

Council Grove Wildlife Area News



Area News – Spring 2016

Woodland Habitat Enhancement Work Continues

Another round of woodland habitat enhancement work was completed this winter, this time within the west Neosho River drainage at the Council Grove Wildlife Area. With the aid of Kansas Forest Service District Foresters, area staff continued annual efforts to encourage desirable tree species such as burr oak (primarily), hickory, and walnut. To enhance tree stature and nut production of these species, more common and less desirable tree species such as locust, hackberry, elm, maple, ash, and boxelder were removed from the stand when they were found to be competing for sunlight. By reducing competition, those trees that remain are more likely to flourish and enhance food and cover characteristics for many woodland wildlife species including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, squirrel, and raccoon. Since 2010, nearly 600 acres of area woodland habitats have been evaluated and appropriately treated to enhance habitat characteristics and the recreation experience of our visitors! Work is on-going, with additional projects being planned within wooded habitats along the east Neosho River drainage and near the southwest corner of the lake during the winters of 2016 and 2017.



Woodland habitat enhancement is a simple process. Competing trees are identified and marked for removal. Trees are removed by encircling them with a cut from a chainsaw. Herbicide is then sprayed into the cut, ultimately killing the tree and reducing competition for sunlight, water, and nutrients for those trees that remain.



Trees in the foreground of this photo have been removed during a previous woodland enhancement project. The burr oak that remains in the background is now thriving as competition has been reduced. Tree stature and nut production are enhanced, enhancing food and cover characteristics for area wildlife species.

Council Grove Lake – 2016 Fishing Outlook

District Fisheries Biologist, John Reinke, has provided the following information to assist anglers when planning upcoming fishing trips. Information is provided based upon his annual population sampling.

White crappie- Fair/Good Fish sampling efforts during October 2015 produced more crappie than 2014. Density is still lower than historic averages, however. Crappie production did increase dramatically with the high water of 2015, which bodes well for the future. Young of the year hatched late, however, so the success of this year class is yet to be determined. While the numbers of crappie increased in 2015, the fish that are available are primarily 8"-10", with a few over 12".



Saugeye- Fair Anglers should expect only fair saugeye fishing during 2016. The 2015 fall sample showed a decrease in overall density and in numbers of larger fish. 60% of the sampled saugeye exceeded the 15-inch minimum length limit so anglers will have to sort through a few fish to find keepers.



White bass- Good The 2015 fall test netting sample resulted in an increased catch rate for white bass. Size of fish also increased. Nearly 40% of the white bass sampled were between 12 and 15-inches, and 10% were over 15". Anglers should expect more and bigger white bass than last year.



Wiper- Good Wiper were first stocked in to Council Grove Reservoir in 2008. Fish exceeded the 18 inch minimum length limit by the fall of 2010. The last stocking of wiper occurred in 2012 and no wiper were requested for stocking in 2013, 2014 or 2015. Wiper catch rates obtained during fall test netting samples therefore decreased slightly in 2015. Sampled wipers ranged in length from 16 inches to 24 inches. 100% of the gill net sampled wipers exceeded the 18-inch minimum length limit. Anglers should expect good wiper fishing during 2016 with the chance at fish over 24 inches.



Channel catfish- Fair/Good Channel catfish density decreased slightly during the 2015 sampling, and remains below the historic average for the lake. Roughly 80% of the channel catfish sampled during October 2015 were in the 16.4 to 24 inch size range. Anglers should expect fair fishing for channel catfish during 2016. Very Good to Excellent catfish action can develop during times of inflow as the fish concentrate to feed in the creeks and other areas with current.



What's Being Done to Improve Fishing in Kansas?

Ever wonder how the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism works to develop or improve fishing in the sunflower state? Craig Johnson, District Fisheries Biologist for the El Dorado District continues to develop a number of short videos highlighting the work done by fisheries biologists to improve fishing throughout Kansas. His most recent video entitled "Kansas Walleye Production Program" provides a unique summary of the work fisheries biologists do each year to enhance walleye production and improve fishing opportunities in Kansas. In addition, catfish anglers will be interested in another recent video developed by Johnson which provides a unique underwater perspective of feeding catfish below fish feeders in Kansas State Fishing Lakes. Can't get away to try your luck? Take a look at the library of videos on Kansas fishing that Johnson has produced. They are sure to entice any angler to begin planning their next fishing trip. They are a must see for anyone with an interest in fishing in Kansas. Check out all of the videos at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCA7nV8A8XuVEGVRAHiULtA>



Successful Kansas walleye angler.

