

KANSAS 2018-2019 SUMMER MAFWA REPORT

First Cave Myotis Bat With White-nose Syndrome Found In Kansas

White-nose syndrome (WNS) was confirmed for the first time on a cave myotis bat (*Myotis velifer*) collected in Kansas. This brings the total number of bat species confirmed with the deadly fungal disease in North America to 10. Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) biologists collected sick and dead cave myotis, a bat species common in Kansas, in Barber, Comanche, and Kiowa counties. Samples were sent to the U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wis. for testing, and bats from all three counties were confirmed positive for WNS.

WNS was also confirmed in a unidentified dead bat found in Pratt County, bringing the number of counties in Kansas with WNS to five. Earlier this year, WNS was confirmed in Cherokee and Barber counties.

KDWPT Addresses Landowner Concerns Surrounding Elk Management

A shift in Kansas' elk hunting season dates and management units will address local landowner concerns of crop damage caused by elk. KDWPT commissioners voted in favor of moving the harvest season opener from September 1 to August 1 and reducing the size of Unit 2 – the unit that includes and provides a protective buffer around Fort Riley – to provide landowners with more options for controlling elk numbers on their land.

A firearm season of August 1-31 will allow landowners to use hunting to remove elk at a time when crop damage can be an issue. And part of the boundary of Elk Management Unit 2 was shifted closer to Fort Riley to allow more options for hunting elk that had taken up permanent residence in an area north of the Fort. Permits valid in Elk Management Unit 2 are restricted to limited draw and hunt-your-own-land elk permits. By shifting the boundary, the area in question becomes part of Unit 3, where an unlimited number of over-the-counter resident and landowner/tenant either-sex elk permits or antlerless-only elk permits are valid. The buffer was intended to provide additional protection for elk residing on Fort Riley, but these elk were permanently residing on private land miles from the Fort.

While most of Kansas' elk are located on the Fort Riley military reservation, elk numbers in other parts of the state have been on a long but gradual increase, due in large part to landowners who accept elk on their land with the knowledge that they'll be able to hunt them and maintain them at acceptable numbers.

La Cygne Reservoir Makes Top 100 Bass Lakes In U.S.

La Cygne Reservoir, the 2,600-acre power plant cooling lake in eastern Kansas, was listed as one of the country's top 100 bass fishing lakes by *Bassmaster Magazine*. In the publication's July/August 2018 issue, the nation's top 100 bass lakes are listed by region, based on the number and size of largemouth or smallmouth bass that are produced and caught. La Cygne is listed as No. 10 in the Central Region.

Bassmaster Magazine editors considered the results of electrofishing efforts last spring, which turned up an eye-popping 17 bass longer than 20 inches per hour of shocking effort. Editors also noted that two largemouth bass weighing more than 10 pounds were caught on the same weekend in March 2017.

La Cygne Reservoir consistently ranks near the top for bass fishing in Kansas. Each spring, biologists use electrofishing to sample the largemouth bass populations of Kansas lakes, gathering data to help make stocking requests and regulation recommendations. The data is also used in the annual fishing forecast, and the 2018 Kansas Fishing Forecast lists La Cygne as No. 1 with a Density Rating of 89.09 bass longer than 12 inches per hour of electroshocking. Of those, 66 were longer than 15 inches and 17 were longer than 20 inches. While some smaller state and community lakes produced fish over 20 inches during sampling efforts, none approached the numbers found at La Cygne.

Because the lake's water is used to cool the La Cygne Generating Station coal-fired power plant, it rarely freezes and fish enjoy warmer water temperatures year-round. The longer growing season, and the fact that some Florida strain largemouth bass genes still linger, probably account for the lake's big bass. Florida strain largemouths were stocked in La Cygne in the early 1980s. It was hoped that with the warmer water temperatures, larger fish would be produced. However, subsequent surveys didn't indicate strong survival of the Florida strain fish, so no follow-up stockings were conducted. Even so, subsequent genetic testing of La Cygne bass shows remnants of their Florida cousins.

River Proposal Threatens Kansas Lakes, Rivers

To meet Nebraska's legal obligation to increase the flow of the Republican River into Kansas, the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District proposed creating a connection in Nebraska between the Platte River Basin and the Republican River Basin. After entering northcentral Kansas, the Republican River feeds into Lovewell Reservoir and Milford Reservoir before joining the Kansas River near Junction City. The Republican River also connects with several other waterways in northcentral Kansas.

