

**Kansas
State Report
May 30, 2025**

**Christopher Kennedy, Secretary
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
1020 S Kansas Ave, Suite 200
Topeka, KS 66612**

Ecological Services:

KDWP launches Ecological Review Tool to streamline regulatory processes

Following several years of web development and testing, KDWP launched the Ecological Review Tool (ERT) for use by our regulated stakeholders in October 2024. KDWP maintains authorities over state threatened and endangered species and their habitats through the Kansas Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act. Development projects that receive public funding or assistance, require permits from state or federal agencies, or may impact critical habitat of a state listed species require review by KDWP. ERT conducts automated reviews of user-submitted information based on types of projects, associated activities, and project footprint. If a proposed project does not impact state-listed species, critical habitats, or land managed by KDWP, project sponsors or their consultants may receive a regulatory review with project clearance in less than 15 minutes. Projects that have potential for these impacts are flagged for closer review by KDWP. So far, 379 external users have registered for ERT and have submitted 978 projects for review.

Recovery program updates:

The goal of the Aquatic Species Recovery Program is to reestablish populations of native species back into habitats where they used to occur but have since disappeared. Species reintroductions and monitoring surveys are made possible through voluntary agreements between private, non-federal landowners and KDWP.

Neosho Mucket Reintroductions:

KDWP in collaboration with the Neosho National Fish Hatchery reintroduced approximately 2,000 federally endangered Neosho Muckets at three separate mussel beds on the Neosho River in Kansas. Monitoring of these locations in late 2024 and early 2025 have shown over winter survival. For 2025, plans are to stock nearly 3,000 Neosho Muckets at 5 separate sites on the Neosho River in Kansas. All sites were private or local government owned, and all parties have signed a Certificate of Inclusions under the KDWP Enhancement of Survival Permit Programmatic Conservation Benefit Agreement (CBA).

KDWP applied for and received a 10(a)(1)(A) Endangered Species Recovery Permit that will allow the department to collect, propagate, monitor populations, and reintroduce Neosho Muckets in Kansas. The Department will be collecting Neosho Muckets in 2025 for propagation at the Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center.

Topeka Shiner Reintroductions:

KDWP is working with the University of Kansas on the reintroduction of a stock of Topeka Shiners being held at research ponds at KU. Following a genetic analysis of these populations, KDWP plans to work with KU to reestablish these populations in to their respective Flint Hills and Smoky Hills watersheds.

Members of the National Park Service, Kansas State University, Emporia State University, and KDWP staff met to conduct annual sampling on streams on the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. Federally listed Topeka Shiners have been found in streams and some ponds on the property which has prompted experimental releases of the species back into streams of the property using pond populations as broodstock. KDWP staff seek to replicate these methods with landowners across the Topeka Shiner range in Kansas to help reestablish populations of the species in the Flint Hills and Smoky Hill watersheds.

Alligator Snapping Turtle Release

A total of 100 juvenile Alligator Snapping Turtles from the Tishomingo National Fish Hatchery were released in the Neosho River between Erie and Parsons Kansas. In September 2024, 40 juveniles AST were outfitted with telemetry transmitters and released. Early monitoring efforts have shown successful over winter survival. In May 2025, another 60 AST were released to further augment the population. A cooperative agreement for monitoring with Missouri State University will continue for two years. These releases are part of a multi-state recovery program with prior releases throughout its historic range in Oklahoma. Releases took place within the Neosho River in the largest fragment of river that would provide opportunities for the species to disperse and find favorable habitats.



Public Lands:

Access

A bill authorizing the Department to acquire a 268-acre parcel of land in northwest Kansas was introduced during the 2024 legislative session, but no action was taken. Non-resident pressure on Kansas public lands is a continuing issue for vocal Kansas residents. The Department is looking at ways to address these resident concerns.

Habitat Management

Dry to drought conditions have created some challenges for managing habitat on Kansas public lands but it has allowed more intensive methods to be utilized on our wetland properties. Aquatic invasive species control was a high priority during this reporting period.

Wildland fire assistance

Continued drought in many parts of the state resulted in numerous wildfires once again in 2024. Wildland Fire Certified Public Lands staff remained busy responding to fires on our public areas as well as providing mutual aid assistance on private lands. Coordinated efforts continue to diminish fire danger and mitigate fuel loads in the Reservoir flood plains on both private and public areas.

Law Enforcement:

In 2024, the Law Enforcement Division hired seven new Game Warden recruits. Among them, four were already certified officers: three from the State of Kansas and one from Nevada. Additionally, the division ordered 12 Chevrolet pickups, which are scheduled for delivery in June 2025.

