

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks Magazine

FOR HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS | \$3.75 | MAY-JUNE 2019





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KANSAS
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INSIDE FRONT COVER Emporia's Dirty Kanza gravel race draws cyclists from across the world. Rick McNary photo.

Contact the editor: nadia.reimer@ks.gov

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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COMMON GROUND

with Brad Loveless



Investing in Kansas

Over the years I've received numerous letters from customers and despite their varied intent, I harbor a special fondness for each of them. Many have been notes of thanks, so my affinity for those is easy to understand. But I have at least as much appreciation for those that have been critical, not for the way they make me feel, but for the effect they have on me. These are the communications that do the most to make me think, to question a course we have taken or are considering, and to ponder different options. They lead to correction or greater conviction. A letter I received last week led me to the latter response and, given the subject's importance to our agency's future, I asked and was granted permission to share it with you with just the writer's introduction sentence and signature removed. (See the letter to the right).

Senate Bill 50, which our agency introduced this session, would raise the fee caps of fishing and hunting licenses so that these amounts can be raised over time when deemed necessary. Resident hunting licenses were initiated in 1905 for \$1. Fast forward to 2016, when the current annual cost of \$25 each was established, and we can see that hunting and fishing license fees were adjusted just 14 times in more than 110 years. As you can imagine, the cost of doing business has superceded our 14 fee adjustments many times over. Despite good effort, this bill has not passed this session, so our hope is that it will in the 2020 session.

License revenues are critically important because parks, fishing, hunting and associated research, education and protection are not funded by state taxes or the state's general fund. Instead, these license revenues and user fees leverage federal money collected from the sale of fishing, hunting and boating equipment - generally, a \$1 Kansas dollar/\$3 federal dollars ratio. Every person we employ, campsite we prepare, fish we stock, license or permit we issue, person we educate, Walk-In Hunting Access parcel and private fishing pond we enroll in public access or word we print is made possible by user fees from our customers.

After reading this letter, I checked with Independence Community College to ask if they would

Dear Mr. Loveless,

I am currently a Sophomore at Independence Community College in Independence KS. My purpose for writing to you today is to present my stance on the Senate bill 50 that is going to raise the prices on hunting and fishing licenses for residents and non-residents.

My stance on this bill is that I think it will bring a negative effect to the annual budget of the KDWPT. It will also have a negative effect of how many non-residents and residents won't buy licenses and that will cause a negative effect on how much money will go towards public hunting grounds and fishing hatcheries to name a few.

I would like to thank you for your time on reading this and hopefully you could look into the bill a little more and possibly not raise the prices on us that love to hunt and fish. Also so we can keep these sports alive and traditions still growing.

Thank You

ask this young author to give me a call. I was delighted when she did later that evening and I learned that she was passionate about both fishing and hunting, and had grown up enjoying the Kansas outdoors. When I shared how we are funded and the need to make incremental adjustments over time to continue to refine and expand offerings to our customers, that made sense to her. I explained how the vast majority of permit holders believe our prices are a bargain and how we work to stay aligned with our neighboring states so that we remain competitive.

I learned that this young woman is enthused, intelligent and knowledgeable about Kansas and its resources. She learned that her license contributions are critical to our department's continued operability and health.

And together, we decided that we'll continue our conversation later this spring at a better location - while fishing at one of our southeast Kansas hotspots! 🐾

Letters To The Editor

Contact the editor: nadia.reimer@ks.gov

Pond Catch

Editor:

Just wanted to share this .75 lb bluegill catch. Is there a place to submit our pond catch pics?

Monte Cutshall
Nortonville, KS

Monte,

Thanks for sharing photos of your family fishing day. We never tire of seeing fishing pics, especially when they're of a healthy bluegill and a smiling kid!

Photos can be submitted directly to Nadia Reimer, nadia.reimer@ks.gov. We can't guarantee photos will be printed in the magazine, but we'll always take a look and give them consideration.

You may be interested in our annual Wild About Kansas photo contest. One of our categories is "Hunting and Fishing." For details, check out ksoutdoors.com and click "Publications," then "Wild About Kansas Photo Contest." Entry forms for the 2019 contest will be available soon. Happy fishing.

-Editor



KDWPT Game Wardens Recognized

Earlier this year, the Law Enforcement Division held their annual awards banquet to honor and recognize officer's actions and accomplishments during the 2018 calendar year. The event was held at the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center in Yoder. Congratulations to all recipients, and a special thanks to all officers for their efforts to protect Kansas' natural resources and those who enjoying them.

-Law Enforcement Division

Officer of the Year - Mike Hopper

Awarded in conjunction with the Shikar-Safari Club International. It recognizes the officer who has shown exemplary performance in all aspect of their duties.



Boating Law Enforcement

Officer of the Year - Dan Hesket

Recognizes the outstanding achievement of an officer in the area of boating law enforcement.



Award of Merit -

Brandon Sanders, Jacob Spear

Awarded for the conduct of an officer deserving recognition for accomplishments above and beyond the normal responsibilities of an officer.



Natural Resources Education and Advancement Award - Angie Reisch

Recognizes officers who have developed and successfully implemented programs that enhance the image and recognition of natural resource education through the Law Enforcement Division by utilizing public programs, media relations and education programs.



Richard Harrold Memorial

Award for Investigations - Brandon Sanders

Awarded to those officers who have successfully apprehended violators of Kansas wildlife law by the use of advanced or intensive investigative techniques.



Life Saving Award -

Jason Harrold, Matt Schmidt, Brian Haug (not pictured)

Presented to an officer who is directly responsible for saving a human life.



Director's Award - Law Enforcement:

Dave Adams, Brooks VanDerBeeck, Tracy Cikanek, Jacob Spear, Ross Uhrmacher, Aaron Scheve, Ben Jedlicka. Parks: Adam Murray, Wes Stewart, Justin Lauppe, Mitch Lowery, Kimberly Jones and Seth Turner

Awarded to a group, who through their actions has demonstrated a team effort to advance the mission of the Law Enforcement Division.



BIRD BRAIN

Waiting On Weather

with Mike Rader

We just finished with the “bomb cyclone” storm that brought record-setting low pressure to the central plains, and super windy conditions. All of this is happening during what should be the peak of sandhill crane migration through our area, making birds anxious to get to the North Platte River in Nebraska to stage for their annual trek to breeding grounds. I’ve heard they’ve been stalled in areas to the south due to the crazy weather this winter. As a result, crane tours along the river have been suffering from few birds and disappointed customers wanting to see the massive numbers of birds typically observed in mid-March. I think we may have finally broke through the pattern and the birds will be in a rush to make up for lost time.

Another thing that these long stretches of unseasonably cold weather have done is stall migration for many waterfowl species in Kansas.

The number of geese in the areas I frequent has been staggering; it’s almost impossible to estimate how many millions spent the late winter here. White geese (Snow and Ross’) numbers always amaze me, but this year’s count seemed to dwarf other recent years by

comparison. The very wet conditions provided plenty of places for birds to spread out, but they still seem to

congregate in massive flocks. I don’t know if there were any blades of winter wheat safe from browsing! Even with abundant frozen conditions at area lakes and marshes, the number of ducks using central Kansas seemed to be up as well, with thousands of several species present all winter and early spring.

I look forward to the months of May and June to see what all this water will do for shorebird migration throughout our region. It may be difficult to estimate numbers with the abundance of wet areas, but hopefully folks can take advantage of the prime habitat availability and get out and see the awesome numbers of shorebirds passing through.

Yep, it’s been a couple seasons of wacky weather. But hopefully the wait is over.

If you missed the bi-annual Wings And Wetlands Festival at Great Bend the first weekend of May, get it on your “futures” list (wetlandscenter.fhsu.edu). We provided guided trips to Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira, with great opportunities to network with other birders. The following weekend, the Kansas Ornithological Society (www.ksbirds.org) held their annual spring meeting and field trip, based out of the extreme eastern location of Ft. Scott - a location with many shorebirds and waterbirds when conditions are right, and ample chances to see warblers and other forest-dwelling birds, too. It’s another one you’ll want to make next year.



LAW MATTERS

with Colonel Ott

Boating Legally in Kansas

Boating is an excellent outdoor activity in Kansas. We have more than 150 lakes, 10,000 stream miles and 55,000 ponds, providing many opportunities for a variety of watersports. Whether you're boating to your favorite fishing spot, pulling a skier or tube, or just relaxing on the water, your Kansas Game Wardens want you to enjoy yourself safely.

Kansas Game Wardens are responsible for patrolling the waters in Kansas. We conduct boat accident and Boating Under the Influence investigations, safety inspections and conduct safety and education programs, among many other services to boaters.

Boating laws in Kansas are there for the protection and safety of all boaters. Boating can be an enjoyable experience, but as with many recreational activities, there is risk. Boating comes with the added risk that you can't just stop and get out of the boat without exposing yourself to water. So here are a few tips to make sure your time on the water is both safe and enjoyable.

First, remember to have enough life jackets/personal flotation devices (PFD) for every person in the craft (and don't exceed the person capacity indicated by the boat manufacturer). Lifejackets need to be readily accessible, in serviceable condition and it is always best to wear them. Anyone under the age of 12 is required to wear one at all times, whether in the boat or on skis or a tube behind the boat. Anyone riding a personal watercraft (PWC) must always wear a life jacket/PFD, as well. Boats 16 feet and longer, except canoes and kayaks, must also carry one type IV throwable

flotation device. This, too, must be readily accessible and in serviceable condition.

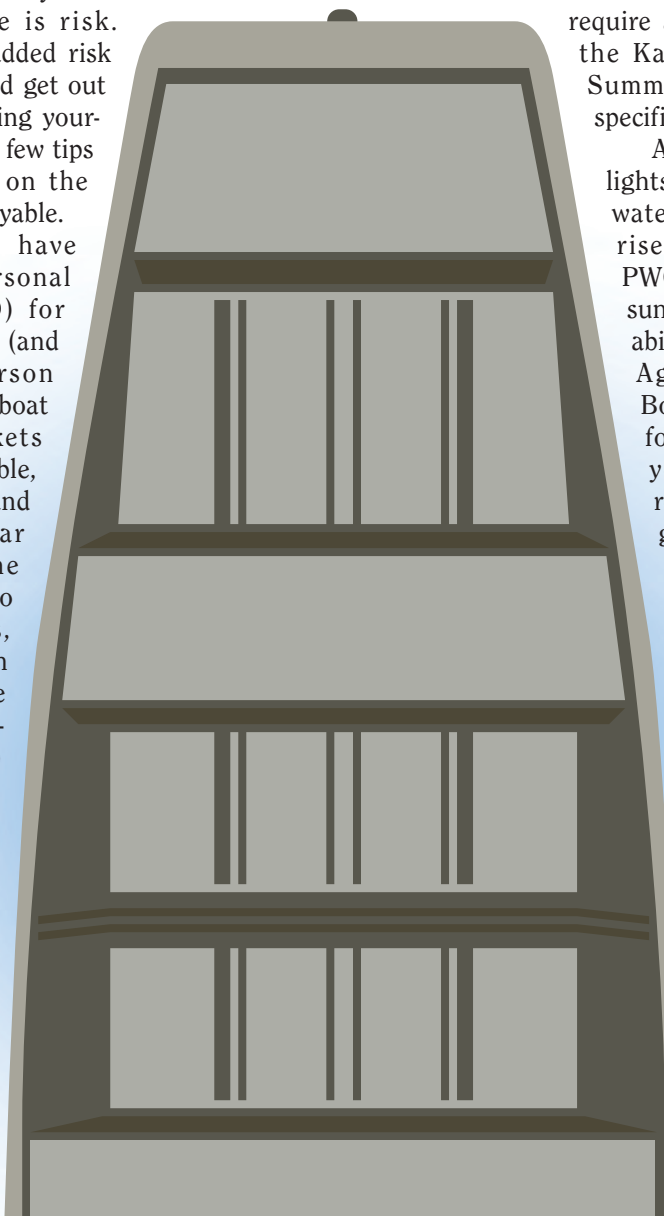
All motorboats must have a mechanical sound-producing device such as a horn or whistle that is audible up to one mile. Vessels 40 feet and longer are also required to carry a bell capable of sounding a tone that can be heard during inclement weather.

Every motorboat, unless exempt, must carry the correct quantity, size and type of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved fire extinguisher. A type B fire extinguisher is for flammable liquids such as, oil or gasoline. The extinguisher must say Marine Type USCG approved to be legal. All boats 16 feet and longer are required to have a fire extinguisher, and larger boats may have a requirement for more than one approved fire extinguisher.

Some boats less than 16 feet also require a fire extinguisher. Refer to the Kansas Boating Regulations Summary for details about your specific craft requirements.

All boats must use navigation lights while operating on Kansas water between sunset and sunrise. It is illegal to operate a PWC on Kansas waters between sunset and sunrise, regardless of ability to use navigation lights. Again, refer to the Kansas Boating Regulations Summary for more information about your particular craft and requirement in regard to navigation lights.

I hope this serves as a good "heads up" on what some of the requirements are for safe and legal boating in Kansas. Kansas Game Wardens take boating safety very seriously, and will not budge on compliance. Please be careful, and know Kansas' boating laws, as your life and others' may depend on it.



Game Warden Profile

Kirk Andrews, Norton and Phillips counties

What is the most memorable investigation you've worked on?

I was standing on the firing line, training in Hays one afternoon when a fellow Game Warden got a call, turned to me and said, "Shoot your qualification, it's time to go to work." We spent the next few hours pulling bullet fragments from a poached whitetail buck, interviewing landowners, obtaining a description of the suspect and a tag number for the vehicle. Later that night, we found ourselves in a driveway in central Nebraska getting screamed at by a not-so-impressed wife. To add to the memories, a few neighbors showed up to joined forces with the wife. The only person not infuriated with our presence was the husband/suspect. He finally admitted to his wrongdoings in Kansas that day, which I'm sure was difficult. You see, he'd told his wife he was going out of town for work and told his employer he was taking time off for family. Meanwhile, he drove to Kansas and got caught poaching a deer. Our drive home at 2 a.m. consisted of McDonalds and wondering if fines and restitution were going to be the worst of his punishment.