Photo by Craig Johnson, KDWP.T.

What's Wrong With That Fish?

On occasion I receive a phone call or an email from a concerned angler. They've caught a fish that doesn't look quite right. Generally, they try to describe the ailment and ask for a diagnosis and then ask if the fish is safe to eat or release. Admittedly, I usually don't have an immediate answer, preferring to consult with those agency staff that work with fishes day in and day out...our District Fisheries Biologists. The last call that I received was pretty typical. The angler described some peculiar white spots on a channel catfish that he had caught. Equipped with a smart-phone the caller was able to email some pictures of the fish to me. I then of course forwarded those to the area fisheries biologist requesting more information. Through the process he provided a good reference that would be of value to help anyone answer the question of what's wrong with that fish and ultimately is that fish safe to eat?

Entitled "An Anglers Guide to Fish Diseases and Parasites", it provides the reader with a brief overview of the different types of organisms that parasitize fish and cause diseases in fish. It describes signs that an angler might see on the outside of the fish or internally while cleaning. Lastly it indicates to the reader whether a fish is edible and what precautions should be taken to insure food safety. Of value to any angler, the reference can be found at: http://www.tnfish.org/FishDiseasesParasites_TWRA/files/AnglersGuideToFishParasites.pdf



Fish prepared for the skillet can enhance the angling experience for many. Anglers encountering fish with parasites and disease can question the value of an inflicted fish as table fare. References indicate that most inflicted fish are safe to eat if infected portions are removed and remaining portions are thoroughly cooked.

The Role Hunters and Anglers Play in Conservation

To my generation, the absence of abundant game and fish species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey, Canada geese, large-mouth bass, walleye, and others is incomprehensible. In my opinion, we are blessed with opportunities to enjoy a rich outdoor heritage and hunting and angling pursuits. I've often been fascinated to listen to previous generations, and read accounts, describing how this abundance was not always so.



Many wildlife species, including the white-tailed deer, benefit from the economic returns that hunters provide.

Today's wildlife wealth can be attributed to many, but leading the way, were, and still are, hunters and anglers. To those that may have never looked down the barrel of a sporting firearm, or casted a lure to a waiting fish, the conservation impacts of such activities may be a mystery, and I have found throughout my career, that it is a mystery, even to many of those within our hunting and angling ranks. How can those thought to only take from the wild, also give back? The roots of this conservation success story can be traced back to the midst of the Great Depression, and should be known to all who enjoy our wildlife resources. Let us take a look back, and in so doing, learn the role that hunters and anglers play in conservation.

History teaches us of the wide-spread economic loss of the Great Depression, and the devastating impacts that drought had upon the American people and its landscapes. Amidst such economic and natural turmoil it is easy to understand how wildlife populations plummeted. Habitat loss was widespread, and natural resource management and law enforcement was in its infancy with few laws in place and even fewer personnel available to enforce them. History has also taught us however that from those troubling times came many successful government and community programs designed to enhance land stewardship and promote sustainability. To those interested in wild lands, fowl, and game, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, better known as the Pittman-Robertson Act (named after its prominent congressional supporters), insured a prosperous future for many wildlife species. Upon its signing into law in 1937, the Pittman-Robertson Act became, arguably, the most successful wildlife conservation program in the world, and has been used as a model for additional efforts to expand funding for fish and wildlife enhancement programs and projects throughout the country, including right here in Kansas.



Wildlife management projects benefitting from the Pittman-Robertson Act proudly bear this logo.

The Pittman-Robertson (P-R) Act was implemented at the urging of far-sighted hunting conservationists and the firearms and ammunition industry, in response to dwindling wildlife populations. The P-R Act assesses a federal tax on sporting firearms and ammunition. That tax is distributed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to all state fish and wildlife management agencies based upon the number of hunting license buyers and land area of each state. State agencies, such as the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism are then reimbursed as much as 75% for costs associated with eligible wildlife management activities including land acquisition and management, population surveys, wildlife research, and hunter education. State agencies typically fund wildlife (and fisheries) management activities up-front by assessing license fees to constituents and meet the necessary 25% federal aid cost requirement utilizing such fees as well.



