rests on tracks so that it can raise a safety gate that rests behind one of the two main gates holding the water back. During the inspection, the gate protected by the safety gate — one of those we had just scrutinized — is raised about 3 feet so that the water between the two gates can be emptied. Then engineers walk up the conduit and crawl under the gate to inspect the other side and the safety gate.

After inspection of the first gate is complete, the engineers crawl out, the gate is lowered, and the safety gate is raised into this upper room. Electric motors move the rack and safety gate over and in alignment behind the second gate, and the process is repeated.

Hays asked if I wanted to take the elevator down to gate level. Of course I did. The elevator cage is only large enough to hold one small

man, I thought, but Hays (a big man) and I squeezed in. Down at gate level, the engineering was even more impressive. Huge hydraulic pistons set over each gate, ready to

raise them when needed. Bolts the size of my hand hold everything together, and the hydraulic pistons must be 18 inches in diameter.

After this tour, we elevatored back to the top floor, exited, and climbed down the outside stairs to the lakeside of the tower exterior, where we could look through grates and into the notch we had recently visited, directly below us. We'd come full circle.

"Tomorrow, we'll have about 20 engineers down here — structural, electrical, mechanical, and geo-technical," Hays explained as we looked out over the water. "They will inspect every inch of this place, including the dam, and run everything off of both regular and emergency power."

Over the next few days, the engineers completed their work, and the inspection went "quite well," according to Hays. Holes in the apron were repaired, woody vegetation along the upper edges of the apron were marked for removal. The conduit and gates were given "a good bill of health," Hays said. "Everything looked very solid and



This conduit is actually a 14-foot-diameter steel liner drilled through bedrock and grouted in place. It is one-half mile long from this entry to the gates holding back lake water.



The control tower at the south end of Kanopolis Reservoir Dam, was built in 1948 and houses the heavy mechanisms that operate the gates that control water releases. For security reasons, no photos of the interior of the tower are allowed.

is performing as designed.” Hays added that the biggest challenge will be removing two lines of logs and other debris along the dam from high water events in 1993 and 1996. So Kanopolis users can rest easy after this inspection.

“My only concern with this is that if we continue to be dry, we’re not ideally positioned to recharge,” Hays added. “We’ve been careful not to draw the water any lower than about 3 inches below the notch, and we’re not going to draw it any lower than we have to, but a sound dam system is important for public safety.”

And this comment gets to the heart of what is so good about Corps and KDWPT cooperation these days. This story was a real adventure for me, but there was a deeper message in the experience. While the Corps built the dam, and thus

the lake, for flood control, Hays realizes the lake’s recreation value and that just a few inches of draw-down can make it difficult for some boaters. “All our boaters are okay at this level, but another foot would be



Corps staff will begin cleaning up debris left after floods in 1993 and 1996 now that the inspection is done.

tough for many,” he explained with sincere concern.

Without the Corps, recreationists would have no lake to begin with. Without KDWPT’s biologists, the Corps would have a much more difficult time maintaining the structure that holds the water back and helps keep the public pleased at having the project and anglers and boaters happy. And the lake’s fishery would be poor at best. So the two agencies need each other, for practical and public relations reasons.

Kanopolis was the first large reservoir in Kansas. Before that, the state had very little to offer boaters and anglers. Today, 24 large reservoirs with rich fisheries can be found throughout the state, each with outlet works more complex than Kanopolis’. Even Jules Verne would be impressed. ♡

CONSERVATION

Mike Blair photos

by Matt Smith
farm bill coordinator, Wilson

If you hunt upland birds, you're probably familiar with and supportive of the Conservation Reserve Program, which was included in the 1985 Farm Bill and added more than 3 million acres of native grass habitat in Kansas. The program has reduced wind and water erosion, and it has had a profound impact on some wildlife populations.