What's the best thing about being a game warden?

This career keeps you involved in the outdoors while others seem to pull you away.

If I was not a game warden, I would probably be:

Involved in agriculture and ranching.

In my spare time, I enjoy:

Hunting, especially behind a good dog. Gardening. Spending time with friends, and here's one for the ratings - Husker athletics!

What/Who influenced you to become a game warden?

My father. He is a game warden in Nebraska, so we're neighboring officers, just across the state line. I grew up listening to him and many other wardens' war stories during their careers and I was hooked.

How are you involved in your communities?

The Logan Lions Club, Hunter Education, and the occasional wildlife or boating program.



What is your favorite area in Kansas to hunt or fish?

Northern Norton County, specifically the Sappa and Dutch Creek areas. It's neat country with lots of history. Plus, I hear the game warden for that area is a big slacker.

What activities can people enjoy in your area?

The Phillipsburg Rodeo is enjoyable even if you're not a cowboy. Kirwin Reservoir and National Wildlife Refuge has many hunting and fishing opportunities. And Prairie Dog State Park is great for the outdoors folks who also want to camp.

What's your most embarrassing moment while on duty?

During an interview with a suspect one night, I decided to reposition my truck on the side of the roadway. Unfortunately, I "repositioned" it into an assisting warden's front bumper. I didn't break anything on the trucks, but it did break that awkward silence between the suspect and myself.

Do you have any advice for someone considering a career as a game warden or in the wildlife management field?

I'll pass on what was passed to me: The first year or so is going to be tougher than you think. You'll make mistakes and find people that don't care if you succeed. Hang in there, and it can be a very fun and rewarding career.

Do you have a dream of an outdoor adventure that you'd like to fulfill?

Hunting moose in Alaska.

What's one thing about your patrol area that most people don't know?

A lot of this area's development leads back to Logan, KS native, Dane G. Hansen - a prominent businessman and entrepreneur. He was involved in major construction, ranching, oil, politics and, I'm sure, much more.



BOAT KANSAS

Charismatic Kansas Weather

with Chelsea Hofmeier

Kansas weather can be wildly unpredictable. The midwest is known to produce fast-forming storms that can be on you in a hurry, and what starts off as a beautiful boating day can quickly turn bad without warning. But don't let our charismatic Kansas weather intimidate you – there are many ways to be prepared for unexpected weather that may come your way while boating.

Start checking the 10-day forecast. Though it may change, it's a starting point for your planning. Assuming things look good just before your trip, take the next step of making a brief "float plan." A float plan can be as simple as letting a friend or family member know what your plans are, including where you plan to boat and when you hope to return.

Know the signs. As easy as it is to rely on a handy dandy weather app on your smartphone, it doesn't hurt to know which telltale signs to look for when a front is moving in. Look for a rapid buildup of clouds, especially tall clouds, as they could mean a potential storm. Keep your eyes to the west, as most of our weather changes come from that direction. Watch the water – if it becomes increasingly choppy, it is likely being kicked up by a weather disturbance. And pay attention to the wind. A change in wind direction, or a sudden

cool breeze, could mean a storm is approaching.

Have "bad weather protocol" in place, no matter the weather forecast for the day, and share it with your passengers. This way, if you find yourself in an unexpected storm, you can put your action into place quickly and get to safety. First, if they aren't wearing them already, have every passenger put their life jacket on, and seat them low in the bottom of the boat, along the center line. Next, turn on your navigation lights and ready any emergency equipment you have onboard, including bailers, a first aid kit, anchor, and signaling devices. Third, and especially in extremely rough water, reduce your speed and face your boat into the wind at a 45-degree angle. This will reduce stress and help you maintain better control of your vessel. Lastly, pick a place to go. The presence of lightning and rough water conditions may force you to make the quick decision to either drive back to the boat ramp or pull onto shore, and ride out the storm on land.

With a little bit of knowledge about weather patterns, emergency preparedness, and smart boat handling skills, you and your boat passengers can navigate Kansas' charismatic weather with confidence.



Just Ask

with Tanna Fanshier

For many, the words "hunting mentor" or "fishing mentor" likely stir up images of setting out decoys with Dad or loading up fishing tackle in the back of Grandpa's old truck – memories made with family. Today, a "mentor" may take on a much broader definition, as novice hunters and anglers are turning to friends, neighbors and coworkers to learn about outdoor recreation. This path to mentorship can often feel less natural, and harder to forge, for a newcomer to the outdoor community. So what can we, both as mentors and mentees, do to help make those transitions a little easier? We can simply ask.

Growing up, I had little interest in hunting and shooting. I passed up on enough opportunities to go hunting with my father and brothers that eventually it was assumed that I wouldn't accompany them to break clay targets or walk fields for pheasants. When I finally started to garner some interest in hunting, it felt as though I had already missed the boat. I

had friends who hunted, but the fear of being a "burden" kept me from asking to tag along. When friends did extend an invite, I was too embarrassed say "yes" because of how little I knew. Eventually, people stopped asking me. I found myself lost, and unsure of whether I would ever have a place in the hunting community. I then began to wonder if it was even something I wanted to be a part of anymore.

Years later, my fears began to erode. I got a little bit of experience here and there where I could, and one day – with a Hunter Education card in-hand – I just asked. I asked a friend if they would take me turkey hunting. (My friend, and soon-to-be mentor in this experience, may tell you that it was more of a demand than a question, but semantics aside, he willingly took me.)

My ask was followed by asks of his own: was I ready to go hunt with him? Did I have any questions? Was I comfortable with my gear?

We hammered out the details, and my first turkey hunt was an absolute success. My friend had a great spot with some

birds, he walked me through what to do, and ultimately, I was fortunate enough to harvest my first tom. My mentor then took the extra steps to teach me about how to process a wild turkey, and how to display the fan. After having such a wonderful experience, I couldn't believe I waited so long to ask.

With my newfound confidence, I then asked him when we could do something like that again. He invited me to accompany him to hunt doves in the fall, and we now have plans to take on yet another "first."

The path to become a hunter has its own unique set of challenges. For me, a lot of those challenges were internal. I was nervous. But at the end of the day, I took the risk and the risk paid off. I have a memory that I will never forget, a deepened connection with a longtime friend, and most importantly, I'm not afraid to ask anymore.

No matter what side of the coin you're on, experienced mentor or green mentee, ask. And keep asking for as long as it takes. You just might find it's well worth it.

HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

Things That Go BOOM!

Whether you're new to things that go "boom," or have been reloading your shot for years, it never hurts to learn about the fuel behind the "fire."

Gunpowder - a discovery typically credited to the Chinese, and now called black powder - was a game changer when it entered the world. This mixture of charcoal, sulfur and saltpeter (potassium nitrate) has influenced everything from armies and independent citizens to celebrations around the world, finding its way into artillery rounds, birdshot, 4th of July fireworks, and more.

Smokeless Powder - By the 1880s, a new substitute called "smokeless powder" crashed the scene and was light years ahead of black powder in terms of performance. Smokeless powder burns much cleaner, increasing both the range and power of firearms, and generates less smoke and fouling residue, making it easier to keep firearms clean and functioning. Smokeless powder is also considered a safer propellant, because unlike black powder, it will not explode when burned in an unconfined situation.

Single Base vs. Double Base - Smokeless powder is made of a material called nitrocellulose. Nitrocellulose is created by treating an organic material, such as cotton, with nitric and sulfuric acids. As a result, it was first coined "gun cotton," though it can be made from any organic material, including wood, straw or paper. Smokeless powder made from straight nitrocellulose is called a "single base powder." If you add nitroglycerine to the nitrocellulose, you then have a "double base powder." Other materials may be added to stabilize the shelf life of the chemicals, and flash suppressants can be added to reduce the muzzle flash. And graphite is often used as a coating to improve powder handling.

Granule Shapes - The shape of a smokeless powder granule has a profound effect on the performance of the charge, influencing velocity, pressure and burn rate. Typical shapes can include small flakes or wafers, small spheres or balls, or sticks. One of the first smokeless powders looked like spaghetti and was called Cordite. Modern powders have greatly improved over the years, burning cleaner and less sensitive to temperature.

Burn Rates - Many ball powders burn at a lower temperature, meter well through reloading equipment, and typically have a very long shelf life. Flake powder is typically a double base composition, fast burning due to the greater surface area of the shape, and is used in many shotgun and handgun applications. Flake powder can be difficult to meter because the flakes tend to stack up in the equipment. When it comes to stick powders, these are usually single base compositions and are used in rifle applications. These can also be difficult to meter through reloading equipment, so often times the loads are individually weighed for precision. Burn rates for these can be controlled by extruding powder granules with the addition of holes, which increases the surface area of the granule.

If this topic interests you, I encourage you to seek more information, just choose your sources carefully. There is a lot of free information on the internet - some good, some bad - but in my mind, there's nothing better than a good reloading manual; The information in those manuals is reliable, and has been verified through precision testing equipment.

Lastly, as with all firearm-related activities, safety is your responsibility, and that responsibility needs to be taken seriously. Say it with me, "Load your brain before your gun."

Lanterman Honored



From left to right: Pratt Community College President Dr. Michael Calvert, Linda Lanterman, and Barry Fisher, PCC Executive Director of Institutional Advancement and Alumni Relations.

Parks Division Director, Linda Lanterman, was recently honored by the Pratt Community College (PCC) Foundation as the 2019 Outstanding Alumnus of the Year - an award recognizing PCC alumni who have made contributions to their career field and community.

A native of Pratt, KS, Lanterman received her Associate of Science in Accounting from PCC in 1988. While at PCC, she worked part time at the (then) Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks' Pratt Operations Office.

Following PCC, Lanterman then went on to receive her Bachelor of Arts degree in Administration and Accounting from Wichita State University in 1991. Two years later, she was named KDWP's deputy chief of Licensing and Permits, and eventually deputy director of State Parks - a position she served in for 14 years before becoming the Parks division director.

Lanterman has served on a variety of local, regional, state, and national organizations, to include serving as President of the National Association of State Park Directors. She has also presented for national and worldwide events, including the World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia, in 2014.

In Lanterman's free time, she enjoys spending time with friends and family, traveling, attending sports events, fishing, and of course, visiting state and national parks.

We congratulate Linda on this wonderful honor.

-Magazine Staff

A Native Plant to Know | by Krista Dahlinger

Fragrant Cudweed is a plant whose name doesn't roll off the tongue easily, but it's a widespread native plant that is worth talking about. That's due, in part, to its small, papery flowers with a wonderful, maple syrup fragrance that lasts for several years after being dried, making this plant ideal for handcrafted floral arrangements. Fragrant Cudweed can be found from Texas north to Canada, in prairies and open pastures in dry, sandy and rocky soils. In Kansas, it is found in the eastern two-thirds of the state as a single plant or in clusters of plants.

A member of the Aster family, Fragrant Cudweed is also commonly known as "Fragrant Everlasting" and "Old Field Balsam," or by the tongue-twisting scientific name *Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium*. There are many species of "cudweed," a description that may refer to the fibrous or woolly nature of the leaves since they likely require extra chewing by the animals that graze on the plant.

Fragrant Cudweed grows one to three feet tall on a sturdy main stem

with upright branches emerging from the upper third of the plant. The stem and leaves are green in the summer, then turn silvery as they dry in the fall. Leaves are narrow and arranged in an alternate pattern on the stems and branches. They are wider and woolly on the lower parts of the plant and smooth on the upper parts.

Fragrant Cudweed blooms late in the year, from August to October. The stems and flowers usually remain intact and upright throughout the winter, making the plant easy to spot by its silvery foliage topped by clusters of the cream-colored flowers. During the winter months, the plant also produces a basal rosette of leaves. Mature plants develop a very stout main stem with numerous upright side branches, creating a short shrub covered by masses of the papery, aromatic flowers.

This plant is one of the host plants for the American Painted Lady butterfly, *Vanessa virginiensis*. The butterfly lays its eggs on the plant's leaves, which provide food and habitat for the developing caterpillar. To conceal itself from preda-



Michael Haddock photo

tors during this stage of development, the caterpillar weaves the leaves together to form a "tent." It then hangs from the plant in a "J" shape as the last stage before pupation.

Keep an eye out for this plant when you are out in a prairie or pasture. After you identify it once, you'll begin to see it much more often, and may even be surprised at how such a plentiful, and fragrant, plant is so easy to overlook.



Michael Haddock photo

EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

with Marc Murrell

Stamp of Approval



Waterfowl hunters in all four flyways are familiar with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp. Often referred to simply as the "duck stamp," it's legally required for anyone 16 or older to hunt waterfowl. But this stamp is more than a legal requirement. It's also a keepsake for many bird enthusiasts and stamp collectors, a work of art, and a source of revenue for conservation efforts nationwide.

Since the sale of this stamp (\$25) began in 1934, more than \$1 billion has been generated in support of wetlands and other critical migratory bird habitats across the U.S.

For the first 14 years of the stamp program, artwork was solicited from notable wildlife artists. Beginning in 1949, that changed when any artist in U.S. could submit their work, and the contest as we know it today began.

But how many people know about the junior version of this popular and beneficial stamp?

The National Junior Duck Stamp Program began in 1989, followed by an art contest in 1993 when the first stamp design was selected from eight participating states. Congress then enacted the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act in 1994. And by 2000, the program had grown to all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. Though not required for waterfowl hunters, the Junior Duck Stamp can be purchased, \$5. The funds raised support the program, as well as conservation-based education efforts.

