

KANSAS WILDLIFE AND PARKS SUMMER MEETING REPORT

Turkey Permit Combo Package Introduced in 2010

The Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks unveiled a new value-added turkey permit/game tag combination this spring. The idea of the “combo option,” which was only available before the season opened, was to encourage second game tag purchase and to encourage early purchase. Research has shown that up to 50 percent of Kansas turkey hunters purchase a turkey permit just one out of three years. With 24-hour over-the-counter and on-line sales options, hunters can wait until the night before they plan to hunt to purchase their permit. If weather is poor or if the hunter gets busy, the turkey permit may not get purchased. Before they know it, the season is over, and an avid hunter has not bought a permit. The combo package, which saved hunters \$7.50 over purchasing the two permits separately, was available through March 30. The spring turkey archery, youth and persons with disabilities seasons opened April 1. The regular spring turkey season opened April 14.

Analysis of license sales after the first seven days of the regular season showed an increase in second turkey tag sales. In previous years, an average of 37 percent of resident turkey hunters had purchased second turkey tags. This year, 49 percent of resident hunters held second turkey tags, a 30 percent increase; revenue from resident sales actually decreased by 3 percent because of the reduced price. The percentage of nonresidents holding second turkey tags increased 10 percent, and revenue increased more than 19 percent, more than making up for the loss in resident sales revenue.

More in-depth analysis will be required after the season to determine if this effort reduced the number of lapsed turkey hunters. More value-added permit packages are being discussed.

Community Fisheries Assistance Program Recognized by American Fisheries Society

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks was one of five state fish and wildlife agencies recently honored by the American Fisheries Society (AFS). KDWP received the AFS 2009 Outstanding Sport Fish Restoration Program Projects of the Year award, along with agencies in Alaska, Florida, Michigan, and North Carolina. KDWP was recognized for its Community Fisheries Assistance Program, which works with communities to improve fishing access and opportunities at community-owned lakes. Bob Curry, president of the AFS Fisheries Administration Section, presented the award at the March 11 meeting of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission in Topeka.

Using matching funds from federal excise taxes on fishing equipment and motor boat fuel, KDWP leases fishing rights to 238 community lakes, removing local fishing and boating fees for anglers on approximately 13,000 acres of water. The program is 100-percent reimbursable. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides reimbursement for 75 percent of the program cost, and local communities' normal lake operating expenses are used for a 25 percent match.

Community lakes enrolled in the program benefit from enhanced fisheries management and stocking. KDWP targeted community lakes because of their popularity with anglers, convenience to anglers who wish to fish closer to home, and diverse locations.

Electronic Registration For Deer Being Developed

In response to problems hunters can encounter transporting deer carcasses because of chronic wasting disease precautions, KDWP will develop a voluntary electronic registration

system. Current big game regulations require hunters possessing certain permits to transport deer carcasses with the head attached. Most permits issued are whitetail either-sex or whitetail antlerless-only, and there are limited mule deer permits available in western Kansas.

Transporting the carcass with the head attached allows conservation officers to determine that a hunter is in compliance with permit restrictions.

It is recommended that carcasses from deer taken in areas where CWD has been detected not be transported to non-CWD areas. States that have adopted carcass transportation regulations do not allow the importation of any brain or spinal column tissue. The registration system, which is still in the development stages, may allow hunters to photograph the deer, send in a digital image, and receive a registration number. Then the hunter will be able to transport the meat and antlers legally.

Early Spawn Bass A Success

Kansas fisheries staff have long struggled to maintain largemouth bass populations in the state's larger reservoirs. Nearly all reservoirs provided fantastic largemouth bass fishing soon after filling, but as Kansas reservoirs age, populations drop dramatically. Efforts to stock more bass, establish aquatic vegetation, and implement restrictive length and creel limits have fallen short of goals and angler expectations.

One problem identified in lakes that seem to provide necessary habitat is that adequate forage is not available for young-of-the-year bass. Gizzard shad are the prominent forage in Kansas reservoirs, and shad spawn before largemouth bass. The young shad often outgrow the bass, making them unavailable as forage. Small, undernourished bass usually don't survive their first winter.

