

**KENTUCKY  
STATE REPORT**  
May 16, 2017

Gregory K. Johnson, Commissioner  
Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources  
#1 Sportsman's Lane  
Frankfort, KY 40601

**FISHERIES**

**Habitat Program**

KDFWR recently created a habitat branch charged with planning and coordination of both small and large-scale fish habitat projects across the state. Each year, with the assistance of the habitat branch, the seven-fishery management districts focus on small-scale projects on their state owned and managed lakes along with larger reservoir projects limited to small areas. Small-scale projects in 2016 covered many lakes across the state with utilization of over 4,107 donated Christmas trees and 14,000 feet of donated scrap gas pipe. GPS coordinates and habitat types are provided in Google maps format for the public on the KDFWR website.

Large-scale projects require critical coordination and teamwork as they involve several state and federal agency interests along with angler and county tourism impacts. Project plans bring together a multitude of partners to provide project planning, habitat structure acquisition and construction, heavy machinery donations, and ultimately staging and placement of the structures in large reservoirs.

In 2016, the habitat branch completed the third year of a four-year project on Cave Run Lake. In total, project staff and volunteers placed 3,300 Christmas/Cedar trees, 2,100 pallet structures, 500 stake bucket structures, 85 cable spool structures, 50 plastic pallet trees, 50 large stumps, 50 concrete culverts, and 50 plastic pipe trees across 39 individual sites in 6 locations on the lake.

**Green River Dam Removal and Recreational Access**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officially determined that five of their locks and dams on the Green River in Kentucky no longer serve the federally authorized purpose of navigation. The Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) participated in a workgroup of state and federal agencies and non-government conservation organizations to provide guidance and assistance with transfer of ownership to state, local, or non-government organizations for potential removal of dams and development of river-based recreational access. KDFWR funded a feasibility study for the removal Green River Lock and Dam 6 that was used as a reference tool for the workgroup and others.

The workgroup advised Congressional and state leaders as well as local interests playing a key role in the passage of the 2017 Water Infrastructure for Improvements to the Nation (WIIN) Act that de-authorized the structures, four of them specifically for dam removal and recreation access. KDFWR has a key role in the WIIN Act as recipient of properties at Green River Lock and Dam 6 and Barren River Lock and Dam 1.

Green River Lock and Dam 6 failed when the river scoured a hole under the dam in November 2016. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service crews from the southeast planned the removal of the structure as an emergency project (completed in 2017). KDFWR provided guidance and assistance with the salvage and rescue of mussels stranded by the lower river levels. Over 2,000 mussels were relocated, including 32 species (two federally listed endangered). Since that time, KDFWR has started plans for recreational access at the site.

### **Asian Carp**

Since 2013, Kentucky has worked with several other agencies and developed unique programs to decrease potential for ecologic and economic impacts of Asian carp. The invasive fishes are being confronted on two fronts with a coordinated, multi-state effort on the Ohio River and in Western Kentucky's Kentucky and Barkley lakes. The Ohio River effort is funded by main stem states and the USFWS grants associated with the 2014 Congressional amendment to the Water Resource Reform and Development Act (WRRDA). The WRRDA amendment by Congress increased funding to the USFWS' general fund with stipulations that the Service work with states to address expanding populations of Asian carp up the Ohio River. The multi-agency efforts in the Ohio River at or above Louisville Kentucky employ several strategies against the carps. They include monitoring population demographics, examining the invasive fishes' use of tributaries and movements among pools, early detection in Ohio River pools in West Virginia and above, and removing all Asian carp collected in the Ohio River from the Cannelton Pool and above. Only Asian carp used for telemetry purposes are released.

In Western Kentucky, Tennessee, Kentucky, and the USGS are conducting experiments with sound barrier technology in the Tennessee River below Kentucky Dam and in the Tennessee River near Pickwick Dam. Additionally, telemetry work with Murray State University and Tennessee Tech University has been increased in scope in an effort to assess movement patterns in the reservoirs. We are also working with the USFWS to assess the feasibility of using electrified Paupier nets to assess relative population sizes of bighead and silver carp in the two reservoirs. Kentucky also continues to work with the commercial fishing industry targeting Asian carp to help processors and commercial fishermen. The Commonwealth has approved a new public/private partnership concept, and funding for the project should be appropriated in 2017. Kentucky is also investigating a potential increase in another Asian carp harvest subsidy and a commercial fishermen training module as part of the partnership. In order to facilitate the fishing harvest, Western Kentucky's Critical Species Western Branch now has six staff, and they will provide oversight of the harvest efforts, sample year around for Asian carp, investigate experimental harvest methods, and inspect exported fish through a contract grant with NOAA. In 2016, over 1.4 million pounds of Asian carp were harvested from Kentucky waters by Kentucky licensed commercial fishermen, and based on the expanding companies in and near Kentucky; we expect a substantial increase in year-to-year harvest from 2016 to 2017.