Youth in grades K-12 are able to participate in the junior contest. Each entry must meet size, species and

media requirements. Entries are judged at the state level, with the "Best of Show" going on to compete at the national level. In 2018, more than 20,000 youngsters entered the Junior Duck Stamp Program Contest.

The 2019 junior contest was held at the USFWS Patuxent Research Refuge Visitor's Center in Laurel, Maryland, and I was honored and privileged to serve as a judge.

Suzanne Fellows coordinates the National Junior Duck Stamp Program for the USFWS and assembled a diverse group of five judges from across the country to select a winner. Scot Storm, Minnesota, was the adult duck stamp artist winner for 2019-20 (marking the second time he's won) and served as the lead judge responsible for breaking any ties. Other judges included Ross Melinchuk, South Carolina, vice president of conservation for the National Wild Turkey Federation; Dave Goyer, New York, president of the National Duck Stamp Collector's Society; and Sean Mann, Maryland, world class waterfowl calling champion, call manufacturer and hunting and fishing guide.

Judging is a process of elimination, and the competition was keen and decisions difficult as the quality of entries were truly impressive. Kansas' "Best of Show," a pair of greenwing teal by 16-year-old Wichita resident, Margaret McMullen, made it to the Top 25!

When the dust settled, the winning entry was a spectacular acrylic painting of a drake harlequin duck crafted by 16-year-old Nicole Jeon of New York. Runner-up was an acrylic painting of a drake wood duck painted by 16-year-old Jasmine Kang of New Jersey. Third place went to Paige Collins, 14, from Pennsylvania for her pastel rendition of a long-tailed duck.

In addition to the artists' competition, there is also a "conservation message" category that all five judges vote on. It could be a theme, motto or statement that relays the message of why conservation, waterfowl and wild places are so important. This year's winner was Arkansas resident Haley Chandler, 18, who wrote, "Environment is our foundation, wildlife is our inspiration, conservation is our aspiration." Kansas won this category last year with the message of, "Conserving our wetlands is as important as conserving our art. It is our history, our inspiration, our life, our future," written by Abigail McIntyre, 16, of Manhattan.



For more information on the National Junior Duck Stamp Program, check out www.fws.gov/birds, and click "Education," then "Junior Duck Stamp Conservation Program." You can also follow along on Facebook at "USFWS_Migratory Birds" and on Twitter, @USFWSBirds.

Life Unpaved

with Nadia Reimer

Dampened But Not Doomed



The spring season has been dampened by some seriously soggy weather, but don't say "finito" to your outdoor plans just yet. There's a lot we can do during this down time to keep us close to the outdoor activities we love, and better prepare for when the clouds decide to part.

This summer, I'll be hitting our trails. Our parks are home to some of the state's longest and most scenic trails, most of which you can access for the cost of a daily vehicle permit, just \$5. So, let's take a look at my trail pack, and see what improvements I can make while I have this extra time.

Shoes - Since I plan to hit trails both on foot and on bike, I'll need to make sure my shoes are up to the task. I've got an old pair of New Balances that still have some "life" in them, so I'll give them a three-point inspection: shoelaces, insoles and a "flex" check. I untie my shoelaces, pull them out completely, and give them a quick tug, inspecting for worn spots. Next, I remove my insoles, and check for any pebbles, cheat-grass, or any other toe-poking materials that snuck their way in last summer. Lastly, I flex the shoe backward and forward, checking for areas that may be prone to separation. If you notice a small tear, these areas can usually be shored up with a good wader adhesive/repair kit.

Backpack - I'm guilty of falling into the habit of saying "That's always in my pack," but the reality is, we use things and move things when we're on the trail, and we may not always remember to put them back. Pain relievers, sunscreen, replacement batteries for a headlamp, Band-aids - these are all supplies

that should be checked and replaced each season. After a thorough check of my pack, I noticed I'm nearly out of Kleenex, and I'm missing hair ties and a pocketknife. Easy fixes.

Water Bladder - My water bladder is fairly new, so it shouldn't take much inspecting. I unzip the pouch, fill the bladder with a little bit of water, and check to make sure water flows freely through the straw. As anticipated, no issues, but still worth the check. If your water bladder is a little older, check for leaks and seals that may need replacing. And for hygienic purposes, it may not be a bad idea to go ahead and put in a new mouthpiece.

Fuel - I'm a snacker; if it's food and it's in my pack, chances are, I'm eating it. But because I know to "expect the unexpected," I always like to have an emergency stash. Energy gels are great for this, because they take up very little space and have a decent shelf life. I've got two watermelon-flavored gel packs from last summer, but I'll pack a few more to share with others. "Blocks" or "chews" are another great option, though they'll take up more space and sometimes don't last as long.

Could I have easily maneuvered a trail without running this check? Absolutely. Will replenishing these supplies make my miles more comfortable? Absolutely. And let's be honest, it's exciting to anticipate the adventures ahead, so taking another glance at my pack didn't feel like much of a chore. This weather may be a damper, but not all is doomed. Instead, use this time to your benefit, and better prepare.

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FISHIN'

Prime Time Fishing

with Mike Miller

The months of May and June are to anglers what October and November are to hunters. There are too many fish to be caught and not enough days in the months. More state record and Master Angler Award fish have been caught during these months than any other two months of the year.

Why? Nearly all of our favorite sport fish are moving shallow to spawn or are feeding heavily after they have spawned. Fish are easier to find and catch when they are close to the bank and in the shallows.

Walleye spawn in late March but a couple of weeks after spawning, walleye will move to the shallow flats and main-lake points and begin feeding to replenish after the rigors of reproducing.

Most Kansas walleye are caught in May and June by anglers drifting jig-and-worm combos across shallow flats, humps or points in water as shallow as 2 feet.

Crappie are still spawning in many of the larger reservoirs, especially in the lower ends where the water warms up last. Anglers casting jigs, or jigs and minnows, under floats can catch crappie along the shoreline wherever there is structure - brush, weeds, rip-rap.

Smallmouth bass are probably done spawning, but they'll be feeding along rocky shorelines and points. Cast crawdad-colored crankbaits, tubes or Ned Rigs to any rocky structure. Largemouth bass are just moving shallow to spawn. Cast spinnerbaits, top-

water plugs, or plastic baits around structure and vegetation.

Panfish will probably be on the beds, which are visible in two or three feet of water, appearing as light-colored depressions. It's great fun to cast a popper on a fly rod but a small spinner, or jig suspended under a float, will also work well.

Channel catfish will congregate and feed heavily wherever water is running in, especially after a rain. Fish still-fish prepared or cut bait on the bottom.

Consult the 2019 Fishing Forecast at ksoutdoors.com or in the March/April issue of this magazine to find waters with the type of fishing you enjoy. Whatever your preference, get out there now!



Writings from a Warden's Daughter

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

My dad served as a Kansas game warden for more than 35 years. Growing up in his "office," our home, provided a childhood different than most small-town girls experience. These are his stories.

An Unlikely Tip

It was a summer day in 1985 when a distraught woman walked into the Topeka regional Fish and Game office with some information. The woman was aware of some potentially illegal fishing activity taking place on the Kansas River. However, the illegal activity wasn't her primary concern - it was the safety of her 72-year-old father. He had been venturing out a couple nights a week to assist another man running fish nets. The woman told the Law Enforcement regional supervisor that she had tried convincing her father that what he was doing was dangerous and possibly against the law, but he refused to listen. During their conversation, she revealed the exact boat ramp being used and that the anglers didn't start their activities until after 10 p.m.

Within a few hours, several game wardens were contacted to begin night surveillance and my dad was one of them. The unrelenting heat of the day continued into the evening as the wardens assembled to receive assignments. One warden hid near the boat ramp, while three others staked out areas along the riverbank above and below the boat ramp. Dad and another warden provided transportation and backup. No activity was observed the first night.

On the second night, wardens witnessed two men launch a flat bottom boat and head down river shortly after 10 p.m. The water was calm, making movement easy and quiet. The boat travelled by the first warden with nothing unusual observed. As the boat passed by the second warden further downstream, it angled toward the opposite side of the riverbank. A nearly full moon allowed the warden to use binoculars to observe the boat moving along the bank but he couldn't tell exactly what the two occupants were doing. They could have been running a legal trotline or banklines, so the wardens allowed them to return to the ramp and leave the area unaware they had been watched.

At sunrise the following morning, Dad made his way to where the anglers had been "working" the previous night. As he approached the riverbank he could see a net in the water. Dad



immediately recognized it as a "hoop net," an illegal fishing device with a wide opening on the downstream end that funnels fish swimming upstream into a trap.

Even in the pressing heat and humidity, hopes were high as the team reassembled for a third night of surveillance. The suspects returned, launching their boat in a beeline for the hoop net. Dad stood hidden on the high bank directly above the men as they removed several channel cats and flatheads from the net. Even with the hum of insects around him, he was close enough to hear their conversation. Just as the men reset their net and left, Dad radioed the team. He continued to watch the men as the boat made a second stop along the opposite bank, before motoring upstream to the ramp where the other wardens waited. The men trailered their boat and were pulling into the parking lot when the wardens moved in.

The vehicle, boat and motor were seized, and nearly 60 pounds of channel and flathead catfish were collected as evidence. The fish poachers, ages 56 and 72, were arrested and taken to jail. Later, under the full moon, Dad and another warden launched a small boat back to the area and retrieved two illegal hoop nets. He thought to himself as they floated down the river, "warden work doesn't get any better."

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WHAT AM I? ID Challenge

Using only the image and clues below, see if you can figure out this month's mystery species!



Clues:

1. Many people see me when doing yard work
2. I can give you a nasty rash
3. I come with a warning: "Leaves of three, let it be."

>>> See answer on Page 14



Fish Salvage

I don't fancy myself a "good" fisherman, so when fish-in-a-barrel opportunities arise, I pay attention. My local lake was recently drained for repair work, and during this time, a fish salvage was put in place. This means any legal means of take can be used to harvest fish, and typical creel and length limits don't apply (you'll still need a fishing license, and all other restrictions apply). Though it can be a lot of work, I decided to break out my paddle-fishing gear since snagging is a fairly effective form of fishing.

The last time they drained this lake was about 13 years ago to rebalance the fish populations and remove oversized rough fish. I took to the lake then with snagging gear and proceeded to have a short couple of weeks filled with a lot of fun. I kept everything, including filleting carp for canning, and freezing 15-inch shad for catfish and furbearer

bait. I would occasionally hit a walleye, wiper or catfish.

This year I was able to get my son involved. We went paddlefish snagging over spring break and he liked the idea of trying this type of fishing during the fish salvage. Carp are a blast to snag and the anticipation of hitting something on every rip through the water kept us at it for hours. And yep, fish went into our barrel.

Crappie, walleye, channel and flathead catfish, and carp all hit the fillet board. I gave some to my neighbor (who is worse at fishing than I am) and my family. My wife and I then went to our local Dillon's to purchase every fish breeding they carried so we could do some taste testing. We are keeping a journal on the results, so when it's time to replicate in the future, we'll remember what we did and didn't like.

One recipe we really like is the one I'll share with you here. This simple yet tasty recipe for those delicate crappie fillets will make your mouth water.



2 servings

SAVORY BUTTER BROIL CRAPPIE

- 12 oz. Crappie fillets (About 6)
- 1 1/2 C All-purpose flour
- 1 tsp Black pepper
- 1 tsp Chili powder
- 1 Tbsp Sea salt
- 1 tsp Garlic powder
- 4 Tbsp butter
- 1 Medium lime
- 2 oz. FRESH parmesan cheese
- 1 C Cooked white rice

Mix all dry ingredients, minus the rice, in a gallon bag. Melt 4 Tbsp butter in a skillet over medium heat. Place the wet fillets in dry mix and coat completely. Place half of the fillets in a hot skillet with butter, lightly browning both sides. Remove to a baking dish. Repeat for second batch. Set the oven to broil. Sprinkle the parmesan cheese evenly over the fillets and add butter from the skillet to the baking dish, and place the dish in the oven. Broil until almost blackened. Serve over a light bed of cooked white rice. Pour the juices from the baking dish over the rice and squeeze half of the lime over the fish. This recipe can be used on other scaled fish, but I recommend doubling the chili and garlic powder. Enjoy!

Fish Squeezer

with Tommie Berger

You Never Know Where You'll Go

Back in the mid-60s when I was in high school, I was a hunting and fishing fool. When I wasn't working on the farm and bucking bales, I was at one of our farm ponds fishing or hunting rabbits or quail. I had a few friends who hunted and fished, but none seemed to enjoy quite as much as I did. I couldn't get enough.

When it came time for college, I picked Kansas State University because I heard they had a conservation program. Although my sister and parents tried to convince me to go to a junior college, I was dead set on KSU. And so, this scared little farm boy headed to the big city of Manhattan to study fish and other wildlife.

When I got there, my first college advisor was Dr. Otto Tiemeyer who was the conservation/fisheries professor. He

retired shortly thereafter, and I got reassigned to Dr. Harold Klaassen. He was my instructor for Ichthyology, Fish Management, and several other upper level courses.

Dr. Klaassen, or "Dr. K" as I like to call him, became a very good friend and mentor throughout my last two years at KSU. His help and advice was instrumental in steering me into my career with the fish and game department. He was also responsible for correcting my farm boy grammar: I learned crawdads are crayfish, and bluegill aren't perch!