In the fall of 2024, the division implemented electronic ticketing using the SmartCOP system. They also successfully acquired two additional Blue Link underwater remote-operated vehicles (ROVs) with funding from agency resources and matching contributions from the Coast Guard. This enhancement ensures that all four regions are now equipped with a unit specifically designated for body recovery from drowning incidents and for recovering crucial evidence from lakes and ponds. With the addition of these two ROVs in 2024, each region will have a dedicated unit ready to respond effectively to recovery efforts.

Furthermore, all members of the Law Enforcement Division will receive the Axon Taser 10, which is currently being implemented. Axon Virtual Reality tactical training has also been integrated to aid in training for de-escalation, tactical decision-making, and weapons proficiency.

The division has acquired Guardian Alliance Technologies for new hire background investigations. This cloud-based system enables the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) to cross-check information with other state agencies, resulting in faster and more accurate background checks. Additionally, TransUnion TLOxp has been acquired for the special investigation unit, enhancing our investigative capabilities. This powerful system transforms fragmented data into reliable information, allowing us to advance criminal cases with greater efficiency and urgency.

Wildlife Division:

- **Turkey Research Project Update**

KDWP is working with researchers at the Kansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit on a Wildlife Restoration grant funded project to capture and mark turkeys across the state with transmitters

and leg bands to monitor their location and movements. Researchers will collect information on nesting, habitat use, reproduction, and survival. This information will be used to inform population models and harvest management decisions. Below are excerpts from our most recent monthly activity report:

Summary

This report covers primary field observations, movement figures, and status updates of wild turkey hens captured in January-March 2024. From the original 297 captured hens fitted with transmitters, 32 (10.8%) died within 14 days of capture, and 22 (8%) of the remaining sample died entering the nesting season. As of the end of April, we know of at least 108 hens that have attempted to nest. We also have begun vegetation surveys for wild turkey resource selection across Kansas, using fundamental assessments such as species compositions and visual obstruction readings. In the next month, we anticipate beginning roost site selection surveys, installing cameras to assess predator communities, nest site surveys, and monitoring poults.

Nesting hens

Adults comprise 81% of the nesting hens at 87 total, and the remaining 19% (21 hens) are juveniles. If split by region, the majority (43%, 47 hens) of nests are currently in the central region. The western region contains 36 (33%) nests so far, and the eastern region has 25 (23%) nests. Of the total 108 known nests, 31 (28%) of those nests have failed, with six being surveyed so far. Five of those failed nests include hens that are now considered mortalities. The earliest nest initiation date we know of begins on March 25th, 2024, who is included in the failed nests and is no longer active. So far, most known nests have been initiated in the middle of April, with April 8th to April 19th seeming to be the peak nesting period with our current dataset. The largest proportion of nests (38%) fall within woodland, and it is notable that 30% of nests fall within grassland, and the remaining 32% are nearly evenly split between savannah and shrubland/ edge. We expect the number of nesting hens to continue increasing until the middle of May, and our first expected hatch date will be near May 11th.



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

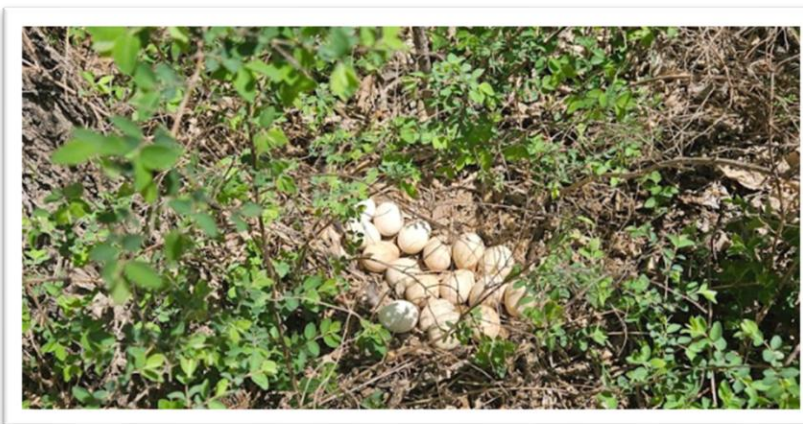
Figure 1. Nesting site of failed hen nest 7627. The nest was found in the downed cedar tree in the center-right section of the photo. Ellsworth County, KS. 2024.



Figure 2. Depredated hen nest 7627 within a downed cedar tree, likely due to small mammal. The nest contained ten eggshells. Ellsworth County, KS. 2024.