## **WILDLIFE**

### **Black Bear Program**

Long-term population monitoring and public outreach were top priorities for the Bear Program in 2016. With the conclusion of a joint KDFWR-University of Kentucky bear research project in early 2016, the Bear Program focused on trapping adult female bears for long-term radio monitoring in the summer of 2016. These female bears will inform a population viability model used to set bear hunting quotas that will both support a sustainable harvest and an increased level of hunter opportunity. In 2016, the Bear Program made a strong effort at public outreach, specifically with beekeepers. We spoke with approximately 350 beekeepers and informed them on how to protect their investment from bears. Additionally, Program staff gave general bear awareness talks to 437 people, attended six high school career days, and wrote four articles on bear awareness for regional newspapers.

### **Deer and Elk Program**

Kentucky hunters harvested 139,434 white-tailed deer during the 2016 season. Although it is a slight reduction from the record-setting harvest of 2015, the 2016 deer harvest is still the third highest on record. Below average precipitation, above average temperatures throughout much of the season, and above average acorn production likely contributed to the decline in deer harvest. 910 total permits were available for the 2016 elk-hunting season. Participation in the random drawing increased and 34,280 hunters submitted 74,953 total applications to hunt elk in Kentucky in 2016. Kentucky elk hunters harvested 242 males and 279 females for a total harvest of 521 elk amongst all available permit types. A new Kentucky state record elk was harvested in 2016 in Pike County, scoring 392 0/8 inches. This is the second year in a row that the Kentucky state record has been broken, and is Kentucky's first ever All-Time Boone and Crockett Bull. We recently completed the third season of a 5-year translocation project with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. On March 22, 2017, 27 elk were shipped to northern Wisconsin to help augment the existing Clam Lake herd.

### **Small Game**

The Small Game Program continues to focus the majority of its effort on northern bobwhite restoration. Work continues on five existing focal areas, and we are seeking to establish another new site(s). Perryville National Historic Battlefield completed 700 acres of fescue conversion to a short grass prairie mix this spring. The Bluegrass Army Depot, a bobwhite focus area, hosted its first wild bobwhite hunt in over a decade. Hunting will continue in the future as well. The Department hosted the first-ever National Bobwhite Leadership Workshop at Shaker Village. Nine state fish and wildlife agency executives attended. Work continues on the implementation of the state's certified prescribed burn boss program. The course manual and presentations are drafted, and the notification system and database are being developed. Analysis of the Department's bobwhite focus area data from 2009-13 demonstrated a 99% probability of growing a focus areas population if similar management is completed. Focus areas had management actions that represented approximately 10% of the focus areas total land area. Statewide small game season frameworks are currently being evaluated for potential changes.

### **Turkey and Grouse Program**

Turkey hunters checked 33,653 wild turkeys during the 2016-17 license year. The 2016 spring harvest of 31,047 bearded birds was on par with 2015 (30,890) and the 6-year average (31,600). Since a peak in 2010 (36,097 birds), spring harvest has increased or been stable in 105 of 120 counties, with harvests of over 200 birds in 74 counties. The fall harvest of 2,606 was lower than 2015-16 (4,306) but similar to 2014-15 (2,633) and 2013-14 (2,671). The combination of lower brood production last summer and greater acorn production last fall meant fewer juveniles available to hunters and greater flock dispersal in forested habitats, both of which reduced fall hunting success.

In 2016, KDFWR began a long-term initiative aimed at increasing populations of ruffed grouse and other wildlife that depend on early successional forest habitat. A program coordinator was hired, a draft strategic plan was developed, and public meetings were held to gather input on the plan. Work has focused on developing partnerships to secure funding, personnel, and equipment to support increased forest habitat management on WMAs that can serve as grouse focus areas. In cooperation with our Wildlife Health Program, we initiated a survey to test for West Nile Virus antibodies in hunter-harvested grouse. This surveillance effort is motivated by recent work in Pennsylvania showing high West Nile prevalence in harvested grouse and high susceptibility of wild grouse to the disease, both of which suggest regional and statewide population impacts.

### **Wildlife Diversity**

Avian staff have continued to expand the Barn Owl inventory throughout the state with evidence of increasing populations. Loggerhead Shrike trapping has begun with three birds captured to date and blood samples collected for contaminants testing. Freshwater mollusk propagation and restoration efforts continue with phenomenal success. Last year scientists were able to propagate the Golden Riffleshell and increased the last natural known population by hundreds of animals. White-nose syndrome (WNS) has been detected throughout the state since the winter of 2011. Biologists continue to monitor impacts on susceptible species. Decontamination procedures are still being followed. This year, scientists will be investigating the reproductive success of Indiana bats. Preliminary fieldwork indicates that females may not be in reproductive condition, thereby slowing recovery even more. Staff have been heavily involved with the creation of our State's Monarch Management plan. Working groups were formed and a state Steering Committee has leadership in place. We are hopeful to rollout our state plan in June 2017 and begin engaging our public to assist in recovery and monitoring efforts.