Shutterstock/772998646

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN

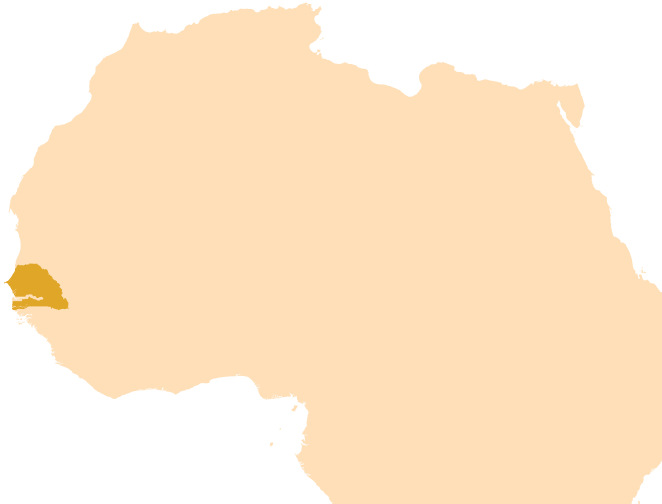


Through Dr. K, I was able to meet the local fisheries biologist, Leo Dowlin. Though I didn't know it then, Leo would later be on my interview panel for my first department job, and my first regional supervisor position. But I had commitment beforehand: basic training. You see, I was in the Reserve Officer Training Corps, so following graduation, I had a 2-year service obligation. Through a stroke of luck, I was stationed at Fort. Riley, Kansas of all places - back home!

Since I had a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology, I immediately went to the Post Conservation Office to volunteer my services. Within a month, I was transferred from my original duties of serving as a military police officer to working at the conservation office as the "Post Conservation Officer." I spent the last 18 months of my military career managing the Post's fish and wildlife, and working in conjunction with (then) Kansas Fish and Game biologists out of the Manhattan office.

And wouldn't you know, I later found out that Dr. K had been contacted for a favorable recommendation. Thankfully he gave one, and it's history from there.

"WHAT AM I?" answer: poison ivy



When I received an invite from Tomas Diagne, director of the African Chelonian Institute (ACI), to attend a celebration in northern Senegal, I couldn't resist. ACI is non-profit organization focused on the conservation of turtles and tortoises in West Africa, and the celebration was being held in recognition of the local community's conservation efforts. What could be better than that?

If you're not familiar with Northern Senegal, it lies within the ecological region known as the Sahel – a transition zone between the Sahara Desert to the north and savannah regions to the south. The Sahel was traditionally more of a woodland, consisting of thorny shrubs, acacia, and baobabs, but with growing human demands for firewood, crop and grazing lands, the Sahel is increasingly afflicted with desertification.

Recognizing these pressures, ACI established the Tocc-Tocc Wetlands Community Reserve on Lac de Guiers. It receives support from the National Parks of Senegal and, perhaps more importantly, the five main villages surrounding the reserve. It's home to many bird species, African manatees, and the purpose of our visit, the Adanson's mud turtle.

Adanson's mud turtle only occurs in the wild in Senegal at Lac de Guiers, and Tocc-Tocc encompasses 675 acres of critical habitat for the species. As part of our visit, Tomas was bringing captive-hatched mud turtles for release in the reserve. Prior to the release, a large community meeting was held with nearly 70 representatives from the local villages, the Senegal National Park Service, and the Senegal Water and Forestry Department. Speeches were given about the importance of the reserve to the local communities and the dedication of the people and agencies protecting the reserve. Then, the meeting was followed by my favorite part, the serving of Thieboudienne or Senegalese fish, vegetables,

and rice. (A pro tip for international travel: an ability to consume spicy dishes will endear you to many cultures!)

After the communal meal, we all moved to the lake where dignitaries and the local village children were able to release the turtles back into the wild. Throughout my career, I've been a part of many outdoor festivals and other natural resource-related events, but the vibe at Tocc-Tocc was very different. I had to just sit and took it all in. The men were gathered around in small groups chatting, the ladies were gathered elsewhere in their finery, the teenagers sitting as far away from the adults as they could get, and the younger children running around playing. It was so reminiscent of many family reunions I've attended, yet this was no mere family gathering. It was a gathering of people from multiple villages whose existence was dependent upon the lake and its wetlands. Their water, food, and economic livelihood are connected to the health of this unique habitat. It was a community stitched together by conservation.

To quote Aldo Leopold, the father of modern wildlife management, "We can only be ethical in relation to something we can see, understand, feel, love, or otherwise have faith in."

As members of the Kansas conservation community, it's our job to help others see, understand, feel, love, or otherwise have faith in Kansas' natural resources. You don't have to build a reserve, or even have turtles to release, to do it. But we could all start by just taking a friend fishing, camping, hiking or birdwatching. That's something worth celebrating, too.



Go Somewhere Different *by Dan Witt*

What a lovely time of year! Weather is warming, birds are dressed up for mating season, and fishing is getting good.

Ducks are just spectacular at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area. I've always thought it would be a great idea to have a "one duck" spring season to harvest a special duck in full breeding plumage to put on the wall. It would be an ideal time to get a blue-winged teal with the white face patch that is present during the breeding season. I settle for the photographs. And while all of the teal species are beautiful, cinnamon teal at the Bottoms is worth the travel time to get a good picture. If you get bored with birds – go fishing! Walleye are on the flats of our local lakes. Wilson Reservoir has stripers, walleye, white bass, catfish and white perch.

Kanopolis, Kansas' first state park, has some historical attributes you might find interesting, as well as great scenery and trails. And the Parks division has done a great job of developing and promoting camping facilities and cabins to rent. I see more families at these locations each year.

If you're careful, it's possible to drive your boat up the Smokey River where it empties into Kanopolis Lake. Some of the very best catfishing happens in that river, especially when it has rained upstream and the river is rising. We collect shad in the fall when they start dying from the cold water and freeze them for bait. Note: There are lots of logs and debris, so it can be easy to get grounded or strike some of the underwater logs.

The Smokey River is a well-kept secret place for birders, too, as herons, pelicans, ducks and shore birds are fairly contained in the river channel. It's almost like watching a movie when the birds start traveling, and calling up and down the river. Green herons love that section of the Smokey.

The upper end of Wilson, past Horse Shoe Bend, is very similar and doesn't have nearly as much debris.

The Saline River is wider and deeper than the Smokey, so it is easier to navigate. We've been catching some really nice blue catfish in that area. (That fish will bend your pole!) Watch your size limit, as it's more than you think. When caught, we release the blues; They're such a great fish to catch and are deserving of "catch and release" status. Plus, it makes you feel good to put a great fish back in the water for someone else to enjoy.

We have some great outings and fishing trips in the upper ends of these lakes, and I have some special photographs from each. They aren't particularly easy to access, and you don't always catch fish, but you always see something fun, different or interesting when you make the effort to go where others won't.

Go ahead, go somewhere different.



Dan Witt photo

Park View

with Kathy Pritchett

Get Outdoors!

June is National Get Outdoors Month, and it's the start of summer – time for fun! If your idea of fun is a trip to a state park, here are a few things you should know:

Motor vehicle permits are required for every vehicle entering a Kansas state park. That includes cars, truck and self-propelled motor homes. It doesn't apply to trailers or bicycles. Permits are easy to get. You can pay for a daily permit (\$5) at a gatehouse or self-pay station. Annual permits, a great value at \$25.50, can be purchased online at ksoutdoors.com or at the park office. If you're a Kansas resident, you can purchase a state park passport when registering your vehicle; It's only \$15.50 and is valid until your vehicle registration expires (all others expire on December 31).

Making a camping reservation

through ReserveAmerica.com is easy. And now, if the site or cabin you want is booked, you can click on "Create Availability Notification" to be notified if it becomes available. By reserving your spot ahead of time, you know it will be there when you arrive. We also have a few "walk-in only" campsites for those who want to camp spur-of-the-moment. You've got options. However, holiday and summer weekends book far ahead, so be prepared.

Seasonal camping is an option for those who may want to leave the camper set up for a month or longer. You can stay on the site for 30 days at a time (max stay is six months), without visiting the camping unit daily; all you need to do is purchase an annual camping permit and sign an agreement.

Those who prefer to use a golf cart to get around the campground now have the option of purchasing an Unconventional Vehicle Permit for \$52.50 at the park office. Golf carts or other such non-tagged vehicles are otherwise prohibited on our park roads. This permit allows such vehicles to be utilized during daylight hours

only. No off-road use is permitted.

Special events run the gamut this year. The 24th Annual Kicker Country Stampede will bring more than 50 top-shelf country music stars to Tuttle Creek State Park from June 20-22. In a similar vein, El Dorado State Park's Dam Music Festival hosts stars on July 25-27. Wilson State Park's Hell Creek Hoedown is May 31 through June 2. For folks into quieter events, Free Fishing Days are June 1 and 2 this year. June 1 is National Trails Day, a great time to check out some of the awesome trails in our parks. Trails are also popular sites for runs and bike races. For equestrians, there are a number of trail rides scheduled, many of which benefit various charities. You can find a list of all of our trails on ksoutdoors.com. And don't for 4th of July, in fact, July 5 brings a fireworks display at Lovewell State Park. Stargazing is another popular pastime in the parks, as most are in rural areas without significant light pollution.

This is a terrific summer to make a lifetime memories at a Kansas state park. The hard part is choosing which one to visit first!



2019 Deadline to enter is Oct. 11!

Photo submissions for the 7th annual “Wild About Kansas” photo contest are being accepted now through Oct. 11, 2019. Divided into five categories, participants can submit photos related to:

- Wildlife** (game and nongame animals, primarily mammals, migratory birds, furbearers, etc.)
- Outdoor Recreation** (people participating in recreational activities outdoors, not hunting or fishing)
- Landscapes** (scenery; wildlife may be present, but should not be the sole focus of the image.)
- Other Species** (insects, reptiles, and amphibians)
- Hunting and Fishing** (hunters and anglers; set-up shots following a hunting or fishing trip. Photos with dead game will be accepted, however, “action” shots, or photos taken during the activity will be given preference.)

RULES

Photographers can submit up to three photos total. Photos must be taken within the state of Kansas and must be the entrant’s original work. The contest is open to both residents and non-residents of Kansas, and there is no age limit.

JUDGING

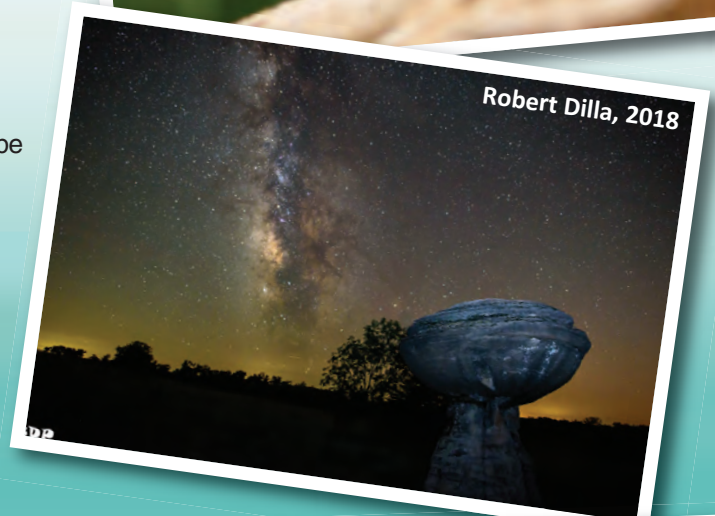
Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and the overall sharpness. Photographs from participants under the age of 18 will be placed in a youth division; all others will compete in the adult division. Winning entries will be featured in the 2020 January/February photo issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*.

HOW TO ENTER

Entries must be submitted no later than **5 p.m. on Oct. 11, 2019**. Photo format should be JPEG or TIFF. All photos must be submitted electronically. Photos that do not meet the minimum file size requirements (1 MB) will NOT be accepted. To enter, visit ksoutdoors.com and click “Publications,” then “2019 Wild About Kansas Photo Contest.”



Danielle Gold, 2018



Robert Dilla, 2018



Jay Stockhaus, 2018

READY, SET, SPAWN!

text by Brent Frazee, *freelance writer*



Each March, Jason Vajnar works to fool Mother Nature at the Meade Fish Hatchery he manages. Largemouth bass ordinarily don't spawn in Kansas until mid- to late May. But in a controlled environment, Vajnar and his crew trick the green fish into spawning early.

BEFORE MOTHER NATURE

Before Mother Nature even gives bass the urge to spawn in reservoirs across Kansas, fry produced in the Meade hatchery are living the good life. Once they are transferred to rearing ponds, they don't have to dodge predators and they get the food they need to promote rapid growth.

They quickly grow to finger-

ling size – from 1.5 to 3 inches long – as soon as early May and are ready to be stocked into reservoirs across Kansas.

The result? A program that has found so much success that both fisheries biologists and anglers are as excited about the future of largemouth bass fishing in Kansas as they have ever been.

“We’re seeing reservoirs that were never known for their largemouth bass populations develop into impressive fisheries,” said Doug Nygren, chief of fisheries for KDWP. “In my career at Wildlife and Parks, I don’t think I’ve ever gone into a season feeling so optimistic about our reservoir bass fishing.”

Largemouth bass spawned in the controlled environment of KDWP’s Meade Fish Hatchery are given a jump-start on their naturally-spawned peers. Results are being enjoyed by anglers who later catch these fish at Kansas reservoirs.





HOW IT WORKS

Standard thinking has always been that stocking bass in major impoundments doesn't work.

And it didn't work in Kansas for years. Largemouth bass spawned in ponds, and fry were collected and then stocked in reservoirs. But the program found minimal success.

"When you do that, you're at the mercy of Mom – Mother Nature," Vajnar said. "You can't control the environment the bass are in. A cold front comes in at the wrong time and the bass vacate their nest. Insects and

birds and even adult bass prey on the eggs and fry, and all kinds of diseases can affect things.

"The only way you know what kind of spawn you had is to walk around the pond for two weeks and see how many fry there are."

But Kansas found a better way when it looked at the way other states operated. Nygren visited a Florida hatchery and got a good look at how the state's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission spawned bass in a controlled setting. Vajnar also knew it could work based on what he had seen while he worked for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

That gave them a good idea of where to start in 2012. Vajnar chose to use a 44-foot long, 8-foot wide indoor raceway as the spawning tank at the Meade hatchery.

A mix of adult male and female bass are netted from outdoor ponds in February, brought inside and kept at ambient temperature with 10 hours of light; A screen in the raceway separates the males and females.