CROSSROADS

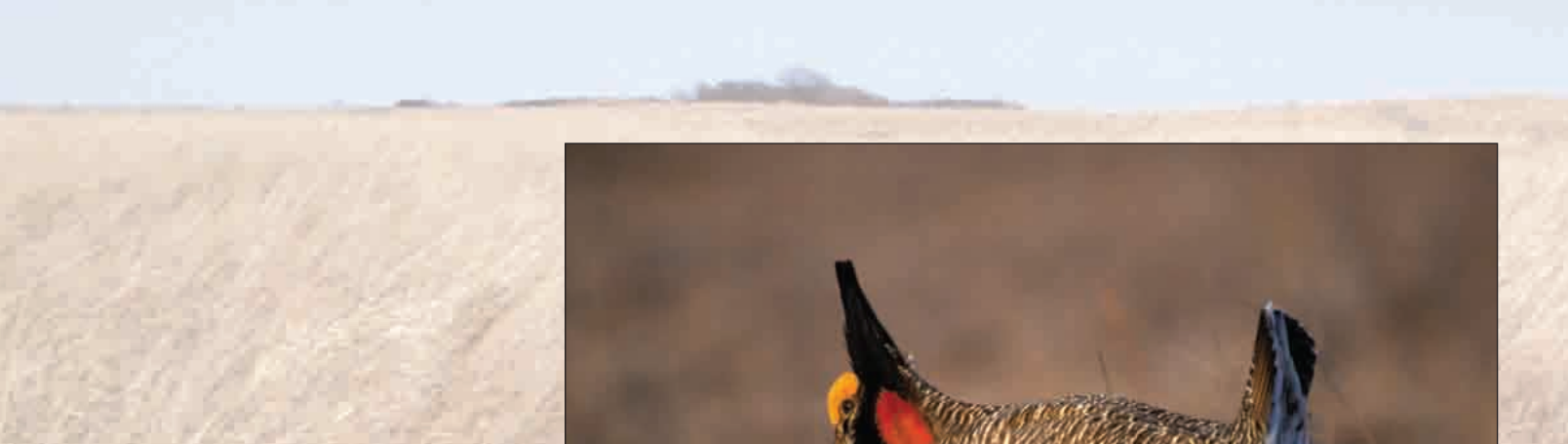
If you're concerned about issues affecting wildlife habitat, land conservation, water quality and food policy, then you should also be concerned about the single most important piece of legislation influencing those issues, the Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill is a huge package of legislation that has evolved into a completely different form since its inception in 1933 as an agricultural aid program in response to economic conditions after the Dust

Bowl period. Today the legislation sets the farm, food, and rural policy goals and priorities for the country. Every five years, Congress enacts new legislation and sets the general direction for America's food and farm policy. To stay on schedule, 2012 should see a new version of the Farm Bill, but in light of budget difficulties facing Congress, it's anyone's guess whether or not efforts will be completed on the Bill by the end of next

year and what new direction the Farm Bill will take.

The most recently passed version of the Farm Bill, "The 2008 Food, Conservation and Energy Act," invested \$289 billion across 15 titles: 66 percent or \$190 billion for nutrition, 22 percent or \$63 billion for commodity and crop insurance payments, 8 percent or \$24 billion for conservation, and 4 percent or \$12 billion for disaster assistance and other programs.

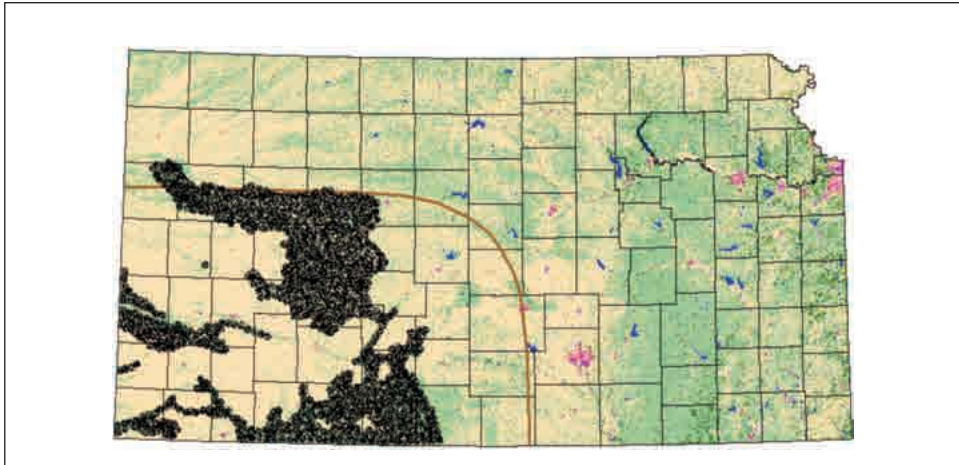
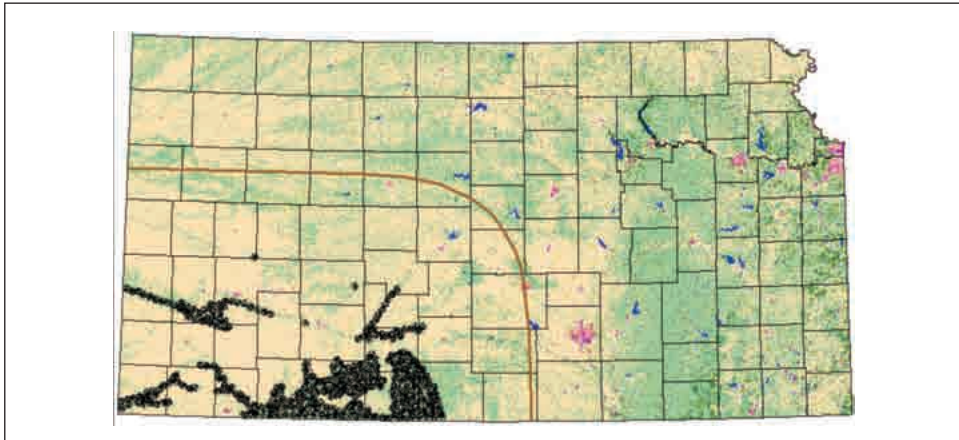