Public land habitat management, and associated hunting recreation, is enhanced through the collective support of Pittman-Robertson funding.

The Pittman-Robertson Act has evolved throughout its 75+ year history to include taxes placed upon archery equipment and handguns, and has fostered a companion program for angling, termed the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program, popularly known as the Dingell-Johnson Act (again named after its prominent congressional supporters), which took effect in 1950. Like its P-R cousin, the Dingell-Johnson Act (D-J) places a tax on related products, but in the case of D-J the tax is generated from the sale of fishing related merchandise and fishing boats, motors, and trailers. These taxes are again distributed to state agencies responsible for fisheries management and again assist with aquatic habitat acquisition and management, surveys, and fisheries research.



Fisheries management projects benefitting from the Dingell-Johnson Act proudly bear this logo.

In essence then, hunters and anglers are the key to what has been termed "the cycle of success" as they pay taxes to equip themselves to enjoy their favorite pursuits. These taxes, in addition to revenues from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, are then utilized by state fish and wildlife agencies to enhance wildlife and fisheries populations and provide the public with opportunities to enjoy these resources. By doing so, each state agency then encourages hunting and angling participation, and the cycle is renewed. In the process however, others benefit, including other non-game wildlife species utilizing that habitat which has been protected or enhanced utilizing sportsman dollars, or from other members of the public, that although they may never hunt or fish, utilize sportsman provided or managed lands and waters for favorite pastimes such as hiking, bird-watching, or canoeing. It is easy to see that hunters and anglers pay their share, and in so doing provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities for many others.



Angler and hunter dollars not only provide benefits to game species, but also enhance habitats for an array of other species, and enhance recreational opportunities for a multitude of outdoor enthusiasts.

By this time you may be asking just how many hunters and anglers are out there and how much financial windfall do they actually provide? Review of readily available information provides some answers. A national survey (completed every 5 years) designed to monitor hunting and angling participation and associated expenditures was last completed in 2011. For that year, that survey indicates that nationally, there were an estimated 13.7 million hunters and 33.1 million anglers, 16 years of age or older. In Kansas, the same survey, estimates there to have been 283,000 resident and non-resident hunters and 400,000 resident and non-resident anglers. Nationally, anglers are estimated to have spent approximately \$41.8 billion in pursuit of their pastime, while hunters spent an estimated \$34.0 billion. In Kansas an estimated \$210.3 million was spent by anglers, while hunters spent an estimated \$401.5 million. The majority of these expenditures are not collected by state fish and wildlife agencies, but rather by community economies providing food, lodging, fuel, and gear to members of the hunting and angling fraternity.

State agencies of course do receive their share of significant financial inputs from hunters and anglers. To illustrate this fact, approximately \$749 million were apportioned to states from P-R and D-J funds in 2011. Kansas received approximately \$11.6 million of these funds. Coupled with state hunting and fishing license sales of approximately \$20 million annually, it's easy to see the economic impact of hunting and angling and the funding that these activities provide to benefit all of those who enjoy outdoor Kansas.



Agency fisheries biologists enhance public fishing opportunities by utilizing funding provided in part from Dingell-Johnson appropriations.

The term conservation implies wise use, and although hunters and anglers do harvest individuals from the fields, forests, and waters of Kansas, they insure sustainability and a lasting legacy by providing dedicated financial support. Those that enjoy time spent afield on public lands and waters, or enjoy the sights and sounds of wild creatures in outdoor Kansas should thank many, but perhaps the first to be thanked is the hunter and angler, for they may often take from the wild, but as a community, assuredly, always give back.



Through your purchase of hunting and fishing licenses, and related equipment, wildlife agencies are working hard to insure that future generations enjoy a rich outdoor heritage!

What the Heck is That? It's a Bryozoan!

Several years ago now I had an individual stop by my office with a bucket full of water that contained a large gelatinous mass. The organism had been found attached to a buoy anchor line and was about the size of a football and had a brain-like appearance. "What the heck is it", he asked? Uncertain, I asked our fisheries biologist to enlighten us. His answer, "it's a bryozoan."