"We have to reprogram the bass, but make them think it is still winter," Vajnar said.

By March 11, the raceway is exposed to 14 hours of light and shortly thereafter, water heaters are used to slowly increase the water temperature. Hello, spring.

By March 18, the screen is removed and the water temperature is raised to 70 degrees – an ideal spawning temperature. Spawning mats are placed in the raceway and the eggs stick to the fibers, making it easy for hatchery workers to retrieve them.

Vajnar and others at the hatchery expect to see the first spawns by April 1. The mats are moved to hatching tanks, and the majority of the eggs that are fertilized hatch.

The young bass are separated into day groups and stocked in rearing ponds at Meade and Farlington fish hatcheries.

"By keeping them in day groups, we can keep their growth pretty uniform and avoid cannibalism," Vajnar said.

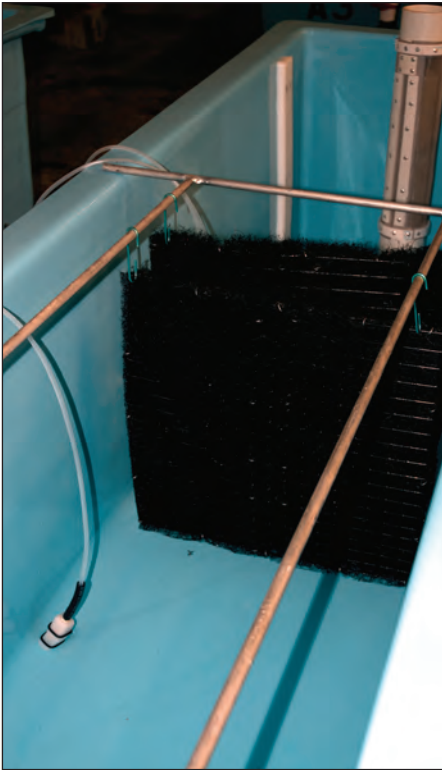
By the time they are stocked as fingerlings, the bass are able to feed on invertebrates and small fish. "They're ahead of Mother Nature by a month and a half," Vajnar said.

That gives the hatchery bass an extra advantage, allowing



Vajnar uses 44-foot long, 8-foot wide indoor raceways as spawning tanks for the largemouth bass. He then controls each raceway's temperature and lighting to "trick" the fish into thinking it's Spring – their natural breeding season.





By March 18, the raceway water temperature is raised to 70 degrees - an ideal spawning temperature. Spawning mats are then placed in the raceway where the eggs can stick to the mat fibers. This makes it easy for hatchery workers to then retrieve the fertilized eggs.

ating these stockings in 2014, anywhere from 38 to 51 percent of the largemouth bass we sampled were bass we stocked (or offspring of those fish)," said Jeff Koch, fisheries research supervisor for KDWPT. "We have also been monitoring bass brought in for tournament weigh-ins, and last year, 40 percent of the bass we tested had DNA from our hatchery fish.

"We're seeing some encouraging things."

Don't assume this means bass populations are booming in all Kansas reservoirs. In waters where there is little quality shoreline cover, bass numbers are still only fair despite the addition of stocked bass.

But in other reservoirs, especially those in central and western Kansas where an influx of water in recent years has flooded brush and vegetation that grew during the drought of 2010 to 2015, the bass are thriving.

them to put on more muscle and fat to survive winter.

KDWPT stocked 476,171 fingerling largemouth bass and 240 intermediates in Kansas waters in 2018. If past success is any indication, those bass will grow quicker than their wild counterparts and go on to make up a significant part of each reservoir's overall largemouth bass population.

ELIMINATING THE GUESS WORK

So how do fisheries biologists know how successful the stocking program has been? Well, it's more than just an educated guess.

Hatchery workers take a fin clipping of each brood fish used in the early-spawn program and DNA information is kept on file at a California genetics laboratory.

When Kansas fisheries biologists do their spring electrofishing samples, they take a fin clip of every largemouth bass sampled, and send the clippings

to the California lab to see if there is a match.

The results, in some cases, have been eye-opening.

"Ever since we started evalu-



Mats carrying fertilized eggs are moved to hatching tanks where, once ready, the largemouth bass young can break out of their egg sac. Hatchery staff typically expect to see the first spawns by April 1, after which the young are moved to rearing ponds.



The young largemouth bass are separated by hatch date to keep their growth uniform and to ward off risk of cannibalism. By the time they are stocked as fingerlings, the young are ahead of Mother Nature by a month and a half and are able to feed on invertebrates and small fish.



A SUCCESS STORY AT WILSON RESERVOIR

The timing couldn't have been better at Wilson Reservoir in northwest Kansas.

When precipitation returned to the Kansas plains in 2015 and 2016, the water level shot up and flooded ideal shoreline cover for largemouth bass. But there weren't enough naturally-produced fish to spawn and take advantage of the situation.

That's where the hatchery program entered the picture. Fingerling largemouths were stocked in big numbers, and they immediately took to their new surroundings.

"A few years ago, there were small bass everywhere," said Klint VonFeldt, a tournament bass angler who lives in Hays. "They were like piranhas.

"You would throw a Pop-R or a spinnerbait and they would just swarm it. We knew then that we were in for good things."

But they didn't know just how good until last year.

The largemouth bass fishing

was phenomenal, with numerous keepers and an occasional fish in the 6-pound range.

"You could count on a limit," VonFeldt said. "And they were big, healthy fish."

Rick Dykstra of Milford says the same thing.

"In the past, Wilson was always known for its smallmouth bass," he said. "And the smallmouth fishing is still good.

"But I've never seen largemouth fishing like what we had last year. In one tournament, we sat in one place and caught all kinds of 14- to 19-inch bass.

"I've fished Wilson for over 30 years, and I've never seen anything like this. The largemouth bass have just gone ballistic."

OTHER SUCCESS STORIES

When the water returned to the plains of northwest Kansas in 2015 and 2016, KDWPT fisheries biologist Mark Shaw expected the largemouth bass population to boom at Kirwin and Webster reservoirs. But he was sadly mistaken.

"In my electrofishing in 2017, I only got two bass at each reservoir," Shaw said. "Obviously, we didn't have enough adult bass survive the low water to recruit (spawn)."

Things changed dramatically, though, when Shaw requested 3- to 3.5-inch largemouth fingerlings from the hatchery program that same year.

"Last year, I got about 110 bass in my electrofishing, and the majority of them tested out to be hatchery fish," Shaw said.

With a good year of growth, those bass should be pushing the 15-inch mark later this year, Shaw added. At that point, Shaw predicts there is going to be some excellent bass fishing in northwest Kansas.

"There aren't a lot of people who fish specifically for bass out here," Shaw said. "I don't think they really know what's going on with this hatchery program.

"But I think we're going to recruit some bass fishermen if our largemouth populations continue to grow like they have."

OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

Other reservoirs such as Hillsdale, Clinton, El Dorado, Kanopolis, Glen Elder and Melvern have been stocked with hatchery bass, with results often dependent on habitat conditions.

"We can prioritize where we stock the bass based on reservoir conditions," Koch said. "For example, if a reservoir has been in a drought for several years and there isn't much shoreline habitat available, it probably isn't

a good time to stock the hatchery bass there."

That's why Nygren is implementing habitat enhancement projects at many Kansas reservoirs thought to have a chance of supporting good largemouth bass populations.

The bottom line? Efforts to help Mother Nature appear to be working in Kansas.

"We'll never have the famous bass lakes to bring in tourism," said Jesse Jordan, a bass angler from Stilwell. "But we're seeing a

lot of good things happen. Here at Melvern, largemouth bass fishing didn't exist for the most part five or six years ago. It was all smallmouths. Now we're seeing a lot of largemouth brought to the scales in tournaments, and that's exciting.

"What Wildlife and Parks has done for us fishermen who like to chase green fish is amazing." 🐟



KDWPT stocked 476,171 fingerling largemouth bass and 240 intermediates in Kansas waters in 2018.

If past success is any indication, those bass will grow quicker than their wild counterparts and go on to make up a significant part of each reservoir's overall largemouth bass population.



Gravel Grinders!

A Look in to Dirty Kanza

text and photos by Rick McNary



How long would it take you to ride a bicycle 200 miles on a gravel road? That distance is the same as going across Kansas, from Nebraska to Oklahoma.

Ted King averaged 19.2 miles per hour when he won the Dirty Kanza (DK) 200 in 2018 with a time of 10:44:22. On gravel. In the Flint Hills. In turbulent spring weather.

The Origin of DK

Considering the network of graveled roads in Kansas, it's no surprise that we are now home to one of the premier gravel races in the world. On June 1, 3,000 cyclists from 23 foreign countries and all 50 states will saddle up on bicycles in Emporia and wind their way through the graveled labyrinth of the Flint Hills. This all began with a group of cycling friends looking for a new challenge.

"I'd been into cycling for 20 years and was looking for something fresher," said Jim Cummins of Emporia, and DK200 co-

founder. "I was intrigued with ultra-endurance type of events – instead of racing hard for a couple of hours, events that lasted a whole day or days. I started talking about it with buddies and organized a group ride of 200 miles in 2006. We started and finished in Emporia and thought 34 riders [was] an amazing turnout. We were more deliberate in promoting it the next year and set a limit for 50 riders, then 75 the next year and 100 the next. We raised it a bit at a time and this year we had to turn away thousands."

The Rise of Gravel Grinding

The fastest growing subset in cycling is "gravel grinding" – riding on graveled roads. Overall, the cycling industry has remained relatively flat with the exception of gravel riding. This market segment has spawned considerable growth and specialized designs. Many are attracted to the sport because of the safety aspect; they are much less likely to be hit by a distracted driver. In addition, the accessibility and beauty of the places the back roads take you appeals to those who prefer to wander roads less traveled.

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The fastest growing subset in cycling is “gravel grinding” – riding on graveled roads. Many are attracted to the sport because of the safety aspect; they are much less likely to be hit by a distracted driver.

Go The Distance

Although the original race was designed as a test of endurance at 200 miles, the interest compelled the race organizers to offer other distances for various levels of fitness. In addition to the DK200, riders can now choose the DKHS (High School), DK25, DK50, DK100, and, the newest addition, the DKXL - 350 miles of grueling gravel grinding through the toughest terrain the Flint Hills has to offer. There is even a training camp now for those wanting to prepare.

“Although we have some of the world’s top cyclists, like Tour De France riders, coming to race, we wanted to make Emporia a destination city for anyone who likes to ride a bike,” Cummins said. “We do follow our mission statement in striving to provide life-enriching outdoor-related experiences for our customers and to build community – locally, regionally, and beyond.

“The DK is not about the pointed end of the stick. Yes, we love the high caliber people who come, but this event is designed for people like you and me, just out there for a personal challenge, to discover things about themselves, their own personal journey whose victory is finishing the journey before the sun goes down. You’ll hear amazing stories told at 4:30 in the afternoon when the first rider comes in, but even more amazing when the stragglers come in at 11:30 p.m.” said Cummins. “The crowd waiting at the finish line cheer as loudly for the last rider as they do for the first one.”



Cowboy Spurs on a Bicycle?

Although it’s clearly evident there is a local, national and international community of cyclists, I discovered the most unique story of “community” when I noticed a set of cowboy spurs dangling from the bike frame of a rider pausing at the Bazaar Cattle Pens. “These spurs belonged to Cliff Cole, who recently passed,” said Mary Davies of Lebo. “His spurs are riding with me today in honor of he and his family.”



Cole was the ranch manager of the land upon which the Bazaar Cattle pens set; a route often taken by DK riders. Cole was not always a fan of the race, especially after a group of riders spooked a herd of cattle that stampeded. In fact, that’s when he and Cummins first met.

“During the race in 2014, my cell phone rang,” Cummins said. “Course spotters said we had an incident near the pens when the lead pack spooked the cattle, and they stampeded through a fence into a neighbor’s pasture. I knew we were going to have to mend fences literally and figuratively.

“I went out the next day and there were big pickups with horse trailers and all these cowboys in the pen with cattle. I told one of the cowboys who I was and he raised an eyebrow and said, ‘There’s some boys out here that want to talk to you!’ He gave me Cliff Cole’s phone number, so I went back home.

“I told a friend I needed to call Cliff and he said, ‘Oh, it sucks to be you right now!’ I called and

found him to be a cowboy in every sense of the word. He was a hard man, but a fair man. We reimbursed him for all the expenses of the cowboys and mending the fences, and over time, we became good friends. I went from being scared of him to looking forward to calling him for lunch. It was a good lesson for us to realize that we were playing in their backyard, to be nice, to be respectful and make sure nothing we do causes trouble. And if we do, we fix it. I'm really going to miss him."

Caring for Nature

As with any outdoor activity, you can't help but leave a "footprint" – signs you've been there. And riding is no different, Cummins and others realize.

"Our object is to show people how they can enjoy this amazing resource with a low impact," said Cummins. "We teach our riders that this is an area to be protected

and respected, and that's why we introduce them to the area; people won't respect something they're not familiar with."

The week following DK is CK: "Clean Kanza." Volunteers are given a map and assigned a 10-mile section to clean up all the trash, not just that left by cyclists.

Last year, volunteers collected more than 2,000 pounds of trash in the effort to demonstrate to local residents and landowners that they are good stewards and neighbors.

Some Come to Race, Others To Ride

I was fortunate to attend the 2018 race as an excited onlooker. After the race began, and camera-in-hand, I left town for a spot in the road where I knew the first riders would cross the highway. I was astonished at the speed and thunder of bicycles roaring down the gravel and wondered if stampeding buffalo sounded the same.

For the elite riders, it was a race against time; for recreational cyclists, it was a race against themselves.

"A bicycle was my first childhood sense of freedom," said Ron Alexander of Ottawa. "I grew up riding bikes around town until the street lights came on – our signal to go home. When you have a bike, the world expands and you get to explore. The DK coalesces two things for me: my love for riding bikes and my love for the Flint Hills.