Mike Blair photo

Wildlife weren't a primary focus of the original CRP program; however, that has changed in recent years. Lesser prairie chickens have benefitted greatly from CRP.

The Conservation Title of the Farm Bill includes United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) voluntary conservation programs providing producer support for land retirement, conservation easements and conservation practices on agricultural lands. The \$24 billion investment in conservation reflects a strong public policy commitment to address conservation concerns, primarily on private lands. Private lands are critically important for the conservation of natural resources in the U.S. because they make up approximately 70 percent of the land ownership in the lower 48 states. In Kansas, approximately 98 percent of the land is in private ownership with 90 percent of those lands used for agricultural purposes.

For a perspective on the scale of the conservation investment the Farm Bill provides private landowners in Kansas consider this, Farm Bill conservation payments in Kansas for 2010 were approximately \$173 million. In contrast, excise tax funds provided to KDWP by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, which is a significant source of funding for the department's wildlife and fisheries management projects, equaled approximately \$15 million in same year. In fact, the department's entire budget is less than one third of the annual Farm Bill conservation payments in Kansas.



The top graphic shows the distribution of the lesser prairie chicken before CRP. The bottom graphic shows current lesser prairie chicken distribution with the addition of CRP.



Mike Blair photo

Before CRP, more than 3 billion tons of soil were being lost each year to erosion. Since 1985, CRP has reduced soil erosion by 470 million tons per year and prevented 278 million pounds of nitrogen and 59 million pounds of phosphorus from entering waterways each year.

Although the Farm Bill addresses multiple resource concerns such as water, soil, energy and air, it is one of the most important tools available for restoring, enhancing and protecting wildlife habitat. The 1985 Farm Bill established what was to become the nation's most successful voluntary conservation program ever, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP was initially developed to address soil erosion at a time when soil was being lost at more than 3 billion tons per year. During this period there were also thousands of acres of wetlands drained; water quality was deteriorating; and many species of wildlife were in peril due to loss of habitat. The CRP program we have today has evolved to equally address water quality and wildlife habitat along with soil erosion.

CRP takes marginal and sensi-

tive land out of agricultural production and offers landowners an annual rental payment to establish and maintain vegetative cover for 10-15 years. Lands enrolled in CRP are often labeled as "idle," "retired" or "non-working" lands. These terms are mistakenly applied, as CRP lands are far from being idle or unproductive. The facts, based on several independent studies, tell a different story. For example, CRP areas in North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana created habitat that led to a net increase of about 2 million ducks per year since 1992. Researchers found that, in prime pheasant habitat, a 4 percent increase in CRP cover was associated with a 22 percent increase in pheasant counts. Northern bobwhite quail are found significantly more in CRP areas with certain grass covers than sites without these practices.

Improvements to water quality due to CRP is evident when you consider that 278 million pounds less nitrogen and 59 million pounds less phosphorus enter waterways each year. CRP has reduced soil erosion by an estimated 470 million tons from pre-CRP levels, and CRP sequesters more carbon than any other federally administered program, an estimated 50 million metric tons of carbon dioxide was stopped from entering the environment in 2007 due to grass cover established on CRP lands.

