

Council Grove Wildlife Area News



Area News – Fall 2018

2018/2019 Hunting Outlook:

Habitat conditions overall were impacted by extreme weather variability this year. Drought plagued the wildlife area through most of the summer, persisting until mid-August. Some early maturing crops and native vegetation species were negatively impacted. Crop yields were reduced for most corn and milo tracts while native plant growth and seed production was also reduced. Upland habitat characteristics will be noticeably different as compared to those conditions found in 2016 and 2017 when timely precipitation produced abundant yields and robust vegetative conditions. Beginning in mid-August, rains returned however, improving growing conditions for late season crops and some native vegetation. Many area soybean tracts benefited from these rains and a late surge of growth and seed production resulted for some native plants such as ragweed and sunflower. These rains also filled the lake in early September, after drought had reduced lake levels to 4.6 feet below conservation elevation. Then, abundant precipitation during the first half of October produced rare fall flood conditions, raising the lake briefly to 8.6 feet above conservation elevation. This flood marked the fourth year in a row in which flooding has impacted area habitats. Some area crop fields and woodlands adjacent to the lake were negatively impacted. Fortunately, this flood was not long in duration and most water was evacuated within 2 weeks, limiting habitat degradation.

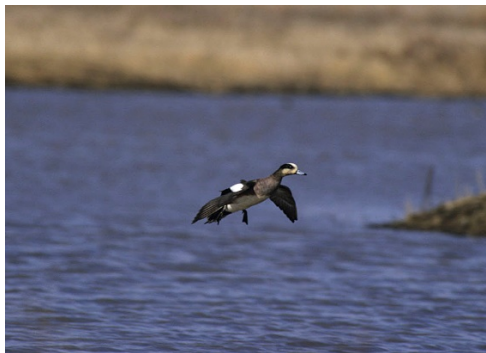


Upland Birds: The fall hunting outlook for quail on the wildlife area is fair. Hunters will likely see quail numbers that are decreased as compared to last fall. Although many wildlife area habitats were significantly impacted by floods in 2015, fair quail numbers remain, and hunters have reported finding some birds the past three seasons. Although last winter was colder perhaps than the previous three winters, we still did not experience prolonged periods of snow or ice coverage, enhancing winter survival. Reduced quail production in 2017 however, likely contributed to a reduced breeding population surveyed this spring. Although few quail broods were witnessed this summer, several coveys were found while conducting habitat management activities in September, providing some optimism for quail hunters this fall. Hunters should note that flooding in October has negatively impacted some area habitats adjacent to the lake, and they are encouraged to focus efforts within upland habitats away from such flood zones. The wildlife area lies outside the primary range of ring-necked pheasant. Hunters occasionally encounter pheasants on the area, but numbers are low.



Northern Bobwhite.

Waterfowl: The fall hunting outlook for waterfowl on the area is fair/good. Waterfowl populations are reported to remain strong following another good production year within breeding habitats to the north. Area habitat conditions are improved as compared to most years and are the best seen since 2013. 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. Rains returned in late summer, filling the lake in September. Now that lake levels have risen within these zones, many of those plants will provide food and cover for wetland wildlife species including waterfowl. Although a rare fall flood event in October has diminished the quantity and quality of much of this vegetation, food and cover resources remain, and are more plentiful as compared to most years. Of interest to area hunters also is that similar habitat conditions have been reported throughout much of central and 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. Hunters are encouraged to visit the area website to view weekly waterfowl population and habitat condition updates.



Drake wigeon.

Deer: The fall hunting outlook for deer on the area is fair. Although area deer numbers were believed to be negatively influenced by the 2012 EHD outbreak and habitat degradation following the 2015 flood, habitat conditions were largely considered favorable in 2016 and 2017 and contributed to improved deer numbers. Summer drought and fall flooding has diminished food and cover values for deer in 2018, but fair habitat remains and deer sightings (particularly does and fawns) were again common this year and reports of a few nice bucks have also been received. Recently completed woodland habitat management projects will continue to enhance food and cover conditions for deer and other woodland wildlife species.



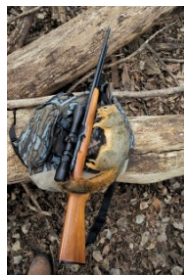
White-tailed Deer.

Turkey: The fall hunting outlook for turkey on the area is fair. Although still locally common, turkey numbers have declined recently on the wildlife area as a result of diminished production following significant flooding in 2015 and “modest at best” production in 2016 and 2017. Area turkey production appears to have been improved in 2018, but populations remain below those experienced prior to 2015. Hunters are reminded that a flood in October has negatively impacted some woodland habitats adjacent to the lake and are encouraged to consider those impacts when planning a hunt. Prior to declines in turkey production beginning in 2015, turkey populations benefited from good production dating back to at least 2012. As such, turkey hunters are likely to find that area flocks contain a greater proportion of experienced adult birds which may make hunting more difficult.



Successful youth spring turkey hunter.

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 during some years. Squirrel populations appear to remain improved following a decline that resulted from significant long-term flooding in 2015. Cottontail populations are often not strong but can provide some opportunity in upland areas away from flood zones.



Successful squirrel hunt.

Furbearers & Coyotes: 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. Good numbers of young coyotes were observed on the wildlife area again this summer suggesting that predator hunting opportunities may be enhanced this year.



Kansas Coyote.

Fall Outdoor Youth Event a Success!

The Council Grove 15th Annual Outdoor Youth Event was conducted on Saturday, October 27th at Council Grove Lake. Forty-two youngsters (and 10 adults) from 9 Kansas communities attended this year and appeared to enjoy a beautiful fall afternoon afield. This special event provided participants with a free opportunity to enhance shotgun and archery shooting and hunting safety skills, ultimately encouraging them to spend additional time in Kansas great outdoors! Since inception, this event has served over 700 participants! 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), 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 an experienced instructor, then jumped right in to actual shotgun, archery, and hunting safety 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 enhance their hunting safety skills by completing several field exercises.



Archery Station



Shotgun Station



Hunting Safety Skills Station

Event organizers were pleased with how 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, Dennis DeLay, and Farmers and Drivers Bank, to encourage them to take what they had learned one step further and do some hunting this fall. Two lucky attendees also won new firearms including a youth model 20-gauge shotgun and a .22 rifle, donated by the Chisholm Trail Chapter of Safari Club International!

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. 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, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bill Young Foundation, Chisholm Trail Chapter of Safari Club International, Farmers and Drivers Bank, and KDWPT's "Pass It On", Hunter Education, and Archery in the Schools Programs.

Individuals: Mike Miller, Wayne Doyle, Tyler Burt, Gary Kepley, Matt Cook, Graham Bisnette, Dennis DeLay, Allan Cashman, Steve White, Steve Crichton, Mary Kay Myers, James Masters, Rhett DeLay, Anna Romme, Brian Romme, Tracy Ryff, Sean Honer, Sheyanne Masters, Darcy Mathes, Kevin Steckley, Ron & Lori Kutter, and numerous parents.

The organizations and individuals that partner with KDWPT to conduct this event each year are committed to responsibly sharing the outdoors, and each share in the mission to conserve wildlife and their habitats and encourage and protect our hunting heritage.



2018 Outdoor Youth Event Participants.
This marked our 15th year for the event designed to encourage participation in the shooting sports and hunting.
Since inception the event has served over 700 participants!

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

Please contact:

Brent Konen – Area Manager
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism
1130 Lake Road
Council Grove, KS 66846
#620/767-5900
brent.konen@ks.gov
www.ksoutdoors.com