## **INFORMATION AND EDUCATION**

### **Conservation Education**

Department of Fish & Wildlife educators delivered five different regularly scheduled programs to approximately 70,000 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. Students attending the department's weeklong residential summer camps numbered 4,902.

### **National Archery in the Schools Program**

This past archery season 142,000 students from 662 schools participated in Kentucky's archery program. Student archers competing in regional tournaments increased to 12,000. Almost 6100 individual shooters competed in the state championship tournament.

### **Kentucky Afield Television**

Kentucky Afield is the longest running outdoor show in the nation. This weekly television show is shot, edited, and produced by the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources. Online viewership of the show continues to increase. Segments of the show were viewed approximately 3,674,317 times over the last 11 months. Total viewership since the department started posting the show on YouTube equals 32,594,344 views. YouTube channel subscribers have increased to 38,254.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

### **Staffing**

The Division of Law Enforcement currently has 136 sworn officers and three civilian employees, with the intentions of adding 25 recruit Conservation Officers in August 2017.

### **Training**

An in-house training section was formed to oversee in-service training opportunities, statute and regulation updates, and identify specialized training for all personnel. The training section provides proficiency training on issued equipment. It is the intent to eventually provide state certified required 40-hour in-service instruction tailored to the needs of the division.

### **Law Enforcement Trends**

The use of the on-body video cameras by Conservation Officers has been a huge success. The cameras provided a high level of safety for officers, as well as documenting evidence of officer's activity. Citizen's complaints are almost non-existent now. On-body cameras are giving the officer and the agency a new level of protection. The Law Enforcement division is currently writing policy on the deployment of tasers to conduct field trials in each district to complete a study to determine if tasers will be deployed division wide.

### **New Enforcement Programs**

**Wildfire Arson Task Force-** the KDFW has created a new task force with the State Division of Forestry and the US Forest Service, to build a stronger partnership between the agencies on wildfire arson cases in the state of Kentucky. In the hopes that we can better protect our residence, private and government properties and our natural resources. First fire season that the task force was deployed, surpassed any expectations that we could have imagined on the arrest and cases that were made.

**Natural Resources and Organized Crime Task Force-** the task force is a partnership between the KDFW Special Investigating Unit, US Fish and Wildlife, and US Forest Service. The task force was developed to better coordinate our resources on working on our larger LACY Act cases. KDFW selected two conservation officers from each of the nine districts, to attend surveillance training with US Fish and Wildlife. This new surveillance team gives a tremendous amount of support in the field for our agents. The task force is currently conducting several large potential LACY Act cases at this time.

**Law Enforcement Chaplain Corp-** the KDFW recently selected a Conservation Officer from each district to take on the role as District Chaplain and to be a part of the newly implemented statewide crises intervention team. Each Chaplain will be required to work with the states crisis

intervention team for counseling during critical incidents involving Law Enforcement Officers, work with their districts pastoral associations with death notifications and post counseling of critical incidents, to be deployed with our agencies emergencies response unit that deploys in and out of the state during natural disasters. Supports the Honor Guard Unit during Law Enforcement Officers or Law Enforcement Officers family funerals.

## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS Marketing**

### **Total Sales**

For the fifth year in a row, we sold over 1 Million licenses and permits. We also exceeded the \$29 Million dollar mark. It represents license sales increases in four out of the last five years. Our fastest growing segment continues to be young adults age 18 to 34. We continue to target non-traditional audiences and choose to deliver Hunter Education in an effective and innovative manner (see Shows and Events).

### **Communication**

Direct Mail – For current and lapsed license customers, we conducted three direct mails to promote license purchases for and participation in our spring and fall hunting seasons, as well as our elk hunt drawing. We direct mailed over 173,000 pieces.

E-Blasts – For license customers, for which we had email addresses, we conducted several e-blasts to promote license purchases for and participation in our spring and fall hunting and fishing seasons, as well as our elk hunt drawing. We are also expanding our engagement in Granicus/GovDelivery communications platform to license customers, and building capacity for opt-in opportunities for information and programs of interest to specific customer segments and stakeholder groups.

Social Media – We continued to grow our social media impact, with a following of over 125,000 Facebook fans and building engagement in our Twitter accounts and Instagram at various levels (Department-wide, Kentucky Afield media channels, Salato Wildlife Education Center, and Fisheries Districts). We are currently building a WebTV and ROKU channel platform to provide new opportunities for engagement and information sharing online, especially with nontraditional audiences and new participants in the outdoors.

Shows and Events – KDFWR participated in 20 shows/events, ranging from regional boat shows in Louisville, Lexington and Owensboro to the Kentucky Deer and Turkey Expo, the Kentucky State Fair, The Archery Trade Association (ATA), Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) , Indy Travel/Deer & Turkey expo and the National Wild Turkey Federation show in neighboring Nashville, TN. At several of these shows/events we also set up an air rifle range where people can shoot, demonstrate some key firearm safety skills, and complete their hunter education range requirement. Over the past year, we had almost 200 people complete their “range day” portion of the training at these events. We generated over \$118,000 in revenue from these shows/events.