**KANSAS 2017-2018 MAFWA REPORT**

**iWIHA**

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism’s (KDWPT) Walk-in Hunting Access (WIHA) program leases more than 1 million acres of private land each fall and opens it to public hunting, more than tripling the amount of public hunting land in the state. Throughout the years, other programs such as the Spring Turkey WIHA, and Special Hunts on Private Lands have been added to address other hunting access issues, especially the lack of access in urban counties. The Special Hunts program has offered a limited number of opportunities near urban areas but has remained stagnant for several years.

In an effort to re-address the urban access issue, KDWPT has begun a pilot program called iWIHA. This program takes the limited-use concept of the department’s Special Hunts program and ties it to the iSportsman application, currently being used on several of our public wildlife areas across the state to manage public use. By tying access to iSportsman it allows us to – 1) limit use by setting an occupancy limit for each tract, 2) increase participation of the Special Hunts on Private Lands program by allowing hunters to check-in the night before or day of a hunt if there are still vacancies, 3) capture harvest and use data, and 4) increase enrollment of land to the program in urban counties where landowners are hesitant because of open access.

iWIHA was kicked off as a pilot program in 2017 in 18 urban counties near the KC-Lawrence-Topeka and Wichita areas. For the 2018 spring turkey season, seven tracts were enrolled in iWIHA and hunters provided positive feedback about their hunting experiences.

**LARVA CULTURE WALLEYE PROGRAM GAINING MOMEMENTUM**

KDWPT’s walleye egg-taking program produces millions of walleye fry and fingerlings each year. However, limited pond space and manpower prevented increasing the production of intermediates, which have a much higher survival rate. For the past two years, hatchery staff at Milford and Meade hatcheries have been developing a larva culture walleye program, allowing them to produce large numbers 8- to 10-inch walleye in an intensive system.

Five-day-old fry are stocked into Phase I larva culture production, a 40-45 day period during which the fish are trained to eat pelleted feed and reared to a fingerling size (1.5+ inches). They are then harvested and stocked into Phase II production (advanced fingerling training), which requires a dark room environment and daily care that includes cleaning, feeding, grading, sampling, and disease monitoring and prevention. Next, the fish enter Phase III production or the “grow out” portion in outdoor raceways.

The intensive larva culture walleye program has a very high return compared to fish gown in ponds, and produced 8- to 10-inch fish in 180 days.

In October 2017, more than 20,000 of these walleye were stocked into two Kansas reservoirs. Plans include growing the program, producing more walleye that will ultimately be recruited to the population and caught by anglers.

**EARLY-SPAWN BASS ARE SHOWING UP IN SAMPLING**

In 2009, biologists at KDWPT’s Meade Fish Hatchery began developing an early-spawn largemouth bass program, creating a controlled environment where largemouth bass would spawn up to two months earlier than normal.

Few Kansas reservoir largemouth bass populations are self-sustaining, and stocking has had mixed results in older reservoirs. The primary forage in Kansas reservoirs is gizzard shad and the gizzard shad spawn earlier than largemouths, which means they are too big to provide forage for young-of-the-year bass. The early spawn fish, with their two-month head start, and appear to be taking advantage.

Since 2010, the early-spawn program has produced 2.5 million largemouth bass fry and 3.6 million largemouth bass fingerlings. Results are promising. Using genetic testing from tissue samples to identify early spawn bass, biologists are finding that up to 50 percent of the bass sampled in lakes where they have been stocked are early-spawn hatchery fish.

**MONARCH CONSERVATION PLAN TAKES SHAPE**

KDWPT is currently working with partners in the development of goals and objectives as part of the Kansas Monarch Conservation Plan. Goals include components to increase visibility of Monarch/native pollinator conservation needs and benefits, increase outreach and educational opportunities targeted toward specific audiences, improve habitat across the state, encourage more robust research and monitoring efforts, and offer best management practices for a range of land uses. Habitat improvement goals are yet to be determined for the Kansas plan, but Kansas is actively engaged with MAFWA and others on the development of the Mid-American Monarch Conservation Strategy and Southern Core Habitat Allocation Tool. Possible metrics to be considered are stem goals for milkweed species and other nectar resources, acres of beneficial habitats, and/or connectivity of beneficial habitats.

**KANSAS DEER RESEARCH PROJECT**

Kansas State University and KDWPT are collaborating on a comprehensive deer research project. The project is designed to learn more about mule deer and white-tailed deer in northwestern Kansas, and it began in February when 120 deer and were captured and fitted with GPS radio transmitters.

Quicksilver Air, Inc. was hired to capture deer using a helicopter and nets. After a quick health check, including taking blood samples, captured bucks were fitted with GPS collars and released. Does were transported back to a mobile processing center where ultrasound was used to determine pregnancy rates, blood samples were taken, ear tags were attached and GPS collars fitted. Before pregnant does were released, they received small vaginal insert transmitters that will drop out when they give birth, allowing researchers to locate and capture fawns. The goal is to fit 80-90 fawns with radio collars this spring.

Researchers want to learn more about reproductive rates, deer movement, survival of different year classes, causes of mortality, and species interactions. Results will also provide insight on deer densities, deer-human interactions, crop damage, and the effects of landscape changes on deer populations. The three-year study is the first of its kind in Kansas, and biologists are anxious to see results.

**FIVE-YEAR REVIEW OF KANSAS T&E AND SINC LISTS**

KDWPT started its five-year review of the lists of Kansas species that are endangered, threatened or Species In Need of Conservation (SINC), which is required by the Kansas Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1975. Any individual or group can petition KDWPT to propose an addition, deletion, or modification to the current lists by providing pertinent scientific information required within the petition form.

