

# Council Grove Wildlife Area News



Area News – Fall 2013

## 2013/2014 Hunting Outlook:

Upland Birds: The fall hunting outlook for quail on the area is fair. Hunters should see quail numbers that are similar to moderately decreased, as compared to last fall. Breeding populations this spring were slightly below average following fair production last year and some periods of snow cover late last winter. Cool and damp temperatures this spring are believed to have delayed nesting and may have hampered production as later hatched poults experienced hot and dry conditions throughout late June and most of July, which then led into extremely wet and cooler than average conditions in late July through the first half of August. Adult pairs were often observed this summer on or near the wildlife area without an accompanying brood, indicating failed nesting attempts, but several coveys were also observed or reported early this fall in areas where habitat developments and enhancements have recently occurred, indicating that some production has taken place. Hunters should be aware that cover conditions will be heavy as a result of abundant rainfall that occurred in early August. Within most habitat areas, natural vegetation and area crops should provide good food and cover conditions for wildlife, including quail, and should help to sustain breeding populations into next spring. The wildlife area lies outside the primary range of ring-necked pheasant. Hunters occasionally encounter pheasants on the area, but numbers are low.

Waterfowl: The fall hunting outlook for waterfowl on the area is good. Waterfowl populations are reported to remain strong following another good production year. Habitat conditions have improved with rains that fell in early August and may be the best seen in nearly a decade. During most years, lake habitats lack significant food resources. This year however is different as many plants became established within dewatered zones at the upper ends of the lake following the drought. Now that the rains returned and lake levels have risen within these zones, many of those plants will provide food and cover for wetland wildlife species including waterfowl. Of concern however is the period of time that the vegetation has been flooded (it is degrading) and whether lake levels will remain within the vegetation throughout migration. Of interest to area hunters also is that similar habitat conditions have been reported throughout much of eastern Kansas and may serve to distribute waterfowl throughout the region rather than concentrate them for much of the upcoming season. Weather will undoubtedly play a part (as it always does) in determining the extent of waterfowl use this year as well. Many years see waterfowl numbers achieve an early peak in late October, followed later by a more significant peak in mid-December. Cool conditions this spring are reported to have delayed nesting of some waterfowl species within breeding areas to the north, and may in turn delay fall migrations. Hunters are encouraged to visit the area website to view weekly waterfowl population and habitat condition updates.

Deer: The fall hunting outlook for deer on the area is fair to good. Although a concern to biologists, last years' outbreak of EHD was not as extensive as other nearby states. Frequent and large reports of die-offs were lacking within the county and on the wildlife area. As such, deer populations currently appear to remain good. Antlerless deer and fawns were not an uncommon sight this summer and reports of a few nice bucks have been received.

Turkey: The fall hunting outlook for turkey on the area is good. Area and regional populations remain strong despite poorer and later production in 2013 as compared to last year. Several broods were observed this summer indicating a moderate level of production on the wildlife area. Hunters should find good turkey numbers this season and should be able to look ahead to the next spring season with some optimism.

Small Game: Opportunities to hunt fox squirrel and cottontail exist. Of the two, fox squirrel, typically provide greater opportunity. With much of the area wooded and with hunting interest in squirrels low, the area can provide some attractive hunting. Cottontail populations are often not strong, but can provide some opportunity in upland areas away from flood zones.

Furbearers: The area is open to the hunting and trapping of furbearers. In most years, good opportunity to harvest beaver and raccoon exists. Coyote and bobcat populations are generally fair, providing some opportunity.

### **Woodland Habitat Enhancement Work Continues:**

Recent visitors to woodlands within the Council Grove Wildlife Area (CGWA) may have noticed some changes, and more are to come. Whether exploring area woodland habitats in pursuit of a November rutting buck, a spring gobbler, or perhaps morels for the frying pan, guests may have noticed some peculiar markings on area trees. More specifically, trees marked with a ring of blue paint are becoming increasingly more common. No, the paint is not the work of vandals, does not mark the location of a favorite tree stand, or even indicate a diseased tree within the stand. Rather, it is an initial step in management work designed to enhance wildlife habitat in woodland dominated areas of CGWA.