The State of Kansas opposed this project because invasive Asian carp and white perch in the Platte River could enter the Republican River (along with other nuisance species) if the two rivers are connected. As a result, the project could severely impact Kansas' sportfish and native aquatic species, water-based recreation, tourism and the state's fishing economy. There is no evidence that those two species currently live in the Republican River.

Changes to the Republican River could also impact critical habitat for the shoal chub and plains minnow, which are threatened species in Kansas. Both species release their eggs into flowing water where they would be susceptible to being eaten by white perch.

Aquatic Wildlife Propagation Center Opens

The future for some of Kansas' most imperiled aquatic species got brighter last summer with the opening of the Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center (KABC) at the Farlington Fish Hatchery in southeast Kansas. The grand opening culminated more than 10 years of planning and work.

The KABC is operated by KDWPT and is part of a program to propagate imperiled aquatic wildlife for reintroduction into areas where they have had serious population declines due to human activities and other factors. It will also be a holding facility for animals in immediate peril due to a decline in the quality of their habitat. Initially, KABC staff will work to propagate common, non-imperiled animals to develop procedures and get the rearing systems up and running. Once the systems are ready, KABC staff will begin propagating a few select species that have been determined by KDWPT to be important to restoring existing populations.

The facility could have a quick impact by raising and releasing aquatic animals currently on a threatened or endangered species list and the center will play a huge role in the recovery of species in future disaster areas, such as where a chemical spill has impacted miles of a particular stream. As well as a place to take survivors of the disaster, the center could also propagate replacement animals far faster than the species could reproduce naturally. KABC will also participate in research projects pertaining to such aquatic animals.

Building the facility required the collaboration of various state and federal agencies. KDWPT, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) contributed to the \$853,000 construction cost. KDHE provided more than half, largely with funds collected from mitigation agreements with corporations responsible for past ecological disasters. Such funding will help support the center in the future, too.

KABC is currently working on a research project concerning alligator snapping turtles with a Missouri university.

Construction Continues at Jamestown Wildlife Area

Jamestown Wildlife Area in northcentral Kansas is a 5124-acre public hunting area with more than 1,900 acres of wetlands, and an extensive renovation of the area and its infrastructure continues. Several marshes were kept at a low level while construction on a division berm was underway last fall.

Construction was more than half-way complete in late summer. Borrow areas where the contractors took earth to build the berm will become new, managed wetlands.

Improvements will allow area managers to flood a larger area and have more control of water elevations. With these new capabilities, staff can better manage the wetland for optimum "moist soil production" – a land practice that simulates a wetland's natural wet and dry cycles, and encourages native, seed-producing plants to grow – ultimately resulting in increased

hunting opportunities. While weather will largely determine when these projects may be completed, managers expect an entirely new look for Gamekeeper Marsh by the 2019 season.

High Quality Hunting Opportunities Through iWIHA

iWIHA is a spin-off program of the state's Walk-in Hunting Access (WIHA) program, which has become a mainstay for many Kansas hunters. WIHA began in 1995, and compensates landowners for acreage opened up to public hunting. Payments vary by the amount of land enrolled in the program and the length of the contract. And while the program has seen much success – nearly 1 million acres were enrolled in 2018 – there is still progress to be made in the state where 97 percent of land is privately-owned.

The iWIHA program is similar to WIHA in that landowners open up their ground to public hunting in exchange for payment, however access is controlled with the use of an online registration system. iWIHA allows KDWPT to achieve its mission of providing quality public hunting access, especially around urban areas where landowners have been hesitant to participate in WIHA for fear their land will become overrun with hunters.

Through iWIHA, one hunter can register and bring a certain number of “guests” to hunt on any given day for each tract. Hunters can electronically “check in” the night before or day of the hunt to see if slots are available. Once the quota is met, no other hunters can check in until someone checks out. KDWPT law enforcement staff will provide monitoring and enforcement for the areas.

Four State Fishing Lakes Receive Partial Renovations

In a cooperative study with Kansas State University to evaluate the influence of gizzard shad on food webs in small impoundments, KDWPT conducted partial fishery renovations on four small impoundments last winter

The first step was lowering water levels in late October, then as weather conditions permitted, Rotenone was applied at a concentration of 7.5 parts per billion. The low dose of Rotenone is designed to target gizzard shad while not affecting sport fish. No salvage orders were issued, and sport fishing equipment and harvest regulations remained in effect.