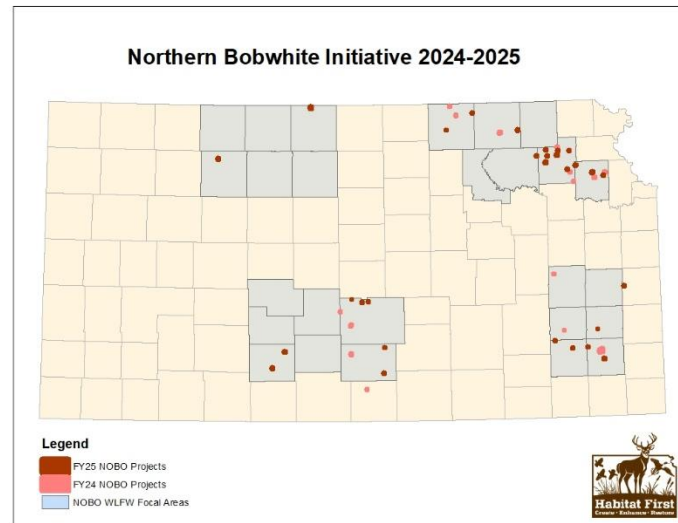


Figure 4. Nest of hen 7647, which was the first nest observed in person for the season. The hen was flushed on 4/13/2024 when conducting what we thought was a mortality check. The hen then returned that same day and continued incubating up to 4/23/2024. After this day, she did not return to the nest, and we surveyed the nest as a failure. Originally, the nest contained 17 eggs. During our return visit, we only found four eggshells remaining that appeared eaten by a large mammal. Ellsworth County, KS.



- **KDWP Partners with USDA, Donors and Landowners to Strategically Enhance Bobwhite Habitat**

In 2021, the Natural Resources Conservation Service began discussions with KDWP about expanding the Working Lands for Wildlife Northern Bobwhite Initiative to Kansas. Working Lands for Wildlife is the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's premier approach for conserving America's working lands to benefit people, wildlife, and rural communities. Through this initiative, NRCS and KDWP offer financial and technical assistance to producers in Kansas to improve bobwhite populations and other game and non-game species by managing their working lands for early successional habitat while meeting their lands natural resource and production goals. KS-NRCS currently allocates \$750,000 to the program annually.



To leverage our resources and intensify the outcomes of the initiative we coupled a portion of our Habitat First program dollars with match provided by a generous WildTrust donation from Mr. Earl L. Donaldson in 2021 to be used to enhance bobwhite habitat. This allowed us to expand our services to private landowners while strategically focusing our resources to have a greater impact to bobwhite and other species.



Figure 1 Perennial grass and forb planting 2024

We began to use these funds in 2024 and have been quite successful in promoting this program to landowners within the 4 focal areas. Since 2024, KDWP has partnered with 59 individual farmers and ranchers. Currently, the Agency has obligated \$129,547.50 in habitat incentives to implement beneficial, early successional bobwhite habitat. \$32,386.88 (25%) was paid with Mr. Donaldson's donation. Approximately 5,217 acres have been within the Northern Bobwhite focal areas. Practices most

prescribed by KDWP Wildlife Biologist for these habitat enhancements are perennial grass and forb plantings, prescribed fire, and invasive tree removal.

- **KDWP and USDA Partnership Highlights from FFY24**

Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has invested heavily towards conservation of our natural resources on private lands for many years. The Wildlife Division deploys 29 Wildlife Biologists across the state to work directly with landowners, farmers and ranchers, and conservation partners to implement best management practices on private lands to enhance and restore our natural ecosystems that wildlife and people rely on. One of our key partnerships is our long-standing commitment to USDA in Kansas. We work hand-in-hand with both the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to build federally funded voluntary conservation programs for landowners. We continue to sponsor and lead several Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) projects with FSA; including the Lesser prairie-chicken, Upland Bird, and the Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators CRP projects specifically designed to meet the optimal habitat needs of target wildlife species across the nation.

Latest Enrollment in CRP SAFE (State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement) projects in Kansas:

- **KS Lesser Prairie-Chicken** – 150,375 acres (1,327 contracts)
- **KS Upland Birds** – 67,866 acres (3,633 contracts)
- **KS Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators** – 9,000 acres (181 contracts)



We continue to partner with NRCS through a long-standing contributory agreement to provide technical assistance for wildlife resource concerns on private lands, promotion of NRCS financial assistance programs, and wetland compliance and conservation planning. One of the key programs that we promote and provide technical assistance with is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). KS-NRCS allocated \$59 million to this program in FFY24. A federal mandate on this conservation title funding requires that no less than 10% of these funds be obligated to wildlife-friendly practices. \$9.1 million (15%) was obligated to practices that benefit wildlife. These funds are also prioritized for projects that benefit target wildlife species on working lands through partner-developed projects. These projects are known, collectively, as the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program. We have worked with NRCS to develop several of these projects in Kansas including the Lesser Prairie-chicken

Initiative, the Monarch Butterfly Initiative, the Northern Bobwhite Initiative and the Great Plains Grassland Initiative.