"I love the challenge of it," Alexander continued. "Can I deal with what the day throws at me? Will it be hot, sunny and windy? Cold and rainy? Both?"

"At the end of the day when I climb that last nasty little hill and come out on the main drag to the finish line and people [are] ringing cowbells, it's a pretty good rush."

"The best part is what I call DK Magic," Alexander explained. "Each year, someone comes out of nowhere and does something really special for you. One year, I was leaving Madison and it was hotter than blazes, and since resupply is 80 miles in between, I had that long ride into the wind back to Emporia. I turned a corner and there was a mom, dad and two kids handing out sliced oranges out in the middle of nowhere. I never had an orange taste so good in my life!"

Another rider to challenge his mettle with the inaugural DKXL of 350 miles was Shawn O'Mara of Emporia. Riders in the DKXL



The 2019 Dirty Kanza race will see 3,000 cyclists from 23 foreign countries and all 50 states. Riders will saddle up in Emporia and wind their way through the graveled labyrinth of the Flint Hills.

Shutterstock/rustamank

Cyclists can choose to compete in one of six groups: High school, 25 miles, 50 miles, 100 miles, 200 miles, or a grueling 350 miles.

start Friday afternoon at 3 p.m. and are given 36 hours to complete the race. Some will finish around the same time the 200 milers do the next day, others come in at the “cut-off” at 3 a.m. Sunday morning.

“I rode bikes around as a kid, but got away from it as an adult,” said O’Mara. “About nine years ago, a buddy told me to dust off my bike and we rode 15 miles and I was whipped. I couldn’t believe people could ride for 30 or 40 miles. But I was hooked and started doing long distances.

“I was honored last year when Jim asked me to be part of the inaugural ride for the DKXL. Rather than take off Saturday morning with thousands of riders, our small group took off Friday afternoon. The noise of the tunnel when we left was exhilarating.

“It was sweltering heat with high humidity. We made it to Madison, then rode from there to Eureka in the dark, through the night. At sunrise, we headed north and that storm came through and the wind was in our face. I was doing okay until I got into Chase County in the afternoon when the strangest thing happened; I started to fall asleep on my bicycle. I was fine on the flats or doing downhill, but when I started to climb hills, something about the rhythm of pedaling rocked me to sleep. I’d snap awake and be headed for



the ditch.”

Matt Acker won the DKXL last year by averaging 13.92 miles per hour and finishing it in 25:10:02.

Sue Bryson of Emporia traded in her running shoes for cycling and hasn’t regretted a moment.

“I love the day of the race and testing my limits,” Bryson said. “But what I like more is that there are now several groups around the area that ride at various times during the week. I can hop on social media and see who’s going out or say that I am, and soon, we have group. There are permanent groups that go out on certain days, then quick, thrown-together groups. The DK has really brought our community together around cycling.”

A Cycling Tourism Destination

The reasons people visit Kansas vary – family gatherings, authentic barbecue, or a trophy whitetail hunt could easily be among the top contenders. But a bicycle race? Absolutely.

“Kansas has a bad rap of being a flyover state,” Cummins said. “But now people come here from all over the world. Our vision was to make Emporia and the surrounding Flint Hills region nationally recognized as a preferred outdoor adventure vacation destination.”

According to the Emporia Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, the annual economic impact is more than \$2.6 million dollars.

“It’s common to walk down the streets and see cars with out-of-state tags with bike racks on,” Cummins said. “This has become a destination for all ages who love the freedom that a bicycle affords.”

If the adage is true that “once you ride a bike, you always remember how,” maybe it’s time for you to dig out your bike and relive the childhood freedom and joy it brought you.

The roads less traveled are waiting to surprise you with the hidden beauty of Kansas. 🐮



Plant & Prosper

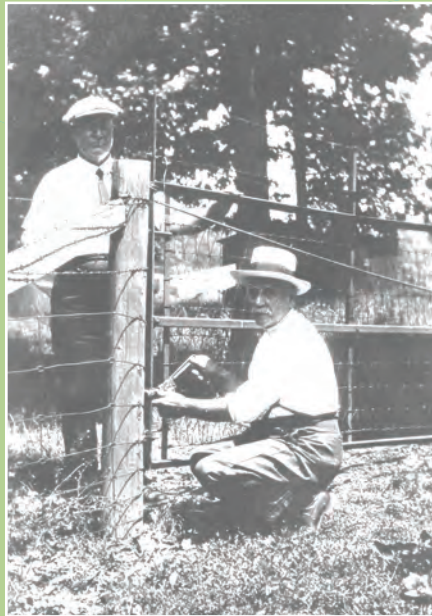
text by Mary Winder
reporter, *The Kansas Chief*

A Mound City, Missouri couple has transformed a 240-acre farm north of Denton into a place where wildlife and pollinators flourish, and natural resources like soil and water are protected.

Ron and Cynthia Pederson, who own the Byers Family Farm with Cynthia's mother Jean Badders Daniels of Topeka, have left trees growing along the streams and have planted native grasses and prairie wildflowers on former cropland and waterways on the property.

"I grew up in the city, but I love the family farm," says Cynthia, who grew up in Topeka and often visited the farm during her childhood. "I'm interested in native plants and the interaction between them and pollinators, and I'm interested in sustainable agriculture. My goal was to do a native planting at the farm to make it more wildlife-friendly."

The Pedersons' project to grow prairie grasses and wildflowers on the farm rather than conventional



Cynthia's great-grandparents, Willis and Cora Byers, moved to the farm in 1877 and lived there for years before retiring and moving to Horton. Courtesy photo.

crops took years to complete.

Cynthia began managing the farm in 1995, though she and her husband and mother didn't own all of it then. Cynthia's great-grandparents, Willis and Cora

Byers, moved to the farm in 1877 and lived there for years before retiring and moving to Horton. In the following years, various family members (some of whom lived far from Kansas) owned fractions of the farm. The Pedersons bought the fractions back from relatives, little by little, with the goal of someday having possession of the entire 240 acres.

"It's been quite a process," says Cynthia, who spent much of that time testing out various native plantings on the five acres surrounding her and her husband's rural home north of Mound City.

"I found out how not to do things," Cynthia says with a chuckle.

After obtaining the final fraction of the farm from a relative, the Pedersons began the real work. The first step? Plant filter strips.

"In 2003, we planted filter strips to prevent erosion in riparian areas (along streams)," explains Cynthia, noting that the

Shutterstock/AngryBrush





Left: Ron and Cynthia Pederson transformed a 240-acre farm back into native grasses and prairie wildflowers. Kurt S. Daniels photo.

Right: Luke Terry of Custom Forestry Applications in Robinson assisted the Pedersons with spraying and drilling work in 2016 and 2017. Courtesy photo.



filter strips were a mix of four varieties of native grasses and 12 kinds of forbs (flowering plants that are not grasses). The Pedersons enrolled in a government program called CP-33 for this project – a project aimed at creating habitat buffers for upland birds.

The next step was to enter the cropland portion of the farm, 177 acres, into the CP-25 program, commonly known as “CRP” or “Conservation Reserve Program.” Though the farm wasn’t accepted into the program on the first try, it was accepted on the second after the Pedersons did some required erosion control work, including the construction of terraces and structures at the ends of waterways. The 177-acre tract was entered into the CP-25 program on Oct. 1, 2006 and will remain in the program until Sept. 30, 2021.

The CP-25 program requires that land be planted with plants such as native grasses and wildflowers. The Pedersons then receive an annual payment for keeping the land in prairie plants, which protect the soil from erosion, as well as provide necessary habitat for wildlife. Native grasses they

planted include big and little bluestem, Indiangrass, sideoats grama, western wheatgrass, and switchgrass. The Pedersons planted more than 40 varieties of prairie wildflowers, including rattlesnake master, dotted blazing star, blue wild indigo, flowering spurge, downy gentian, and compass plant. They purchased the seed from Diversity Farms of Dedham, Iowa and Pure Air Natives in Novinger, MO. Jon Judson of Diversity Farms planted the seed in the spring of 2007, using a native grass drill rented from the Doniphan County Conservation District. All in all, the cost of the seed for the native grass and the prairie wildflowers for the 177-acre CP-25 project totaled around \$32,000, with some of it

being cost-shared and the rest being paid for by the Pedersons.

“At the time we planted the farm to native grasses and wildflowers, it was more profitable to do the CRP rather than to grow the row crops,” notes Cynthia, adding that they don’t own their own equipment. “Even so, my sister Celia and I had to convince our mom to put the farm into CRP.”

Celia, who lives in Topeka, loves the farm and has helped with paperwork and finances. Cynthia and Celia’s mother, Jean, who is 95, is also very fond of the farm and recalls happy times visiting there as a child.

The next step in the Pedersons’ long-term project was to plant pollinator plots, a project completed recently. The couple opted for a mix of 16 different prairie wildflower varieties in some of the waterways and in other spots on the farm, including adjacent to a county road. The plots in the waterways total 2.1 acres and will provide much-needed habitat for pollinators such as bees and butterflies – an effort appreciated by researchers at the University of Kansas who have since visited the Pederson’s farm

“... it was more profitable to do the CRP rather than to grow the row crops.”



Ron and Cynthia Pederson, owners of the Byers Family Farm. Mechelle Foos photo.

to conduct pollinator studies. Though the couple is already seeing results, they and others expect it to get better with time.

“We sprayed Roundup in November, 2016 and in late March, 2017 to kill the cool-season grasses, and then drilled the site in May of 2017,” explains Luke Terry of Custom Forestry Applications in Robinson. “We’ll see how it looks this spring. Year two and year three are when you start to see the results.”

returning the land to its native ecosystem,” says Terry. “There’s a wide diversity of species that benefit from the grass ecosystem on the farm. We’ve flushed pheasant and quail, turkeys, lots of deer, songbirds, and rabbits. And the timber resources next to the streams are also valuable for wildlife and for holding soil where it needs to be.”

In addition to Terry and Judson, others assisting with different aspects of the Pedersons’ habitat work include Tyler Warner, district wildlife biologist for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT); Mechelle Foos, district conservationist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service;

and, Bob Hoffman and other members of the Denton Fire Department who have helped with controlled burns of native grasses on the property.

“This is probably one of the best CRPs in the country, and definitely in Kansas,” says Warner. “Very high native plant diversity makes this property outstanding for all conservation. Pollinators, soil health, erosion (control), wildlife habitat, water quality, and infiltration have been enhanced on this property to the highest level.”

And it’s not just Warner who has taken notice. In 2016, the Pedersons and Cynthia’s mother received the Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award for Doniphan County from the Kansas Bankers Association and KDWPT.

A monarch butterfly visits a cup plant flower. The Pedersons planted more than 40 varieties of prairie wildflowers, including rattlesnake master, dotted blazing star, blue wild indigo, flowering spurge, downy gentian, and compass plant on their 240-acre farm. Cynthia Pederson photo.



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“It’s been a very rewarding project to work on, especially when you have a landowner who is so passionate about returning the land to its native ecosystem.”

The pollinator plots have been mowed high twice to control weeds, and spray has been used for weed control, as well.

“It’s been a very rewarding project to work on, especially when you have a landowner who is so passionate about





“We were really proud to win,” Cynthia says. “To have an opportunity to participate in these conservation programs has been a challenge and a joy. I feel very connected with the prairie, and I’ve learned a great deal by tackling this restoration.

Cynthia encourages others to consider planting plots of native grasses and prairie wildflowers on places such as out-of-the-way spots on their farms or patches in their yards.

“You have to be patient,” Cynthia notes. “And in order to be successful, you need to invest time and energy into the project and do some research. You need to know weeds and know how to control them, how to keep trees from encroaching on the prairie areas, and you need to burn at the right time.”

Golden Alexanders, pictured right, are one of the many varieties of prairie wildflowers planted on the family farm. Cynthia Pederson photo.



In 2016, the Pedersons and Cynthia’s mother received the Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award for Doniphan County from the Kansas Bankers Association and KDWPT. Courtesy photo.

Even the best laid plans come with unexpected challenges. One such challenge the Pedersons are currently navigating is a proposed direct current, overhead transmission line that is set to carry electricity from western Kansas to states to the east – a line proposed to run through the Pederson’s farm. The Pedersons, alongside others from across the area, have been working to prevent the line from being erected. According to Cynthia, the line would interfere with their ability to perform controlled burns, among other practices.

Challenges aside, the Pedersons and their family and friends have enjoyed spending time on the farm – especially taking hikes in the prairie.

“I’m really gratified and really proud of what we’ve done there at the farm,” Cynthia says. “It’s been quite a journey!” 🐮



PUT THEM BACK

text and photos by Pat Silovsky
director, Milford Nature Center



This article highlights some of the best “put them back” stories from recent years. The nesting season of 2017 brought a number of challenges. In all, we replaced three nests of barn owls, two great-horned owl chicks, a barred owl chick, and several Mississippi kites, along with rabbits, songbirds, and baby bats.



Wildlife rehabilitation can seem like a never-ending flow of animal hardship cases. But chances are, the particular animal in question didn’t really need to be “rescued.” However, there it is, in a box, in our rehabilitation facility. What next? My standard answer has become, “Put it back!”

When I ask a caller/finder to put the animal back in the nest, I am usually confronted with a tireless litany of excuses about why that isn’t possible. Maybe it isn’t possible for the caller but with the right partners and determination, we have taken it upon ourselves as a challenge to put as many animals back as we can. This is what is best for the animal and it is best for us as rehabilitators, too. And the policy has resulted in some exciting and rewarding nest reunifications.