Kansans can take pride in their own CRP success story. When CRP began in 1985 policy makers in Kansas made a critical decision that had major implications for the future of wildlife in Kansas. Kansans determined the most beneficial cover for CRP lands in the state would be mixes of warm season native grasses, the same



Mike Blair photo

Recent farm bills have reduced the cap on CRP acres, and as grain prices increased, there is fear that much of our CRP will be lost. Some argue that the program is too expensive, but when the benefits of its impact on farm income, erosion control, recreation, and wildlife conservation are calculated, it appears to be very efficient and worth every penny.

predominate grasses that make up our native grasslands. This decision was not met with unanimous support. Native grasses were expensive and at the time in short supply. Practical experience in establishing those native grasses was lacking, and many reasoned that the CRP program, like others that came before, would not be around long enough to warrant the cost of an expensive grass mix only to see it broken out again in the future. But Kansas held fast to its decision and 26 years later, the investment has paid off. During the late 1990s, KDWPT began documenting the presence of the lesser prairie chicken in areas they formally occupied in southwest Kansas but had not been seen for more than 60 years. This significant expansion of their range was due to the nesting cover native grasses

in CRP provided. The potential loss of CRP in southwest Kansas as current contracts expire and are not re-enrolled has heightened the concern for listing the species under protection of the Threatened and Endangered Species Act.

Of course those who love to hunt upland birds know how valuable CRP is during their favorite season. Over 50 percent of the 1 million acres of land enrolled in KDWPT's popular Walk-In Hunting Areas Program is CRP lands. Kansas upland bird hunters spend about \$121.3 million annually in support of their hunting activities, making the public investment in CRP a good one for the rural economies struggling in the current economic downturn.

Despite its unprecedented success, CRP was targeted for reduction in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Authorized enrollment for the program dropped from 39.2 million acres to 32 million. There was even discussion during the 2008 authorization process of eliminating CRP. To gauge the impacts to the agricultural sector from eliminating the program, a study conducted by the University of Tennessee's Agricultural Policy Analysis Center predicted an additional cost to the government of \$32.6 million over the 2007-2015 study period due to an increase in farm program spending if CRP was eliminated. Alternatively, the study also predicted if the CRP statutory limit was raised to 39.2 million acres, by 2015 it would raise net farm income by \$600 million. If the limit was raised to 45 million acres, by 2015 net farm income would increase by \$1.7 billion.

It's uncertain what the 2012



Farm Bill will look like with the current environment of declining budgets, increased agricultural and environmental challenges, crop prices at historically high levels and an ever-increasing world demand for food products. Concerns about climate change and strains on our water resources make it clear that the investment the public as made in protecting our natural resources will be lost if we retreat from our current path of conservation commitments. Now, more than ever, we need to strengthen our support of the ecological functions that ensure the health and production capacity of

our agricultural systems.

In a 2011 public survey regarding federal agricultural policy and the environment, more than two-thirds of respondents said conservation should be an important goal of national agriculture policy. There was also support for pro-conservation reforms in existing agriculture subsidies and policies, particularly when those reforms are designed as long-term solutions that save money. We cannot afford detrimental actions or shortsighted changes that degrade our natural resources.

Farm Bill policy development is at a crossroads. In these current

economic conditions we must ask ourselves, will the path be “conservation by design” where every dollar spent will work more efficiently to deliver multiple benefits, or will we continue to follow policies that often work at cross-purposes and create additional natural resource challenges that will be costly to address?

In part two of this series, we will look more specifically at how individual Farm Bill programs have benefit Kansas landowners and the natural resources of our state. ♡



Mike Miller photo

Kansas bird hunters are acutely aware of the value of CRP to wildlife, as well as recreation. Nationwide, CRP has provided a huge increase of high-quality habitat for ducks, deer, prairie chickens, quail and many ground-nesting birds.



New Angle For F.I.S.H.

By Tom Lang
fisheries program specialist, Pratt

Modeled after the popular and successful Walk-In Hunting Area program, F.I.S.H. (Fishing Impoundments and Stream Habitats) is designed to open new angling opportunities through leasing private ponds and streams. An injection of federal grant money will open new opportunities and possibilities for fishing, canoeing and kayaking.

Mike Blair photo

Not once in 249 episodes of the Andy Griffith Show did you ever see Andy and Opie get denied access to that fishing hole. That might be because Andy was sheriff or it could have simply been because Andy and Opie asked the landowner. Regardless, as the Taylor boys demonstrated, in “the good old days” it was pretty easy to find a place to go fishing.

Nowadays, many factors make it difficult to garner access to one of the more simple and enjoyable things in life. Loss of rural ties makes it challenging for many to know where a fishing pond or stream access is located or who to ask for permission. When they do figure these things out, they may be denied access. Understandably, landowners may deny access because they worry about being overrun by too many anglers, trash and vandalism, and overfishing, or they may limit access through a lease agreement.

Access to water is as fundamental to an angler as is the knowledge of how to fish, having the right equipment and the desire to go. Simply, you can't go fishing, canoeing, or kayaking, if you don't have access. The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) has recognized this fundamental need and while managing our state's public waters, staff have worked diligently to increase public access to private waters since 1998 when the Fishing Impoundment and Stream Habitats (F.I.S.H.) program was implemented. And the F.I.S.H. program has recently received a shot-in-the-arm with federal grant money.