Fisheries:

Stocking Programs

The four state fish hatcheries produced a total of 72,167,467 fish from varying sources were propagated and stocked in Kansas. This includes fish trades with other state agencies. We began construction on a new office at our Farlington Fish Hatchery in southeast Kansas. The former office was constructed shortly after World War II.

Native Freshwater Mussel Stockings

We currently are propagating and reintroducing six different species of conservation concern in Kansas. In 2024, 53,412 juveniles were produced consisting of 4,022 Ouachita Kidneyshell and 49,390 Yellow Sandshell. We stocked 8,000 Plain Pocketbook (image) and 800 Bleufer into former native range in 2024.



Fisheries Research

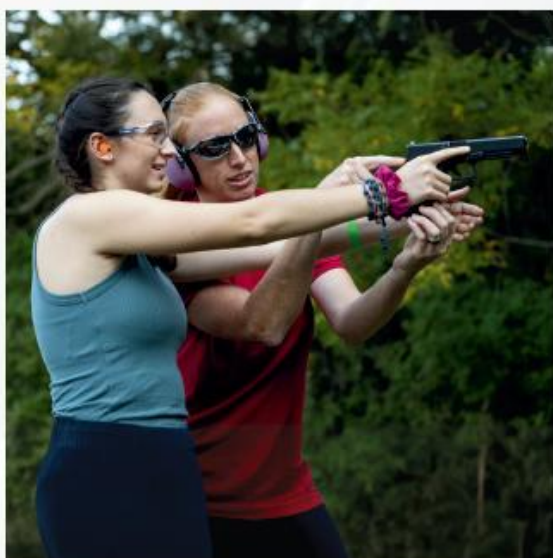
We continue to perform growth analysis on Blue Catfish populations in the state. We also used genetic parentage evaluation to determine stocking contribution of various sizes (fry, fingerling, intermediate) of Walleye into three study impoundments in western Kansas. Basically, we took genetic fingerprints of all male and female parents that contributed to each hatchery product. We then sampled the age-0 fish in these impoundments in the fall, extracted genetic fin clips, and evaluated their origin. Most of the age-0 contribution came from fry stockings as opposed to fingerlings, intermediates, and wild/natural production. We will continue this project in 2025.

Public Affairs:

Public engagement efforts remain central to success, with the hiring of a new Chief of Public Affairs in October. This section focuses on three primary goals: increasing revenue, strengthening the agency's reputation, and promoting public appreciation for Kansas's natural resources. Key campaigns include KDWP 101, to educate Kansans on agency operations and benefits, Wildlife of Kansas, celebrating local species, with a special focus on the 50th anniversary of the Kansas Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act, and Protect the Wild, which encourages direct conservation actions through seasonal initiatives. Major initiatives that will continue through 2026 include a new website to enhance accessibility and engagement, a refresh to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine to modernize design and editorial strategy and coordinated engagement efforts to strengthen community connections through regional coordinators and research-driven outreach.

Education:

KDWP is excited to present the final version of our R3 Action Plan. Nearly 30 KDWP staff from multiple divisions collaborated through 4 working groups or "pillars": Hunt, Fish, Shoot, and Support and Connect; these teams were charged with tackling the work for this plan. The Kansas R3 plan began during the COVID era, but these teams persevered through adversity, meeting virtually when necessary and ultimately produced a meaningful document that is now ready for final approval and implementation. Next steps include distribution and discussion among leadership and management staff to identify high priorities for implementation.



R3 Action Plan

Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation
2024-2029



Goals of the Kansas R3 Action Plan



Hunting Goals

- Increase Hunting Access and Opportunity
- Engage a More Diverse Hunting Community
- Evaluate Hunting Programs and Efforts



Fishing Goals

- Increase Licensed Fishing Participation
- Evaluate Fishing Programs and Efforts



Shooting Sports Goals

- Increase Participation in Shooting Sports
- Engage Broader Constituencies in Shooting Sports
- Evaluate Shooting Sport Programs and Efforts



Support & Connect Goals

- Empower Participation in Outdoor Recreation
- Inspire Civic Engagement with Natural Resources
- Build Capacity to Support R3 Goals

Licensing:

In April 2024 we accepted nonresident deer applications and received 32,975 applicants. Our quota for this draw in 2024 was 21,815. Total revenue generated for this draw is approximately \$15,000,000. In April 2025 we received 33,962, which is an increase of 987 permit applications. Our quota for this draw in 2025 is 21,724, which is down 91 permits from 2024. Total revenue of approximately \$15,200,000 for this year's nonresident deer draw.

The fall turkey season of 2024 was suspended due to declining populations on a state and regional level. In Spring 2025 we had 14,871 nonresident hunters apply for the spring turkey draw and 9,700 permits allocated.