

Kansas
State Report
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2020 License Sales A Pleasant Surprise

KDWPT staff began planning for revenue shortfalls in early April when the sale of nonresident turkey permits was suspended in order to protect the health of Kansans. The potential financial impact to the agency's Wildlife Fee Fund was estimated at more than \$2 million. Fortunately there is good news. Thanks to the fact that outdoor recreation as an allowable activity in Governor Kelly's Executive Orders, the department has kept state parks, reservoirs, state fishing lakes and wildlife areas open. And Kansans have responded. State parks, reservoirs and state fishing lakes enjoyed record visitation. State parks were at nearly full capacity every weekend from April through November, and revenue set records. Overall, fishing license and permit sales increased by nearly 30 percent in 2020, compared to 2019.

Chronic Wasting Disease Confirmed in Captive Elk Herd

The Kansas Department of Agriculture confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in a captive elk herd in Osage County. KDWPT staff are collaborating with KDA to mitigate risk to the captive cervid (elk and deer) industry, as well as the local wild deer population. This is the first documented positive CWD case in eastern Kansas and the first in a captive herd since 2001. The captive herd was depopulated and surveillance for CWD in Osage County this year turned up no positives.

Fatmucket Mussels Produced at Hatchery

KDWPT hatchery staff at the Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center (KABC) (part of KDWPT's Farlington Fish Hatchery) successfully produced fatmucket mussels, a species of mussel that is on Kansas' Species In Need of Conservation (SINC) list. This summer, the mussels will be available for reintroduction into selected sites where they are native or they could be stocked back into the stream that the adults came from (Drywood Creek near the hatchery).

The KABC was developed so fish culture could be used to restore imperiled species. Staff at the center will breed native aquatic species to be reintroduced into bodies of water where they've native.



New Name, Same Good Fishing

Last summer, Walk-In Fishing Access (WIFA) signs went up around Kansas on properties that were originally enrolled in the Fishing Impoundments and Stream Habitats

(F.I.S.H.) program. The program leases fishing access to private waters and opens it to all Kansas anglers. The program was recently rebranded with the new name to improve awareness and more closely align it with the popular Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) program. Fisheries staff hope this change increases usage of the properties and attracts more pond and stream owners to participate in the program. There are hundreds of thousands of small farm ponds across Kansas and 10,000 miles of privately owned streams, which provide fantastic fishing. In 2020, 189 sites were enrolled in WIFA, including 45 miles of streams, five navigable river access sites and 1,590 pond acres.

Habitat Program Opens Access To Hunters

KDWPT district wildlife biologist James Svaty and habitat specialist Davis Ostermeyer secured a five-year Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) lease on a 2,500-acre working cattle ranch in Lincoln County through a habitat improvement project. The WIHA lease, which provides public hunting access, was the culmination of a collaborative effort to remove Eastern redcedar trees from the grassland, improving both wildlife habitat and cattle grazing conditions. The property, located in the heart of the Smoky Hills, is owned by Mid-Continent Farms based in Washington County, and is now excellent greater prairie chicken habitat and provides high-quality hunting opportunities for white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, and wild turkey. Ostermeyer, fills a habitat specialist position made possible through an agreement between KDWPT and Pheasants Forever/Habitat Forever. This single position has opened hunting access to more than 5,000 acres of new WIHA, and has cleared more than 1,100 acres of cedars. Invasive Eastern redcedars are the number one habitat concern in the Smoky Hills Ecological Focus Area outlined within Kansas' State Wildlife Action Plan.

Aquatic Nuisance Grants Secured

The KDWPT Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) program received five federal grants worth more than \$500,000, which will be used to prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species in Kansas. Over the next two years, these grants will fund: 1) boat inspections across the state, 2) a feasibility study of a potential barrier to prevent upstream migration of Asian Carp in the Kansas River, 3) commercial harvest of Asian Carp in the Kansas River, and 4) study of the Neosho River bighead carp population. KDWPT's ANS Program coordinator Chris Steffen led the effort to apply for these grants.

RBFF Lapsed Boat Registration Mailing Yields Results

Last March, KDWPT collaborated with the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) to renew lapsed Kansas boat registrations. Mailers, designed, printed, mailed, and paid for by RBFF, were sent to lapsed boat registrants, encouraging them to register their boat, or return the mailing indicating a change of address or sale of the boat. Boat registrants who also held a fishing license were mailed a fishing specific mailer, which included a map of a lake in their area, with landmarks like fish habitat, boat ramps, and feeders indicated. The campaign resulted in a much cleaner and more accurate mailing list, removing nearly 9,000 outdated addresses, registered 970 boats and brought in \$41,225 in revenue.

Mountain Lion Sighted Numerous Times In Same Area

KDWPT staff reviewed and confirmed a trail camera photo taken in southcentral Kansas of adult mountain lion carrying a recently killed porcupine. This photo follows three earlier confirmations (20 miles total apart) in the same area over a three-month period, which biologists assumed is the same cat headed south. This is the first time multiple photos of a cat have been confirmed in the same area within a time frame that could indicate the presence of a resident lion. However, it's too early to tell because it could be a different lion coincidentally in the same area.



More recently, a mountain lion was photographed by a backdoor Ring video camera as it walked casually down the alleyway in the heart of Wichita, Kansas' second largest city. The footage was taken at 4 a.m. on May 10, 2021. KDWPT biologists confirmed the location and searched the area in case the cat was still nearby. It was not located.

<https://ring.com/share/6823c39e-819f-4e79-bb02-18208d042bae>

There have been 36 confirmed mountain lion sightings in Kansas since 2007, and most have appeared to be young adult cats on the move.