Using cutting-edge fish culture techniques, hatchery staff at KDWP's Meade Fish Hatchery fooled Mother Nature. Working with information from only a handful of other state hatcheries to attempt this, hatchery staff Jason Vajnar and Josh Jagels assembled an indoor system with tanks, temperature control, spawning mats, and artificial lighting to trick largemouths into spawning nearly two months early. The first year was a learning experience, but they kept researching and tweaking the set-up.

Their efforts paid off. In 2010, more than 700,000 largemouth bass fry were spawned – all well before the normal bass spawn. Most fry were stocked into two reservoirs where suitable habitat exists. Sampling in mid-June will determine survival and growth rates.

Ideally, the early-spawn largemouths will take advantage of the natural forage and be large enough to survive their first winter. Time will tell, but fisheries staff are optimistic about the program.

License Sales Up In 2009

The KDWP administration was concerned about the potential impact high gas prices and a struggling economy would have on license and permit sales, but those concerns were unfounded. Sales for nearly every license and permit category, as well as park visitation, showed an increase for 2009.

Local news media attributed increased park visitation to families vacationing closer to home. But there are probably a variety of reasons for the increase, including budget vacations, increased water levels in western Kansas reservoirs, and excellent pheasant populations.

Banner Spring For Walleye Program

Each March, KDWP fisheries biologists gear up for the walleye egg-taking effort. The walleye is a popular sport fish with Kansas anglers, but natural production usually isn't sufficient to maintain fisheries. In a collaborative effort, biologists from across the state converge on designated reservoirs to net fish, strip eggs and milt, and transport fertilized eggs to hatcheries.

While March weather often throws a wrench in the organized chaos, 2010 went off pretty much as planned. Within a month, more than 50 million walleye fry had been produced and stocked or kept for fingerling production. By mid-May, more than 800,000 fingerlings had been stocked.

Reservoir Seep Stream Habitat Enhanced

A stream below Kanopolis Reservoir received intensive habitat enhancement this spring through an unusual project involving the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. That's good news for Kansas anglers because the stream provides an excellent winter trout fishery.

The seep stream, called Sand Creek, is a popular winter fishery, and the cool water coming from the dam of the reservoir creates ideal trout water. To increase fishing-holding pools, an earlier project placed small dams along the stretch. In an interesting turn of events, the NRCS developed a watershed project with stimulus funds, and it required stream mitigation. Sand Creek was selected for the mitigation. The dam at Kanopolis Reservoir is owned by the USACE, and the fishery is managed by KDWP, so the three agencies came together to enhance stream habitat.

The primary focus of the project was placing specially-made concrete structures, called Lunker Bunkers, that will stabilize the stream bank and provide overhead cover and shade. The

structures are actually modified cattle feed bunks that have proven ideal to enhance the shoreline structure.

The stream produced two state record brown trout last winter and is becoming more popular with anglers. To maintain cooler water temperatures, future plans include placing shade trees along the more open stretches of the creek.

Property Purchased

KDWP recently completed the purchase of a property in eastern Kansas, adding it to the list of 40 department-owned state fishing lakes. KDWP had been managing the 280-acre Louisburg-Middle Creek Lake for the last 20 years under a lease agreement, but the property was owned by the community of Louisburg. KDWP received a Motor Boat Access grant to assist with the purchase, which included more than 300 acres of adjoining land, in addition to the lake.

First NASP State Championship Hosted in 2010

The National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) has spread quickly in Kansas, with more than 130 schools now implementing the program. Participating schools certify instructors to teach International Style Target Archery and are equipped with a kit that includes compound bows, arrows and target butts. KDWP provides funding assistance to schools.

After four years in Kansas, NASP is still growing. In fact, the first state NASP State Championship was conducted in March. Hosted by Ft. Hays State University, the archery competition attracted 72 students from seven schools. Shooters competed individually and as teams. The top two teams and top three shooters qualified for the National NASP Championships in Kentucky.