BARRED OWL

Owls generally don't possess good engineering skills when it comes to constructing nests, but they compensate for their lack of nest-building skills by using natural cavities in trees or repurposed hawk nests. Sometimes, cavities do collapse, as was the case with a barred owl nest in Milford in May of 2017. Our first action was to call Brad Kesl, director of the Division of Operations for Westar Energy, to find out if we could contact a local linemen crew. In this case, I met a Westar employee at the home and began to assess the situation. When we arrived at the yard, we could see that the side of the cavity had sheared off and the owl had fallen to the ground. The side that had fallen off fit perfectly back in place and with a little wire around the broken piece, we were able to put the barred owls back in the nest. As always, we asked the homeowner to keep an eye out to make sure the little owls were being tended or to notify us if the chicks were back out of the nest.

GREAT HORNED OWLS

On an blustery morning in April of 2017, we received a call from a lady in Wakefield who said she had baby great horned owls on the ground beneath a big cedar tree in her front yard. The nest had been used for several years by the pair of owls, but wind had blown the somewhat shabby nest to the ground. Our substitute nest was an old laundry basket that was big enough for the brood and would drain well. In this particular nest replacement, we tried something

When a great horned owl nest fell to the ground, staff used an old laundry basket as a replacement nest. The size was right, and the material would allow it to drain well.



Owls generally aren't adept at constructing nests, but what they lack in building skills, they make up for with ingenuity. Owls will find natural cavities in trees or repurposed hawk nests to use as suitable sites for resting and rearing their young.

that didn't work out. Just a few days prior to this nest blowing down, we had received a great horned owl chick of similar size but without enough information to return it to its nest. When this call came in, we thought we would try to foster our great horned owl chick in this nest with the other two. Great horned owls are known to foster other chicks, especially in a rehabilitation setting, so we thought we would try to sneak our foster

owl in with the other two chicks in this nest.

After the owlets and nest were put back, we asked the homeowner to call us if any of the chicks were out of the nest the next day. Sure enough, we got a call from her the next day to say that momma had kicked out one of the owls. Turns out, it was our foster owlet, but she was taking care of her two just fine! You win some and you lose some.



BARN OWLS FROM JETMORE

Probably one of the strangest nest replacements happened in late July of 2017. It began in the parking lot of a Manhattan motel when an employee walked past a trailer parked in the parking lot and heard some loud hissing coming from the trailer. On the trailer was a large sign, similar to a football scoreboard. The owner of the sign and trailer was travelling back to Iowa after purchasing the sign in Jetmore. A Manhattan animal shelter was called and staff discovered that inside the sign was a nest containing four baby barn owls. The barn owls were retrieved from the sign and Vanessa Avara, assistant director of the Milford Nature Center, received a call from the animal shelter. She collected the chicks the next morning and brought them to the nature center.

Barn owl chicks are eating machines and will consume between 6-10 mice in a single day. With that many chicks, we would be going through 25-40 mice per day just for these barn owls and we have other young birds to care for, as well. We knew we needed to try and put them back, but we didn't know where the sign came from exactly. The trailer had already pulled out the next morning and the cell phone number for the driver wasn't working, so we didn't get a chance to get specific directions to the location of the sign. But Jetmore's not that big, right? I called the City of Jetmore and said, "I have a weird question for you." I spoke with a very friendly lady who said she would do some checking and call me back. She called back later confirming the sign was from the racetrack outside of town and she put me in contact with Larry Fagen, the employee who had removed the sign and helped load it on the trailer. I asked Larry if he would be willing to place a pole in



Growing barn owl chicks are healthy eaters, and can consume as many as 10 mice in a single day.

the same spot as the sign had been and if I drove back with the little owls, could we put a nest box on the pole and put them back? He agreed.

Jetmore a five-hour drive from Junction City and it already in the afternoon. I also had to stop at the Kansas Wetland Education Center at Cheyenne Bottoms to borrow barn owl nest box from nature educator Pam Martin (if I promised to replace it). A "small" complication was that her nest box was on a pole at the Bottoms and had to be taken down. This was easier said than done in 100-degree heat when a screw just didn't want to let go. Eventually, the box came down and I was back on the road.

I arrived in Jetmore just after 6 p.m. and met Larry, who led me to the old racetrack site outside of town. The pole was in place and we attached the nest box. Once that was done, I put the owlets in the nest box and Larry screwed the lid on. All kinds of thoughts ran through my head. My idea that someone might be able to come and check on the chicks went out the window when I saw how far out of town the site was and how high up the box was. No one will be able to peek in the box and check on the them so as we

screwed on the lid, I silently hoped we weren't "putting the last nail in the coffin."

I had to trust my gut instincts about what was right for these animals and my knowledge of how devoted a mother owl is. These young owls had been gone a little more 24 hours. I would have felt better if I had seen a barn owl in the area as we drove up but I knew that would be highly unlikely. I told myself I had done the best I could as I drove away and hoped for the best. A couple of days later, Larry called to let me know that he had been out to the site and seen the mother owl fly out of the nest box. That was sweet music to my ears.

In another incident, we learned a valuable lesson while replacing a fallen owlet into a tiny, flimsy-looking stick nest in a tall sycamore in a Manhattan neighborhood. When we put the young owl back, we scared another chick that bailed from the nest and caught itself with one talon on a small branch. We quickly had to move the bucket down to grab the second chick, which was hanging upside down by one foot, and replace it as well as the first chick. We learned to go slow when returning chicks to the nest.

MISSISSIPPI KITES

Mississippi kites have been expanding their range in Kansas over the last 20 years. Today, they are regular nesters in northcentral Kansas, whereas two decades ago, they were found only in the southern part of the state. Kites like to nest in groomed parkland settings like golf courses and urban yards and each summer, we get numerous calls about fledgling Mississippi kites because they typically end up in someone's yard. In July of 2017, a Mississippi kite was found in a Hutchinson yard, but it was not old enough to be a fledgling. It was just a little guy not more than a few weeks old. We received the call because of a "friend of a friend" kind of thing and the chick was brought to the Nature Center. This was a perfect candidate for nest replacement. It was a healthy, uninjured baby that had a mom and dad but needed to be put back.

On this trip, I contacted Aaron Stegmaier of Westar Energy in the Hutchinson area. We agreed to try and put this little owl back the next morning. I would meet them

at the yard at 8 a.m. before the day heated up. Everything was going fine until we found nests in two trees separated by just a few yards. Which did our owl come from? The first nest didn't have any other chicks in it and didn't look very "lived in." Moving the bucket over to the next tree, we found zero chicks in it but we did see a fragment of an egg shell. Was this the nest? We Googled an image of a "Mississippi kite egg" and determined that this must be the nest. It would have been great to have another sibling in the nest, but it appeared our chick was an only owl. We placed the chick in the nest and hoped it was the right one. Thankfully, the homeowner (who was the friend of a friend) was very excited about the chick being returned to the nest and spent many hours outside in a chair waiting to make sure the mother returned. We were so happy when she called and reported that the momma kite was back.

In July of 2017, a Mississippi kite, not more than a few weeks old, was found in a Hutchinson yard. Staff worked with Westar Energy to get the young bird back to the safety of its nest.



These stories highlight just a few of our efforts to get these birds back into the wild. But these success stories didn't just happen in a vacuum. I can't say "thanks" enough to all the Westar Energy crews and other people who say "yes" when we ask for help returning these young raptors to their nests. And we also want to thank the many homeowners and finders of these young raptors who agree to keep a watch out and let us know if our tactic worked or if something went wrong. While we may not always be successful, we know it is the right thing to do, and we know that wild parents are much better at raising their young than we are. 🐾



PLAN ON POMONA

text and photos by
Rick McNary

"Keep close to Nature's heart... and break clear away, once in awhile, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean." - John Muir



Pomona State Park near Vassar offers numerous opportunities for you to follow Muir's advice and enjoy nature at its finest. Muir – the father of the national park concept, and subsequent state park concept – believed that time in nature was good for the body and soul. Pomona awaits to wash your spirit clean.

Pomona State Park is located approximately 30 miles southeast of Topeka in Osage County. This 490-acre park sits aside the 4,000-acre Pomona Lake which is known for excellent fishing, bird viewing, watersports, camping and numerous family-friendly events.

The park's campsite and cabin names give clue to the area's rich history. And its proximity to the Santa Fe Trail reminds us of our ancestors who once called this area "home."

As for the lake, it has a history of its own. Pomona Lake was built in 1963 at a cost of \$13 million dollars, and it's estimated to have saved more than \$210 million dollars in flood damage since its construction. It outflows into 110 Mile Creek which then flows into the Marais des Cygnes, and is part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer efforts to control flooding in the Missouri and Mississippi River basins.

Take a Trail

Pomona State Park offers three nature trails, with a new one starting construction this spring. The new mountain bike/hiking trail will connect the park's existing trails to create a larger, combined trail totaling more than six miles. Existing trails include Buck Brush Trail, 0.63 miles; Hedge Wood Trail, 0.95 miles; and Rising Sun Trail, 0.47 miles.



Shutterstock/Christos Georgiou

First Day Hikes

One of the many fun and family-friendly events held at Pomona is the park's annual "First Day Hikes" events on Jan. 1. Each year, park visitors gather to start the year off in a healthy way, all while enjoying the beauty of nature.

Bald Eagle Hike – This 1.5-mile ranger-led hike takes participants through areas known to be frequented by bald eagles. In 2018, an eagle survey counted 35 bald eagles around Pomona.

Nature Hike – More than 250 hikers of all ages braved the bitter temperatures in 2018 to enjoy this 4.5-mile hike. Even more not-so-fair-weather hikers are anticipated for the 2019 hike.



Joining Forces

The newly christened, 110-mile Flint Hills Nature Trail State Park has an access point approximately 0.5 miles south of Pomona State Park. Plans are in place for a trail to eventually connect the two parks. In the meantime, Pomona has been serving as an easy break point along the Flint Hills Nature Trail for hikers, cyclists and horseback riders. The Annual Fall Fest, hosted at Pomona, coincides with the Rush The Rails bike ride each October, giving participants access to various activities in the park, as well as a relay stop for riders.



file photo

Things To Do

Pomona is home to a variety of fun and family-friendly events throughout the year, many of which are just around the corner.

Park staff work closely with, and depend on the support of, the active Friends of Pomona State Park group. Two of their most notable events are the park's Easter egg hunt and Retro Camper/Car/Motorcycle Show. The Easter egg hunt attracts 400-500 children and adults each year. And through a random draw, children win quality prizes such as bicycles donated by local retailers. The Retro Camper/Car/Motorcycle Show is a festive event as owners of vintage campers open their doors for people to tour their rides. If you make it to this event, you can also join in on a retro-style Sock Hop.



Places To Stay

After a day of fun activities, rest your eyes at one of Pomona's many great camp offerings. Campers can reserve one of the park's four deluxe cabins, or pitch a tent at one of 200 primitive campsites. The park also offers more than 50 campsites with full hookups, more than 90 campsites with water and electric, and seven shelters perfect for a family gathering.

Reservations can be made by contacting park staff at (785) 828-4933, or by visiting www.ReserveAmerica.com.



Good Getting Better

As with all Kansas state parks, Pomona State Park staff and dedicated volunteers are continuously working towards improvement. Campers at Cedar Creek Campground will soon benefit from two upgrades – 50-amp services (previously 30-amp) and improved water lines. Boaters will notice a new ramp (Boat Ramp #1). Osage Campground will soon see 50-amp services. And campers of Waucondah Campground are slated to get a new shower.



Watching Wildlife

Wildlife Wednesdays – Each Wednesday on the Pomona State Park Facebook page, park staff posts photos of various wildlife found in the park throughout the year. This is a great way to keep up with park happenings, and get an idea of what kinds of wildlife you can expect to see on your trip!

Bald eagles – Pomona State Park can be a great place for viewing our nation's emblem, live in-action. Plan your trip for winter, and canvass dead trees or along the ice where there's open water. Often the birds can be seen waiting for a fish to swim by.

Bluebird boxes – There are numerous bluebird boxes scattered about the park, and attracting birds, thanks to the efforts of local Boy Scouts. In fact, the park keeps a supply of the kits on hand and offers free primitive camping spots for Boy Scouts willing to assemble bluebird boxes or complete other community service projects in the park.



file photo

Shutterstock/Christos Georgiou

Upcoming Events

- June 1 - Ranger Activity - Skins & Skulls
- June 1 & 2 - Free Fishing Weekend
- June 9 - Ranger Activity - Archery
- June 15 - Ranger Activity - Campfire cooking
- June 23 - Ranger Activity - Bee Program
- July 6 - Ranger Activity - Camping 101 Basics
- July 7 - Fireworks in the park
- July 13 - Friends of the Park movie night
- July 14 - Ranger Activity - Archery
- July 20 - Ranger Activity - Horseshoes and Disc Golf
- July 26 - Ranger Activity - Kayaks
- Aug. 3 - Ranger Activity - Night Hike/ Star Gazing
- Aug. 11 - Ranger Activity - Archery
- Aug. 16 - Friends of the Park movie night
- Aug. 16 & 17 - Retro Weekend Activities
- Aug. 17 - Retro camper open house
- Aug. 17 - Classic car/motorcycle show
- Aug. 31 - Friends of the Park - Labor Day breakfast
- Aug. 31 - Friends of the Park - Movie night
- Oct. 5 - Annual fall festival (Rush the Rails bike ride/relay)
- Oct. 5 - Friends of the Park - Annual chili cook off
- Dec. 7 - Santa's Workshop

Events are subject to change, so contact park staff for the most up-to-date information before making your trip.

Pomona State Park Office

(785) 828-4933
22900 S Highway 368
Vassar, KS 66543


KDWPT.PomonaSP@ks.gov

Mon – Fri: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Sat: 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Closed Sunday

For more Kansas state parks,
visit ksoutdoors.com

Bring Your Boat

Family owned since 1964, Lighthouse Bay Marina is the park's local full-service marina. Offerings include 112 covered slips, ranging in size from 20 feet to 36 feet; dry boat or camper storage; Ship's Store, complete with a full line of water recreation equipment, as well as grocery items; and, a full-service repair center.