F.I.S.H. has annually partnered with about 200 landowners across Kansas. These partnerships have provided the public with fishing access to more than 1,500 acres of ponds, 90 miles of streams, and six access sites to our navigable rivers. Benefits to Kansas anglers are obvious, but landowners have received many benefits as well.

Benefits to their participation in F.I.S.H. have included lease payments, increased patrols by KDWPT enforcement officers, protection of state laws, and even fish stockings.

Even though landowners are compensated for allowing public access, anglers are still guests on private land, and the future success of this program depends on these anglers behaving as good guests. There are regulations in place specifically to address this issue, prohibiting activities such as target practice, commercial or noncommercial dog training, discharge of firearms, camping, horseback riding, fireworks, fires, littering, cereal malt beverage or alcoholic liquor, and destructive acts. However, these regulations do not limit the landowner, or their designee, from any activity on the land.

Helping ensure guests act appropriately is only part of the equation of a good partnership. KDWPT staff routinely install fence crossers, cattle guards, erect signs to help guests know where to go and where not go, and even section off temporary parking areas if needed.

For longer-termed, stronger part-

nerships, the F.I.S.H. program has invested additional resources into some locations. Some F.I.S.H. waters have received habitat improvements to help increase fishery productivity. New ponds enrolled have been stocked by the department, providing benefits to both the landowner and anglers. Some F.I.S.H. properties receive considerable fishing pressure and require additional stockings to maintain fishing quality. The F.I.S.H. program takes care of routine stockings of those ponds, as well. Finally, some properties offer exceptional opportunities for fishing from a boat but lack basic launch facilities. In these instances, rock access ramps have been installed through F.I.S.H. These benefits have proven to help F.I.S.H. waters reach their full potential.

For various reasons, landowner participation in the F.I.S.H. program stagnated in recent years. In response, KDWPT evaluated F.I.S.H. and, thanks to the federally funded Voluntary Access Program and Habitat Improvement Program (VAP-HIP), the program received a much-needed shot in the arm. KDWPT applied for and received



Mike Blair photo

Until recently, the F.I.S.H. program provided only access for anglers, but grant money through VAP-HIP will allow staff to seek canoeing and kayaking opportunities, as well.



Mike Miller photo

Angler surveys show that Kansans prefer fishing on smaller impoundments, and there are more than 150,000 farm ponds dotting the Kansas countryside. F.I.S.H. provides landowners income for opening their ponds and streams to angler access.

grant money through VAP-HIP, and some of that money will provide the necessary shot-in-the-arm the F.I.S.H. program needed, allowing greater incentives for landowners to voluntarily participate.

The serene experience of fishing a Kansas farm pond or secluded stretch of stream is cherished and valuable. Increasing access to these waters will help ensure public enjoyment and in turn create more stewards of all of our aquatic resources. Therefore, annual base lease rates for small impoundments in all counties have been increased. However, F.I.S.H.'s annual base lease rates for ponds differ by county, and all counties have been divided into three tiers. Tier 1 counties are most important to the F.I.S.H. program in increasing landowner participation, and the annual base lease rate for counties in this tier is \$125/acre. The Tier 2 annual base lease rate is \$100/acre, and Tier 3's \$75/acre.

When joining F.I.S.H., landowners work with the district

fisheries biologist to determine lease rates depending on opportunities provided. Waters that provide the additional opportunity of fishing from a boat are more valuable to the program and can demand higher lease rates. Landowners allowing all boats, with launch facilities present, will receive an additional \$25/acre on top of their annual base lease rate. Thus, a pond in a Tier 1 county allowing all boats would annually receive \$150/acre. Ponds allowing carry-in boats only would receive an additional \$10/acre to their county tier base rate. Locations not allowing boats would simply receive the base rate amount for that county tier. The boating allowance is listed in the index of the annual Fishing Atlas so that the public understands, and can respect, the restrictions for that specific water.

To further encourage enrollment of impoundments in key areas, F.I.S.H. is offering sign-on bonuses. Landowners enrolling waters in

counties without any public fishing opportunities will receive a one-time sign-on bonus of 100 percent of their annual payment (guaranteed minimum of \$500). Given the unique opportunities that F.I.S.H. waters can provide the public, counties without any F.I.S.H. pond sites will also receive a one-time sign-on bonus of 50 percent of their annual payment (guaranteed minimum of \$300). Maps of the eligible counties for these sign-on bonuses are available at FISH.KSoutdoors.com.