KDWPT Refunded Nonresident Deer Hunters Who Couldn't Travel Due To COVID

Not long after the lottery drawing for nonresident deer permits last April, hunters began inquiring whether refunds would be available if hunters could not travel due to COVID. The decision was made in June to provide refunds on request, and to offer returned permits to unsuccessful hunters next in the draw order. Refund requests were light through the summer, and department Licensing Section staff successfully re-issued permits to hunters next in line.

Through the fall months, the COVID situation in Kansas made national news, and more hunters requested refunds. Some couldn't adhere to mandatory quarantines they would face back home after traveling to Kansas, and others were dealing with their own exposure to the virus. Overall, licensing staff processed 285 refunds and re-sold 102 permits.

KDWPT Public Lands Helps Those In Need

KDWPT Public Lands staff decided to clean out department freezers last year and help those in need during the pandemic. Each year staff must harvest some bison and elk on state reserves to ensure the herds are maintained at sustainable levels. Culled animals are butchered and meat is usually used for education and outreach efforts during the year. However, this year, such gatherings were nearly non-existent. With more meat on hand than was needed, Public Lands staff delivered more than 1,900 pounds of bison and elk meat to various food banks and pantries across the state in 2020-2021.

New Regulation Allows Night Vision Equipment for Coyote Hunting

Coyote hunting has always been allowed at night in Kansas, but until 2021, the use of lights, night-vision and thermal imaging equipment could only be used by nuisance wildlife control permit holders and landowners protecting livestock. After hearing from predator hunters, trappers and landowners for several years and with an indication that legislation may be introduced to allow night vision equipment, KDWPT began developing a regulation. After researching other states' experiences and discussing the issue at four public meetings, the commission passed a regulation in August 2020 with overwhelming public support.

On Jan. 1, 2021, a limited night vision equipment season opened, requiring a \$2.50 Night Vision Equipment Permit, which allowed the use artificial light, scopes and equipment that amplify visible light, and thermal-imaging scopes and thermal-imaging equipment, when hunting coyotes at night. The season was open Jan. 1-March 3, and only coyotes could be taken. The use a vehicle was prohibited and the activity could only occur on private land.

For the inaugural season, 5,776 Night Vision Equipment permits were sold, representing about 17 percent of total coyote hunters. A random number of permit holders were surveyed and extrapolated data indicated that those who hunted harvested an average of 7.6 coyotes during the season – 4.4 at night and 3.2 during the day. Nearly 19,000 coyotes were taken at night by hunters, 141,000 were taken by traditional hunters and 37,000 were taken by trappers. There were no safety or poaching concerns reported during the season and 96 percent of those surveyed indicated they had no concern about target identification.

Fisheries Research

KDWPT's Fisheries Division, in cooperation with Missouri State University, has initiated a study looking at crappie exploitation in three southeastern Kansas reservoirs. One thousand crappie were tagged in Big Hill and Elk City Reservoirs and in Parsons City Lake.

Anglers report tagged fish by calling the number on the tag and successful anglers that report tags will be placed into a drawing for prizes.

Information gathered through this study will provide a better understanding of angler induced mortality, allowing for more accurate population modeling and better management of crappie populations in the state.

Walleye, Saugeye and Sauger Egg Collection Goals Met

KDWPT's Fisheries Division staff met egg collection goals needed to produce walleye, sauger and saugeye requested for stocking in Kansas waters. The goals were lofty – 68 million walleye, 24.3 million saugeye and 1.8 million sauger for a total of 94.1 million eggs. Crews battled late-March weather extremes and high winds at Kirwin, Cedar Bluff, Perry, El Dorado and Hillsdale reservoirs, but pulled all nets on April 3 after goals were met. The results were welcome after egg collection efforts were cancelled in March 2020 because of the pandemic.

iWIHA Shines During Youth and Archery Spring Turkey Season

The Interactive Walk-In Hunting (iWIHA) program's popularity continued to grow during the 2021 youth and archery spring hunting season (April 1-13). iWIHA opened 53 tracts totaling almost 11,000 acres for the 2021 spring turkey season. The program leases land for public hunting just as the regular WIHA program does; however, iWIHA limits the number of hunters who can hunt on a tract at any one time through an electronic check-in system. This relieves landowners' concerns about overcrowding, which is a concern in more populated areas, and ensures hunters enjoy high-quality experiences. Check-ins and turkey harvest were much higher in 2021, compared to 2020.

Record Number of Nonresident Deer Permit Applications Received

During the April nonresident deer permit application period, a record 29,881 applications were received for the 22,026 permits allocated for the 2021 season. Last year, 24,240 applications were submitted for the 22,003 permits allocated. Application numbers had been relatively stable until this year. Allocations are set using a series of adjustment factors listed in statute. Those applicants unsuccessful in the draw will receive a refund and preference point for next year's draw.

Diversity and Inclusion

Through partnerships with the Kansas Wildlife Federation and the Kansas Hispanic and Latino American Affairs Commission the department produced the first-ever Spanish-language hunting and furharvesting regulations last fall, available online and in a printed version. The regulation pamphlet is just one facet of a new language access program, "Afuera Para Todos" meaning "Outdoors For All." This spring, the *2021 Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary* was produced and distributed. The program also includes plans to offer additional Spanish-translated materials, to include the *2022-2023 Kansas Boating Regulations Summary* (produced every two years), area signage, website and social media content, and more. In addition to offering Spanish-translated materials, KDWP has increased its capacity to field phone and email communications in Spanish through the hiring of a dedicated bilingual information representative.