Whatever your plans may be this summer – fun in the sun or a quiet place to camp – you'll want to plan on Pomona. 



A CHERISHED FATHER'S DAY

BY MICHAEL PEARCE
OUTDOOR CONTENT MANAGER, KDWPT

As a Father's Day gift to myself, I plan to fish with one of my most-cherished possessions. The old reel clanks and wobbles like an old hand-cranked egg beater. The rod is so heavy the tip dips in a perpetual bow. They're like the Beverly Hillbillies' jalopy compared to today's sleek and balanced fishing gear. They wouldn't even be considered a decent garage sale find to most people these days. But to me they're literally worth their weight in gold. Then again, who can put a price on a cherished family heirloom.

The old spinning reel and fiberglass rod were fancy stuff on Father's Day, 1972, when my father fished with them. That morning the outfit had been a present to Dad from my mom and me, though she'd been comatose several days by the time Father's Day arrived. Dad dutifully fished with the rod and reel that afternoon, knowing the 36-year-old love of his life would soon leave to be with the angels.

I'm not sure Dad ever fished with the old Garcia 308 and Eagle Claw rod again, but on or around most Father's Days, I take the cherished gear bass fishing. It's a rare link to when I was 14, and we were a complete, loving family.

Fishing gear was a frequent gift to my dad when I was a child. Born in June, he repeatedly asked for things like lures or line for both his birthday and Father's Day. Looking back, I now know most things on his wish list were to replace items I'd somehow lost.

Most times I, with some monetary and often transportation assistance from Mom, gave him a gift box with things like a new spool of line for our spincast reels, packages of swivels, and maybe a Jitterbug, a Mepp's spinner and a Crème plastic worm that looked as life-like as a pencil with gaudy spinners and beads. Often my gift selection was limited to a few feet of shelf at the Western Auto store or Oakson's Hardware in Tonganoxie. If I was lucky and well behaved, I might get to shop a few minutes in one of two sporting goods stores in downtown Lawrence. But even those shops were smaller than the sporting goods sections at most Walmart stores. As a kid, I was more enthralled walking through those doors than I was an adult the first time I walked into the then-new Cabela's in Kansas City.

As far back as I can remember, I've been addicted to angling. Like today's kids, my right thumb was my dominant digit. But it wasn't from texting

on a cell phone or working the controller on an Xbox, it was from pushing the line release button on the old Wright & McGill spincast reel.

I probably caught more fish a year than any kid in Tonganoxie, and I also lost more gear. Some shoreline willows along favored lakes or ponds had more sparkle and shine from my lost lures than a nicely decorated Christmas tree.

Many were Midge-orenos, my dad's favorite lure. The heavy, and often out of balance floating/diving lures, sometimes seemed to fly with a mind of their own on long casts. It would have been easier to shake a squirrel out of a treetop than one of those lures, with its two big treble hooks.

Dad liked throwing heavy lures for big bass, so I'm not sure how I came up with idea that Dad needed a whimsy, ultra-light spinning outfit for that Father's Day. He had little interest in bluegill or crappie and we rarely fished for trout. There was probably an article touting ultra-lights in *Outdoor Life*, or some other fishing magazine I'd read cover to cover at the barber shop. Or there may have been something on Harold Ensley's television show. No matter, I was determined that's what Dad needed as a gift.

When I priced the combined rod and reel at around \$30, I figured he'd end up getting an assorted gift box again. Mom was justifiably tight with money, mainly because we never had much of it. Most times \$5 was around the maximum for Dad's gifts.

But she all but insisted we spend the extra money for the new rod and reel for that long-ago Father's Day.



I remember repeating the exact amount, to be sure she understood. Still, she was adamant we should get it for Dad that year. Looking back I suspect I may know the reason.

Mom had gotten terribly ill, with horrendous headaches, several times that spring. Doctors were stumped.

I've often wondered if she somehow sensed her time was short and splurged on the last gift she'd give her husband. Maybe it was more of a gift to me, hoping to enjoy my excitement of such a luxurious gift while she could. Wrapping the rod and reel was probably the last thing Mom and I ever did together, just the two of us.

Several days prior to that Father's Day, she'd been taken to a Leavenworth hospital for testing. She was on an x-ray table when she turned to a nurse and asked for her husband to come immediately. Mom held it together until Dad arrived, squeezed his hand, and professed her love for him. Her last words were that she loved me, too. She immediately faded into the coma from which never recovered. Doctors later blamed an aneurism.

Mom was on life support a few days but doctors said it was only postponing the inevitable.

I gave the wrapped rod and reel to Dad from both of us on Father's Day morning. Somehow he buckled up his emotions and we went fishing at a relative's pond for an hour or so before we headed to the hospital. I wasn't allowed to be there the next day when the respirator went silent and Mom died.

Because I was an only child, we fished a lot more evenings that tough, lonely summer of mourning. It was a time in America when males weren't supposed to seek help, especially for emotional issues. Quiet times on private waters were our best therapy.

Day after day with faithful young friends I fished the afternoons. And on many evenings, Dad and I hauled a small johnboat with the hardest seats in the world to one of many ponds.



I fished the ultra-light outfit Mom and I had given Dad most of those times that summer. By the next spring a similar spinning outfit somehow appeared as a gift to me from Dad. The one Mom bought him disappeared.

My kids were already born when dad walked from his garage and handed me the familiar-looking old ultra-light rod and reel many years later.

"Do you know what this is," he asked.

When I answered it was his final Father's Day gift from mom, Dad said he wanted me to take it home.

A few years later, when Dad was in Hospice care because of cancer, he softly asked, "Do you still have the...?" He smiled when I said it was cherished and in a safe place.

For many years it was in a prominent place in a rod rack, a reminder of the saddest time of my life. But as they say, time heals such wounds.

Probably 10 years ago, it caught my eye and it felt good in my hand again. As I spun the clanking old reel's handle and shook the willowy rod, happy memories came. Good memories of my mother's love and the time Dad and I spent angling after her death.

I first took it out of retirement near Newton the next Father's Day, with some of Dad's old Midge-Orenos I had on display in our house. They were well used and showed a few scratches in the paint from where Dad had bounced them off rocks or logs casting toward shore decades before.

My first cast with the old gear in more than 20 years caught a nice largemouth. It made me smile. I don't know if I've missed a year fishing with it, since.

Last spring I added new monofilament to the reel's spool for the annual trip down memory lane. At a good bass pond I used that over-matched rod and cast those heavy lures that sail off like knuckleballs from a cannon. I didn't catch a bass on the first cast, but it didn't take many. I think I landed four or five, but put the outfit up after nearly getting a cast snagged.

Someday I want each of my kids, now grown, to cast and catch a bass on the old rod and reel and one of the heavy, wooden lures. My grandkids are a tad small, yet, but I want the day to come when they listen to the story of the love and memories in the fishing outfit and then give it enough casts to catch some fish, too.

Sooner or later someone will hang one those cherished lures high in a tree. I'll leave it tangled there with a smile.

It'll be just like old, happy times.

Happy Father's Day to me. 🐻

Grandpa Harry

Bicycle Made for Two

text and photo by Rick McNary

Harry stirred the embers in the fireplace as the sun greeted a spring day. Chauncey, his golden lab, stirred as Harry tossed another log on.

"Well, Chauncey, Ethan's arriving today," Harry said. "This place is about to be happy again. I'm sure glad that little feller has taken a shine to us."

Ethan lived a culture away from Harry's cabin in the hills. While Ethan lived in a bustling city, Harry still lived in the old cabin he built for Gladys the first year they were married.

Just a few years ago, Harry received a note from his grandson, Ethan. A class project caused Ethan to want to spend time with his grandpa. After a few visits, Ethan now wanted to spend all his school breaks at Harry's. Ethan's last note read:

Dear Grandpa Harry,
I got your birthday card and the money you sent. Thank you! Just like you told me, I saved my money so I could get a mountain bike. I had a little-kid bike but now I have a mountain bike. Can I bring it to your place and ride around this summer? I know there are a lot of gravel roads I could ride on.

See you soon!

Love, Ethan

P.S. Tell Chauncey I'm bringing him a new dog bed. His old one's kind of smelly.

Shortly after the fire flamed, Chauncey bounded out the open front door toward the sound of car tires crunching gravel.

"Grandpa Harry!" Ethan hugged the old man. "I'm so glad to see you. Come check out my new mountain bike."

"Good heavens," Harry chuckled as Ethan's mother lifted the bike from the car's rack. "That's fancier than the first car I bought."

"Did you ever have a bicycle, Grandpa?" Ethan asked.

"Did I ever," Harry chuckled. "Grandson, I delivered newspapers on a bike when I was your age and I rode one to

work for years. I even rode a bike behind enemy lines during the war. They dropped us in with what they called bomber bikes. They figured on foot we could walk 25 miles a day but, on a bike, we could go 75. But really, we could only go as far as the tires stayed aired up."

"Did Grandma Gladys ride?"

"No, not by herself. But we rode a tandem bike because we couldn't afford gas to go anyplace. So, we'd ride to church on Sunday then around to see the neighbors. Gladys had a little picnic basket that fit up front, and she'd pack it with food so we could make a day of it."

"Do you still have the tandem? Reckon we could ride it?"

"Well, I reckon I do but we'll have to get 'er down and oil 'er up. Not sure if she's in riding shape still."

"Oh, Grandpa, I know you! The way you keep everything in perfect condition, I'm sure it's as good as new. Come on, Chauncey, last one to the barn's a rotten egg!"

After few squirts of oil here, a twist of a wrench there and a dog barking at a boy manually pumping air into the tires, the old man and his grandson mounted the tandem bike and pointed it down the drive.

"Well, Grandson, I never thought I'd be doing this again," Harry laughed. "I have a feeling Gladys is watching and is calling me a crazy old coot in one breath and cheering you on in the next."

"Well, let's go!"

The bike wobbled and lurched a bit as it started but soon straightened as they pedaled down the hill. They rode through town, waving at friends, both enjoying the ride.

The next week at the diner, locals laughed about the old man and boy.

"I haven't seen a smile that big on Harry's face since Gladys won first prize for her cherry pie at the state fair," Marge, the diner owner said. "Ole Pete said he ain't touched the bottle since sixty-seven, but he swears there weren't just two people on that tandem bike. No sirree, Pete says he's sure he saw Gladys sitting in that basket on the handle bars. And you know what, I believe him."

The rest of the diner patrons smiled and nodded in agreement.



Species Profile **Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel**

Thirteen-lined ground squirrels are 8 to 11 inches long with distinct striping on their backs and heads; Seven dark brown stripes laced with white dots, and six tan or white stripes for a total of 13.

This adaptive critter – not to be confused with chipmunks – can be found as far south as Texas and as far north as Canada.

They make homes in areas where vegetation is short, such as open prairie or grasslands, cleared roadsides, cemeteries and golf courses.

Thirteen-lined ground squirrels make several types of burrows. Hibernating burrows provide protection from frigid winter temps as the squirrel stays dormant. Nesting burrows are for sleeping and raising young, while hiding burrows provide quick access to safety.

The short two-year life span of the thirteen-lined ground squirrel is spent mostly underground. When above ground, they are busy eating or gathering food. Seeds, nuts and small insects, such as grasshoppers, make up most of their diet.

Perching themselves up on their back feet and using their tails for balance, the squirrel will sit and observe its above-ground surroundings using its keen eye sight to avoid predation by foxes, badgers and hawks. Human road traffic also poses a threat.

Though breedings typically result in as many as 8-10 young, only 10 percent will survive their first year.





Backlash

with Mike Miller

A Change of Office

I'm writing this column out of habit because after doing it for 30 years, the impending deadline is always in the back of my mind and it probably always will be. However, this one is different because it will be my last. I was recently appointed to serve as the Assistant Secretary of Fisheries, Wildlife and Boating, a position vacated in December when Keith Sexson retired.

While just the prospect of filling Sexson's shoes is daunting enough, comprehending what I have committed to is almost overwhelming. And the reality that I will no longer be a part of writing, editing and producing this magazine is beginning to hit me. *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine* has been an integral part of my life for my entire career, and I will miss it. However, I'm confident the magazine is in good hands and more than anything, I will miss working with the magazine staff.


Contributing to this agency's mission has been rewarding, and moving to the next level feels right at this stage in my life and career. If I do what I've always done: surround myself with smart and dedicated co-workers, I'll be fine. None of the successes I've been a part of over the past 35 years would have happened without the collaboration of many. And I've tried to steal a little wisdom from each of those people I've been fortunate to work alongside.

There are really two sides to the wildlife conservation purpose. We often focus on and communicate about conserving wildlife and habitat, promoting conservation principles, protecting our resources and ensuring Kansans enjoy and appreciate outdoor opportunities. Working toward these goals is honorable. However, from the inside, being a part of this team of the dedicated players who keep this train on track is as fulfilling as the mission itself.

It's easy to see a state government agency as a bureaucracy, an inanimate construction of bricks and mortar. But the real building blocks of any successful agency or company is its people and we have an amazing foundation. While I haven't always understood this, I know now that the most fulfilling aspect of my career has been the opportunity to work with such a variety of high-quality individuals.

I believe the people currently leading this department are as talented as any we've ever had and if I'm successful in my new venture, it will be because of them. I'm excited to be a part

of the new leadership, but I won't lie, there is trepidation and I've had more than a few sleepless nights hoping I can live up to the support I've received.

As I sign off on my last Backlash column, I would be remiss if I didn't thank you, the readers of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*. It has been a pleasure to connect with you over the years and I treasure each and every phone call, letter and e-mail I've received. It's been a great ride and I have been extremely fortunate to have been a part of such an amazing publication. Keep reading because it's only going to get better. Just before this issue went to press, I learned that managing editor and my "right-hand-man," Nadia Reimer, would be promoted to fill my position. The magazine is in good hands. 





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