Kansas has outstanding streams that are renowned for both their scenic beauty and quality fisheries. The opportunity to enjoy the experiences these waters provide is important to helping society appreciate and value the outdoors. F.I.S.H. has traditionally leased stream reaches for fishing. With the expansion of the program, F.I.S.H. can now lease streams for fishing and paddlesports like canoeing and kayaking, too. It is hoped that this new component will help people to get off the couch and get in a canoe,

cast a line, and see first-hand why conservation is important.

All Kansas stream reaches have one of four fisheries quality designations. The F.I.S.H. program bases lease rates on these designations: highest-valued fisheries resource, high priority, moderate, and limited. Streams designated as a highest-valued fishery resource are leased at an annual rate of \$1,500/mile for fishing. High priority fisheries resources are leased at \$1,000/mile for fishing, and moderate priority stretches are leased at \$500/mile for fishing. Limited fisheries resources are not leased.

Stream reaches of highest-valued and high priority fisheries resources are eligible for a paddlesport bonus for allowing canoeing and kayaking. These stretches must be a minimum of 1 mile in length, with put-in and take-out spots, and under a five-year lease. The paddlesport bonus for highest-valued is an additional \$750/mile/year and for high priority stream reaches, the paddlesport bonus is an additional \$500/mile/year. Essentially, a landowner owning both sides of a mile of high priority stream could receive \$2,000/year for five years just for allowing people to fish, canoe, and kayak.

Funding is limited, and longer stream reaches are preferred by KDWPT. Stream owners interested in taking advantage of this opportunity should consider partnering with their neighbors. Groups of landowners, with longer contiguous stream reaches are most likely to be accepted into the F.I.S.H. program when funding becomes limited.

In addition to the many stream reaches, Kansas is also home to three large navigable rivers; the Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas rivers. Unlike streams of the state, these waters are considered public. However, the public must have legal access to utilize these fisheries resources. To increase access to these resources, F.I.S.H. leases big river access sites. Standard lease rates are \$1,500 per site annually. Locations that are within 10 river miles of any other public access site are leased at \$2,000 per site annually. Locations with exceptional facilities may receive additional financial consideration.


Standard access dates for all F.I.S.H. waters are March 1 through October 31. Some private waters provide quality fishing outside of these dates. On these waters, F.I.S.H. will pay an additional 10 percent of standard lease rates for year-round access.

Our society is facing a myriad of



Providing boating access to streams and the three navigable rivers in Kansas is also a goal of F.I.S.H.

challenges. Keeping people outdoors, enjoying, valuing, and conserving our natural resources should not be among them. The F.I.S.H. program provides the opportunity for willing landowners to partner with KDWPT to ensure our fishing heritage does not become a memory. Landowners are compensated, landowner rights are protected, property is respected, fisheries resources are wisely used, and the future conservation of our natural resources is ensured. Partnering with the F.I.S.H. program is a win for all involved.

If you or someone you know owns a pond, stream reach, or big river access and are interested in partnering with KDWPT to preserve our great outdoors heritage, please contact us. The deadline to join the F.I.S.H. program for 2012 is fast approaching. Our contact information and additional F.I.S.H. program information is located at FISH.KSoutdoors.com. 



Mike Blair photos

Most F.I.S.H. contracts with landowners provide angler access from March through October. Landowners can stipulate the type of access and boating allowed.



75 Years

IT'S YOUR NATURE

by Mike Miller
editor, Pratt

One of the most important pieces of wildlife conservation legislation ever enacted will be 75 years old next year. With so many of our wildlife resources healthy and thriving today, it might be easy to forget our conservation history and the visionary individuals who wrote the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Acts.

Hunters and anglers pay for wildlife management in Kansas. If you've heard that before, you were probably talking to an employee of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. There is a popular myth, probably because KDWPT is a state agency, that general taxes pay for our programs. We do receive some State General Funds, but they make

up less than 7 percent of our budget, and that money is dedicated to state park programs and administration. The bulk of our budget is derived from the sale of our licenses and permits. The rest of the budget used for wildlife and fisheries management comes from federal funding. This funding can actually be traced back to the beginning of modern wildlife management.

In 1900, wildlife populations in the U.S. were dwindling to dangerously low numbers, and some species were near extinction. Wildlife management, while desired, wasn't funded by Congress or the states. And even though there were Kansas laws on the books designed to protect our game populations, there wasn't funding to pay for enforcement. In 1900, the

Kansas legislature appropriated \$2,800 for fish propagation, and George W. Wiley became the state's first full-time "fish warden." Kansas hunting licenses weren't required of hunters until 1905. However, the agency was mostly focused on fishing, and the new headquarters was the Pratt Fish Hatchery. There were established seasons for quail, prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse and most songbirds were protected, but all other wildlife could be taken by just about any means. Paid game wardens didn't come on the scene until 1921.