Bryozoans are aquatic invertebrates that form colonies. Although most species occur in ocean environments some freshwater species can be found in appropriate habitats. Colonies in our area have been reportedly found attached to docks, buoys, and submerged sticks and logs in area lakes. Colonies are filter feeders meaning that they strain microscopic organisms from the water for food. They can reproduce in a number of ways including from seed like structures and budding. They are reportedly preyed upon by snails, insects, and fish. Reports of observations from anglers and other lake users seem to be on the rise in recent years. So, now you know...no, it's not an alien life form or even an egg sack from a frog or fish...it's yet another part of our diverse aquatic ecosystems...it's a bryozoan!



Bryozoans are colonial animals that can be found in area lakes. They are often found attached to docks, and submerged sticks and logs during summer months.

Anglers and Boaters Reminded to Take Precautions to Control Aquatic Nuisance Species!

Last summer, more Kansas waters were added to the growing list of those threatened by aquatic nuisance species (ANS). ANS waters are defined as those containing Asian carp, white perch, or zebra mussels.



Asian Carp



White Perch



Zebra Mussel

Regulations have been enacted to prevent the spread of ANS. Boaters and anglers are reminded to follow these regulations while visiting Kansas waters.

1. Livewells and bilges must be drained and drain plugs removed from all vessels being removed from waters of the state before transport on a public highway.
2. No person may possess ANY live fish upon departure from any designated ANS body of water.
3. Live baitfish may be caught and used as live bait only within the common drainage where caught. However, bluegill and green sunfish collected from non-designated ANS waters may be possessed or used as live bait anywhere in the state. Live baitfish shall not be transported and used above any upstream dam or barrier that prohibits the normal passage of fish.

Always remember to **CLEAN, DRAIN, & DRY** boats and equipment. Visit www.ksoutdoors.com for more information.

Annual Youth Spring Turkey Hunt a Success (AGAIN)!

The Council Grove 16th Annual Spring Turkey Hunt was conducted on Saturday, April 2. This year's hunt sought to accommodate area youth ages 11-16. A cool spring morning did not hamper 12 eager area youngsters the morning of the hunt. By day's end, all of the participants were fortunate to see or hear wild turkeys. Two of the participants harvested a turkey while others enjoyed encounters with their quarry but were unable to harvest. For those fortunate to harvest, the event was memorable, because both of them harvested their first wild turkey. Although not as many participants harvested turkeys this year during the hunt, successful reports continue to come in this spring from the parents of proud young hunters that took what they learned from the experience and kept trying, ultimately ending in success.

The primary goal of this hunt was to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for area youngsters, and to bring together individuals with an interest in spring turkey hunting. This event was designed to pair young hunters with knowledgeable and experienced adult volunteers, in an effort to initiate or further entrench participants into the enjoyable spring pastime of wild turkey hunting.



All participants enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to receive hands-on hunting instruction, turkey hunting gear, and meals. The hunters truly appreciated the efforts of all involved and volunteers were rewarded with many thanks.

Since 2007, this event has hosted nearly 130 Kansas kids and their families. Nearly 50% of hunt participants have harvested a turkey, while all have enjoyed a memorable outdoor Kansas experience!

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

Organizations: The National Wild Turkey Federation, The Flint Hills Chapter of Quail & Upland Wildlife Federation, The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism, The U.S. Army Corps Of Engineers, and J&J Backhoe.

Individuals: Spencer Tomb, Allan Cashman, Mike Wells, Jim Evans, Tyson Powell, Brad Richardson, Josh Patry, Dean McDaniel, Kris Hall, Steve Skerce, Shane Hesting, Manny Medina, Matt Spencer, Dan Biehler, and Don True.

Special thanks must also be extended to numerous landowners for their generosity in allowing youth to hunt turkeys on their property.

Volunteers interested in helping with next year's hunts can contact: Brent Konen – Council Grove Wildlife Area Manager, #620/767-5900.



2016 Youth Turkey Hunt Participants



Prescribed fire was utilized again this spring to enhance public land habitats and improve future recreational opportunities.

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

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