McPherson State Fishing Lake and Maxwell Wildlife Refuge are located in McPherson County, six miles north of Canton, Kansas. The refuge consists of 2,574 acres of rolling native prairie owned and managed for wildlife by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. Constructed in 1954, McPherson State Fishing Lake has 46 surface acres of water. Surrounding the lake are 260 acres of campground and public use area.

BISON

At their peak, there were 60-75 million bison in North America. The plains bison was the subspecies prevalent in Kansas. Mature plains bison generally weigh 1,600 to 1,900 pounds, but some individuals may weigh more than a ton. Adult bulls stand five to six feet tall at the shoulder. Cows generally weigh 900 to 1,200 pounds and stand about five feet tall.

In winter, both sexes are covered with a thick, wooly heavy winter coats in the spring, long hair remains on their heads and forequarters. After shedding their coat of dark brown hair, with longer and darker hair on their backs, reins, rearsunfish, bluegill, and largemouth bass.

In 1943, the estate of Henry Irving Maxwell, a McPherson businessman, began purchasing land for the purpose of creating a wildlife refuge. In 1944, 2,560 acres were deed-ed to what is now the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.

After fencing and corrals were constructed, seven buf-falo cows and three bulls were obtained in 1951 from the

Wichita Mountains (Okla.) National Wildlife Refuge to form the nucleus of the Maxwell herd. Today, the Maxwell herd averages about 200 animals.

Elk were also introduced at Maxwell in 1951. Today, the elk herd on the refuge averages about 75 animals. Elk are shy and harder to spot than bison, but the best times to observe them are late evening or early morning.

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In winter, both sexes are covered with a thick, wooly

coat of dark brown hair, with longer and darker hair on their heads and forequarters. After shedding their heavy winter coats in the spring, long hair remains on the animal's head, forelegs, and hump, and a short, thin summer coat covers the rest of its body.

Bison are wild animals and must be given the respect due to an animal of their size and strength.

FISHING AND BOATING

The lake is characterized by a steep rocky shoreline towards the dam and shallow mud flats on the upper end. Water clarity is usually good, supporting fairly to excellent populations of channel catfish, black bullhead, black crappie, redear sunfish, bluegill, and largemouth bass.

A boat launching facility is located in the main use area on the west side of the lake. Boating on McPherson State Fishing Lake is for fishing only. Skiing and pleasure boat- ing are prohibited. Shore anglers will find several fishing piers that provide access to deep water.

MAXWELL WILDLIFE REFUGE

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PRAIRIE ELK

Elk once occurred throughout Kansas, but they were extirpated from the state by the early 1900s.

Elk belong to the deer family (Cervidae). They prefer grass, but they can subsist on forbs and woody vegeta-tion.

Males have large antlers that are shed each year in March or April. The new antlers have a velvet covering that is shed in late August. The breeding season occurs in the fall. At this time, males gather females in harems.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism maintains herds of American plains bison and elk under natural conditions as possible, keeping with the cur- rent land-use demands, ensuring that an important part of our state's natural heritage will not disappear from this portion of the Great Plains.