In the 1930s, hunters and the hunting and shooting industry urged Congress to act before it was too late for many of our wildlife species. Congress acted by extending the life of a 10 percent tax on ammunition and firearms used for sport hunting and earmarked the funds to be distributed to the states for wildlife restoration. On September 2, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, now called the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (P-R) after its principal sponsors, Sen. Key Pittman of Nevada and Rep. A. Willis Robertson of Virginia. The money has been distributed to the states based on the number of hunting licenses they sell. The funds pay for wildlife-related programs on a 75-25 match. State license and permit fees make up the other 25 percent. Since P-R was signed into law, more than \$2 billion in excise taxes have been sent to the states, which matched \$500 million for wildlife restoration.

How is the money spent? More than 62 percent is used to buy, develop, maintain and operate wildlife management areas. Four million acres have been purchased, and nearly 40 million acres have been managed for wildlife under agreements with other landowners. Twenty-six percent of the funding is used for surveys and research, two efforts extremely important to the evolution of modern wildlife man-



The white-tailed deer is an example of a species that was near the brink of disaster in 1900. Today there may be more whitetails across the U.S. than ever, thanks to the P-R Act.

agement programs. But it's accurately called the Wildlife Restoration Act. Since it was signed, historical wildlife population comebacks have been witnessed again and again.

Great comeback stories include that of the wild turkey. In 1900, there were few turkeys in North America and probably none in Kansas. However, through dedicated reintroductions and management programs, there are an estimated 7 million turkeys in the U.S. today. The Kansas population is strong, and hunting is allowed statewide.

The pronghorn, which is unique species to North America, went from millions of animals prior to European settlement to less than 20,000 by 1900. Today, there are more than 1 million pronghorn across the West, including a thriving population in western Kansas.

The white-tailed deer is another great

example of a species restored. It is estimated that there were 35 million white-tailed deer in North America when Europeans arrived. By 1890, the population had been reduced to an estimated 300,000. Millions of white-tailed deer were killed for subsistence by settlers, but the species nearly disappeared because of habitat destruction. Deer were extirpated from Kansas by the turn of the century. Today, they thrive in every county, and hunters harvest more than 60,000 each fall. Nationwide,



The Sport Fish Restoration Act was modeled after P-R and was signed into law in 1950. Boating access, in addition to fisheries management, is a function of this program.

some estimate there are more white-tailed deer today than there were pre-settlement.

Following in the footsteps of Pittman and Robertson, Sen. Edwin Johnson of Colorado and Rep. John Dingell Sr. of Michigan sponsored the Sport Fish Restoration Act in 1950. Commonly called the Dingell-Johnson, or D-J, Act, this legislation was modeled after the P-R Act, bringing revenues from excise taxes on sport fishing equipment, import duties on fishing tackle, yachts and pleasure craft and a portion of the gasoline fuel tax attributable to small engines and motorboats. That money is distributed to the states based on fishing license sales and also requires a 25 percent match and is used to fund fisheries management programs and boat access.

Next year will be the 75th anniversary of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs. Since they began, nearly \$14 billion has been generated and apportioned back to the states. Recipient fish and wildlife agencies have matched these program funds with more than \$3.4 billion. Grants to the state from the Sport Fish Restoration program can be used for fishery projects, boating access and aquatic education. Money from the Wildlife Restoration Program is used for projects to restore, conserve, manage and



Waterfowl populations were in peril in the early 1930s after years of market hunting and habitat destruction. Today, most duck and goose species are thriving.

enhance wild birds and mammals and their habitat, as well as projects that provide public use and access to wildlife resources, hunter education and development and management of shooting ranges.

Through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, (WSFR) Kansas receives approximately \$15,000,000 annually. The 25 percent match comes from hunting and fishing license sales. That money funds programs such as the Hunter Education Program, wildlife research and surveys, public lands and fishery maintenance, and acquisition of public lands. Last year, WSFR funds helped the department purchase land at the Parsons Ammunitions Plant that will be managed for public hunting, and Fancy Creek Shooting Range at Tuttle Creek State Park was enhanced. WSFR funds make up 25 percent of KDWPT's total budget. The funds leverage

license and permit revenues and allow the department to provide direct benefits to wildlife, as well as anglers, hunters and boaters.