Beginning in 2010, nearing the completion of a successful plan to increase and enhance grassland habitats on the wildlife area, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism (KDWPT) staff developed a new plan to begin work within the most prevalent habitat type on the 2,000 acre property; woodlands. Utilizing the expertise of District Forester, Thad Rhodes with the Kansas Forest Service (KFS), KDWPT has initiated annual projects to utilize timber stand improvement (TSI) principles to enhance woodland characteristics for the benefit of wildlife. TSI work on CGWA has been designed to promote burr oak (primarily), walnut, and hickory stature and nut production by removing nearby competing and less desirable trees. Trees of these species are often less common than other species such as locust, elm, ash, hackberry, maple, and boxelder, and can provide valuable food and cover sources for area wildlife including game species such as deer, turkey, squirrel, raccoon, and wood ducks.

TSI is a simple, but labor intensive process. Each fall, KFS and KDWPT staff, walk area woods to locate species such as oak. When a management tree has been located, the surrounding tree community is evaluated. To be a healthy and productive tree, the management tree must not be too crowded and it must be able to successfully compete for moisture, nutrients, and sunlight. Site evaluations review woodland characteristics such as tree species, density, height, health, canopy coverage, and underlying soils. Specific focus at CGWA is directed to analyze the tree canopy or upper level of leaves. If the management tree currently receives little sunlight, or may be at risk of shading in the future from faster growing neighboring trees, then neighboring trees are marked for removal. Marking simply involves painting a blue ring around each tree to be removed from the stand. By removing less desirable trees, the management tree (burr oak in our case) does not have to compete as much for sunlight, moisture, and nutrients and should improve in overall health and in its ability to produce wildlife food and cover.



TSI work completed. Locust tree to left has been marked and girdled to promote burr oak tree to right.

After the stand is marked, crews initiate removal work by simply using chainsaws to girdle the marked trees. Girdling involves cutting through the outer layer of the tree to interrupt its ability to transport nutrients and moisture from the roots to the canopy. Workers encircle each tree with a cut of 2-3 inches and then inject herbicide into the cut to kill the tree. In most cases the tree remains standing after treatment. The tree does not have to be cut to the ground to remove it from the stand and to meet the goal of reducing competition for the benefit of our management tree. In some cases herbicide may not be used to allow species such as elm and mulberry to resprout from the base. Young succulent growth from the base of these trees can be attractive food for wildlife such as deer.

By leaving the tree standing we accomplish several objectives. First and foremost we are better able to insure the safety of the work crew. By not falling trees we can work in a safer environment and can save time so more acres can be treated each year. In addition, standing dead trees can provide habitat for cavity nesting species such as woodpeckers, squirrels, and wood ducks. Later, as those trees decay they shed branches and begin to dry, reducing weight, so when they do fall, they are less likely to damage adjacent desirable trees. Fallen decaying trees then often enhance habitats on the woodland floor by providing soil nutrients, by providing attractive habitats for an array of insects which can be important food sources for other wildlife, and by providing concealment for wildlife. Woodlands with a “messy” understory appearance are often preferred habitats for species such as turkey, deer, and raccoon, while “messy” woodland edges can be attractive habitat for quail. Decaying vegetation on the woodland floor can also be a popular location to search for edible mushrooms including morels.

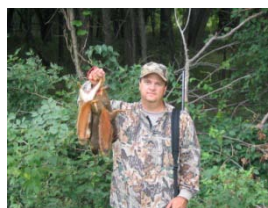
By “opening up” the woodland stand to encourage more sunlight, additional habitat benefits may also be realized by encouraging another generation of desirable trees to sprout from remaining seed, and by promoting sun-loving vegetation that is different than surrounding vegetation found on the shady woodland floor. Woodlands that not only have diverse tree species, but diverse understory vegetation often provide better wildlife habitat, particularly for many game species.



Trees at the edge of this photo have been removed from the stand by conducting TSI work. This encourages more sunlight to reach desirable trees (such as this burr oak) and the woodland floor enhancing wildlife habitat.

TSI work completed in 2011 included 3 woodland tracts totaling 42 acres near the wildlife area office and north of the Neosho River. In early 2012, similar work was completed within 2 tracts totaling nearly 70 acres north of the Neosho River and near the north end of Short Creek, and along 2.7 miles of woodlands adjacent to most area creeks and rivers. In late 2012 nearly 150 acres were completed along Munkers Creek. More TSI work is planned in 2013 and will likely include additional woodlands along Short and Slough Creeks to include evaluating nearly 205 acres. Woodlands along western tributaries of Council Grove Lake will then be targeted in 2014 and beyond.

So, you may now see that peculiar blue paint within area woodlands indicates management work completed, and this work is designed to enhance woodland characteristics, ultimately enhancing habitat for wildlife, and the recreation experience for our visitors.