Gizzard shad present a challenge to managing many small Kansas impoundments, which are designed to provide close-to-home fishing opportunities. In Kansas smaller impoundments, open-water predators are rare or non-existent and gizzard shad populations often expand to levels that cause problems for more desirable sport fish.

Walleye Study Underway At Glen Elder Reservoir

A three-year study investigating walleye life history and behavior at Glen Elder Reservoir in northcentral Kansas will give anglers and biologists a better understanding of what makes

walleye tick in this impoundment. The telemetry study will evaluate mortality patterns, movement, home range, and habitat selection of adult walleye.

Thirty female and 30 male walleye were implanted with ultrasonic transmitters, though not all fish with transmitters were greater than the 18-inch minimum length limit.

Each fish is also tagged with a 3-inch long pink Floy tag in the dorsal fin for anglers to identify it as a study fish. The tag contains the individual fish number, the KDWPT office number to contact, and a message indicating a \$100 reward will be given for return of the transmitter.

Manual tracking will be conducted at least two times per month with more frequent tracking during critical periods of the year. Once each fish is located, water depth, GPS location, water temperature, and the fish identification number will be recorded. Angling mortality will be determined by tag returns, natural mortality by the lack of movement of a transmitter over time, and fish emigration will be detected using a stationary receiver. Daily movement patterns will also be studied by following a subsample of fish around over a 24-hour period.

This is a unique study for the state of Kansas and will provide many answers pertaining to Glen Elder walleye life history that will help biologists better manage this important sportfish. Anglers will also benefit from learning daily and annual movement patterns and habitat selection.

Aquatic Nuisance Species

There was good news in Kansas last year involving the efforts to prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species. According to Chris Steffen, KDWPT aquatic nuisance species coordinator, no zebra mussel larvae were detected during 2018 sampling efforts. Staff sampled 110 Kansas lakes not currently on the ANS Waters list, including city, county, state and federal lakes.

Zebra mussels are known to occur in 30 Kansas lakes and the agency has embarked on a year-round education program to inform anglers and boaters about the dangers of ANS and the steps they can take to prevent further spread. Staff hope 2018 test results indicate the message is getting through.

Chronic Wasting Disease In Kansas Deer: 2018-2019 Update

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) collected and tested samples from 360 in 2018-2019. Thirty-seven of those samples were confirmed positive. The targeted region for sampling deer taken by hunters this year was southwestern Kansas. However, sick or suspect deer observed in other parts of the state were also tested.

The 37 confirmed positives came from deer taken in Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton, Phillips, Smith, Thomas, Sheridan, Gove, Rooks, Osborne, Scott, Lane, Hamilton, Haskell, Hodgeman, Ford, Edwards, Stafford, Reno, and Pratt counties. While most positives are

still coming from northwest Kansas, new counties were added to the list this year, including several that show the disease's spread to the south and east – Haskell, Edwards, Pratt, Osborne, and Reno

Kansas Reports Safest Hunting Season Yet

The 2018-2019 Kansas hunting season was the safest one yet – with zero fatalities and a record-low, four reported firearm-related incidents.

Of the four incidents reported last season, two were the result of hunters swinging on game; one was attributed to poor firearm handling; and one was the result of the unsafe use of a decoy. Fortunately, none of the reported incidents were fatal.

Hunter Education staff also track treestand-related incidents, and two were reported for 2018-2019. In both cases the hunters were not wearing fall-arrest systems and neither incident proved fatal.

Kansas Hunter Education staff attribute these record-breaking low numbers to one thing: the program's more than 1,400 volunteer hunter education instructors who share with students safe firearm handling practices, ethics, wildlife regulations and conservation principles. Instructors certify approximately 9,000 students per year.

While staff and volunteers would ideally like to see the number of incidents drop to zero, current reports remain a stark contrast to statistics from 50 years ago when seven lives were lost in a year, two years in a row.

Kansas Biologists Harvest More Than 90 Million Walleye Eggs

The walleye egg-taking season started slowly in Kansas, but it ended quite successfully. While cool water temperatures delayed and prolonged egg-taking efforts, once they started, they were fruitful. In fact, biologists set a record, taking 12 million eggs in one day from Cedar Bluff Reservoir. In all, working at three Kansas reservoirs, fisheries staff collected 92 million eggs.