KDWPT relies on the Threatened and Endangered Species Task Committee to assist with the review process. The task committee consists of seven members representing various disciplines, and include staff from state and federal agencies, as well as state universities. To determine if a full review is warranted, the task committee examines updated scientific information and research for any species petitioned for a listing change. These recommendations, and any amendments to them, will be published in the Kansas Register for public comment for at least 90 days. After a full review is completed, the task committee makes recommendations to the KDWPT Secretary and any changes to the lists must be approved by the KDWPT Commission following a public hearing.

After the last five-year review completed in 2014, the redbelly snake, smooth earth snake, longnose snake, spring peeper, chestnut lamprey and silverband shiner were downlisted or removed from the Kansas Threatened Special List and added to the SINC list. The Eskimo curlew, black-capped vireo, and many-ribbed salamander were removed from the Kansas Threatened Species List due because there was no evidence of viable populations in Kansas. The northern long-eared bat was added to the SINC list.

Currently, the Kansas Endangered Species List includes 10 invertebrates, five fish, two amphibians, two birds and two mammals. The Kansas Threatened Species List includes six invertebrates, 11 fish, six amphibians, four reptiles, two birds and one mammal. The state SINC list includes 83 species.

**2017 AERIAL LESSER CHICKEN SURVEY SHOWS STABLE NUMBERS**

Last spring’s lesser prairie chicken survey showed population trends remain stable after six years of aerial survey data collection. The survey indicates an estimated breeding population of 33,269 birds, up from 25,261 birds counted last year. Results of the 2018 survey will be available this summer.

**KANSAS IMPLEMENTS AUTO-RENEW OPTION AND 365-DAY LICENSES**

In 2018, KDWPT introduced an auto-renew feature for select annual licenses and permits purchased online. License buyers will be able to opt in or opt out of the auto-renew feature at the time of purchase or any time after purchase through their online KDWPT account.

Also in 2018, many annual licenses and permits are now valid for 365 days from the date of purchase rather than expiring on Dec. 31 each year. This will provide better value for the same price, especially on licenses purchased late in the year. License buyers will have the option of receiving email reminders before their licenses expire, or better yet, they can select the auto-renew option leave the worry to KDWPT.

**COMMISSION BIG GAME PERMITS RAISE CONSERVATION FUNDS**

KDWPT’s Commissioner Big Game Permit Program allows local chapters of nonprofit organizations based or operating in Kansas that actively promote wildlife conservation and the hunting and fishing heritage to apply for seven big game permits. Once drawn, organizations can then sell the permits to raise funds.

In 2017 the seven big game permits raised $72,850. Since the program started in 2006, nearly $500,000 has been raised. Seven permits, one elk, one antelope or up to seven deer, are issued each year, depending on applicant preference. Winning groups are issued a voucher, which they can sell or auction to the highest bidder. The cost of the permit and 15 percent of the total price is subtracted and kept by the group, and the rest is remitted to KDWPT with a proposal for a conservation project. Once the project is approved, the money is returned to the group to complete the project.

In January 2018, seven lucky winners were drawn from 154 eligible applications. An organization or chapter can draw only once in a three-year period.

**KDWPT RECEVIES LAND STEWARDSHOP AWARD**

KDWPT was recently recognized by the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) for the department’s management of public lands. Recognition came in the form of a national land stewardship award, which was accepted by Keith Sexson, KDWPT Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Boating, during the 42nd annual NWTF Convention and Sport Show.

NWTF determined this year’s award winners based on how their work strengthens the organization's new “Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt.” initiative. KDWPT was selected for the Land Stewardship award because of the department’s efforts to provide quality habitat and hunting experiences, despite the challenges of being a state that is almost entirely privately-owned.

**GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKENS SURVEYED**

KDWPT has conducted aerial surveys of greater prairie chickens every three years. Wildlife biologists work with a contracted aerial service company survey the state’s greater prairie chicken range, including the eastern Smoky Hills, Flint Hills, Glaciated Plains, Northern High Plains, Osage Cuestas and Chautauqua Hills regions  (northcentral and eastern half of the state). Surveys will occur from sunrise until approximately two-and-a-half hours after sunrise during the greater prairie chicken lekking period from March 15 to May 15.

Data collected from the aerial surveys will be used in conjunction with data from KDWPT’s annual ground surveys to further document population trends and better determine the species’ response to current management efforts.

**WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME DETECTED IN KANSAS BATS**

White-nose syndrome (WNS), a fungal disease that affects hibernating bats, has recently been confirmed in Kansas – the 32nd state to confirm the presence of the disease. Several dead bats, collected by KDWPT staff during cave surveys in Cherokee County in southeast Kansas and Barber County in southcentral Kansas, tested positive for the disease. Surveys were conducted between February 14 and March 1, and samples were tested by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wis.

In 2014, KDWPT began working with private landowners to enter caves, survey bats and check for the fungus. No positive test results were found until this year. Biologists with KDWPT’s Ecological Services Section, alongside other scientific groups, will continue survey efforts, but they’ll need the help of willing landowners to locate and enter bat caves.

Of the more than 1,000 species of bats around the world, 15 have been found in Kansas. Big brown bats are the most common and widespread species in the state and live here year-round. WNS has not been documented in big brown bats in Kansas.

**KANSAS ARCHERY IN THE SCHOOLS STATE TOURNAMENT**

KDWPT hosted the 9th Annual State Archery in the Schools Tournament in April at Blythe Family Fitness Center in Pratt, Kan. Three-hundred-thirty-sis students from 15 schools competed.

Archers shot for individual and team honors, as well as the opportunity to compete at the National Archery in the Schools Program competition in Louisville, Ken. this June. Each Kansas state competitor shot 30 arrows – fifteen arrows from 10 meters and fifteen arrows from 15 meters. A bullseye scores 10 points, so a perfect score would be 300.