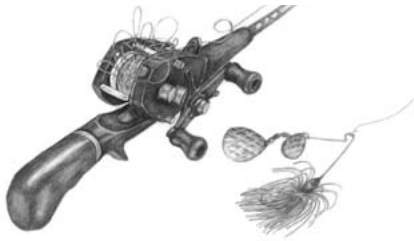
And while the programs funds are usually specific to game animals and sport fish, they benefit all wildlife and fish. Because so few of our wildlife species are hunted or angled for, habitat enhancement efforts benefit many more nongame species.

If you enjoy wildlife in Kansas, you can thank hunters, anglers and the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. All of our wildlife resources and most of our outdoor recreation have benefitted from this far-reaching program that was started 75 years ago by some amazingly visionary people.

Today, people who enjoy wildlife-related recreation spend more than \$120 billion annually, contributing mightily to an economy that needs them now more than ever. We must ensure that our leaders remember the successes of this program, as well as the economic benefits as they consider changes to this legislation. ♡



The popular Walk-In Hunting Access program, which opened 1 million acres of private land to hunters, is only possible because of the P-R Act.



Backlash

by Mike Miller

The Power Of Passing It On

It was just getting light, and we were last in a line of four vehicles slowing down along a sepia-shaded stubble field to our right. Dust lingered in the air, creating red halos around the taillights of the trucks in front of us. I leaned up to look out the window on the passenger side of the truck, wondering what the stubble field held and feeling such incredible excitement, I thought I would burst.

That was exactly 40 years ago. I was 11 years old, and although I was absolutely thrilled about stepping into my first-ever pheasant hunt, I had no idea how that morning would impact the rest of my life. As I reminisce about that morning, I remember the boyish joy exhibited by my dad's friends as they climbed out of vehicles, donned hunting vests and loaded guns. The dusty air was thick with anticipation of what that opening-day hunt held. Everyone was excited, but I didn't think any of them could have felt what I was feeling.

Dad quietly instructed me on where to walk and reminded me to pay attention to where the barrel of my shotgun was pointing. My shotgun – a used 20-gauge pump that had suddenly appeared in my closet just a couple of weeks ago -- was my most prized possession. I don't know if I shot the gun that morning, and I know I didn't kill a pheasant. It didn't matter. I now know that when I stepped into that stubble field in the first seconds of my first pheasant hunt, I discovered something that would be a part of the rest of my life. I was hooked.

I also know now that I was one of the lucky sons. I know many others are left home on opening day so dads can hunt with buddies. Mine never left me home. We hunted most weekends through the season, and I cherish every memory from those early days.

But it was on that first morning when I embarked on a life-long journey that started out to be about hunting. I had always read *Outdoor Life*, *Field and Stream* and *Sports Afield*, but my interest in hunting took on a new emphasis after that morning. I was on a quest to learn as much as I could about hunting, wildlife and the necessary outdoor skills. And over the past 40 years, that's exactly what I've tried to do.

I've been more fortunate than most, I think, to have some extraordinary mentors. Of course Dad and his hunting partner Gene Neelly were the first two, and I have very special memories of hunting with Granddad. When I was older, my best friend in high school, Rex Schmidt, and I spent countless days hunting and learning together. We still hunt together each fall.



In college I became friends with a fellow student from Great Bend. Kurt Keller had grown up hunting ducks at Cheyenne Bottoms, and he taught me about hunting ducks over decoys. When I came to work for this agency in 1983, I thought I was a knowledgeable and experienced hunter – until I started hanging out with some of my co-workers. Just a little older and much more experienced, they took me under their wing. Mike Cox's raw enthusiasm and never-say-no attitude taught me about perseverance and the sheer joy of hunting. I was secretly embarrassed following Gene Brehm around scouting for a deer stand placement because only then did I realize how little I knew. Fortunately, Gene was patient and generous.

I was all about hunting success and proving my ability in those days, and I didn't realize what hunting really was. It's taken years for me to understand it better, and I still have a lot to learn. But the hunting heritage is based mostly on relationships. Of course, relationships with the people I've hunted with are most important – those solid friendships that never fade. But hunting is also about about relationships with wildlife — developing an intense sense of value for our wildlife resources. And it's about relationships with the land and the traditions.

Hunting is so much more than being able to kill a limit of pheasants or take a deer with a bow. When I think back to how that first morning in 1971 has impacted my life, it boggles my mind. My love for hunting and the experiences I've had and the relationships I've forged along the way, have influenced who I am, what I do for a living, where I live and what I value most in life. And to think it all started as a wide-eyed 11-year-old stepped into a Kansas stubble field one November morning. Amazing, don't you think? Never underestimate the power of passing it on. 