Successful squirrel hunter at CGWA.

## **Fall Outdoor Youth Event a Success!**

The Council Grove 10th Annual Outdoor Youth Event was conducted on Saturday, October 5th at Council Grove Lake. Fifty youngsters attended this year, and appeared to enjoy a seasonably cool fall afternoon afield. This special event provided participants with a free opportunity to enhance shotgun, air rifle and archery shooting and safety skills, ultimately encouraging them to spend additional time in Kansas great outdoors! The event is part of KDWPT's "Pass It On" Program, designed to recruit and retain Kansas hunters, particularly youngsters.

The afternoon began with a hearty lunch provided by the Flint Hills Chapter of Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation (QUWF) and Maxwell Wildlife Refuge, followed by a brief orientation of the event. Participants were then divided into four groups and allowed to visit each of the four different stations for nearly one hour. Designed to provide as much hands-on instruction as possible, visitors to each station received a brief orientation by a certified instructor, then jumped right in to actual shotgun, air rifle, and archery skills development training. Two of the stations provided students with opportunities to learn fun wing-shooting techniques with youth model 20 gauge shotguns and flying clay targets. A third station provided opportunities to develop or enhance their skills at shooting youth compound archery equipment at life-sized Kansas game animal targets. The final station provided students with opportunities to shoot air rifles at stationary paper targets. At the conclusion of the live fire portion of the event, an area Master Falconer provided participants with a brief program on the sport of falconry and introduced them to his hunting dog and falcon partners.



Air Rifle Station



Archery Station



Shotgun Station

Event organizers were pleased with how all of the kids conducted themselves during the event. All participants were responsible, improved their shooting and safety skills, and most importantly had fun! All participants were awarded door prizes, provided by the Bill Young Foundation, Underwood Farms, and QUWF, to encourage them to take what they had learned one step further and do some hunting this fall.

Gear and supplies, including shotguns, shells, bows, arrows, targets, and eye and ear protection were provided by KDWPT's Pass It On, Hunter Education, and Archery in the Schools Programs, as well as the National Wild Turkey Federations JAKES Take Aim Program. These programs are designed to reverse the declining trend of hunting participation in Kansas. These programs encourage youth to spend time afield by introducing them to shooting sports and hunting. Their goal is to ensure that every youngster, or person that has an interest in hunting, is provided with an opportunity to experience this treasured pastime.

Area Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) staff would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their assistance with this successful event:

**Organizations:** Flint Hills Chapter of Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation, Munkers Creek Limbangers Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Underwood Farms, Bill Young Foundation, Adams Lumber, Maxwell Wildlife Refuge, and KDWPT's "Pass It On", Hunter Education, and Archery in the Schools Programs.

**Individuals:** Dennis Vincent, Jim Kellenberger, Dave Adams, Randy Benteman, Cliff Peterson, Mike Lowry, Neal Whitaker, Steve Prockish, Chris Myers, John Watts, Don True, Faron Adams, Curtis Meierhoff, Troy Shade, Vance Ralstin, Tyson & Rylee Powell, Travis Richardson, Doug Burt, Dennis DeLay, Allan Cashman, Leland Viar, and numerous parents.

### **Hunters Reminded of New Public Lands, Big Game, & Turkey Regulations:**

The Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission has recently approved new regulations relating to hunting on public lands, and hunting of big game and turkey. Designed to provide hunters with equal opportunities on limited public lands, and to simplify equipment regulations for the hunting of big game and turkey statewide, the following regulations have been enacted:

- Baiting is illegal on public lands. Bait is considered any grain, fruit, vegetable, nut, hay, salt, sorghum, feed, or other food or mineral capable of attracting wildlife. Liquid scents and sprays are not considered bait.
- Only two portable blinds or tree stands are allowed per hunter on public lands.
- Portable blinds and tree stands must be marked with the owner's name and address or KDWPT number. Portable blinds may not be left unattended overnight on public lands.
- Decoys may not be left unattended overnight on public lands.
- Commercial guides must have a permit to guide on public lands. The permit is free and must be specific to the land where guiding takes place.
- Big game hunters can now select any caliber centerfire rifle or handgun, any gauge shotgun with slugs, and any muzzleloader rifle and pistol .40 caliber or larger.
- Crossbows are now legal equipment during archery seasons for anyone with a valid archery permit.
- Turkey hunters are no longer restricted to 20 gauge shotguns or larger. All gauges are allowed, using shot size No. 2 through No. 9.

Would you like more information about the Council Grove Wildlife Area?

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