



Council Grove Wildlife Area News

Area News – Fall 2019

2019/2020 Hunting Outlook:

Hunters should be aware that abundant precipitation throughout the month of May caused significant lake flooding (15.6' above conservation elevation) that persisted until early August. Most area habitats were impacted by this significant flood event that persisted for nearly 3 months. It has been estimated that approximately 80-85% of the wildlife area flooded. As a result, nearly 94% of area crop fields were either lost to flooding or remained too wet to plant. Resulting natural vegetation that became established in crop fields later in August as flood waters withdrew, was often not desirable or was deemed noxious. Species such as cocklebur and johnsongrass were common. Wet conditions and flood debris prevented work to control these species within many fields. Other fields were disked to prevent further spread, but as a result, these crop fields have little or no food or cover value for wildlife. Other area habitats including area woodlands have been impacted. Understory vegetation in most woodland environments was negatively impacted and will provide diminished habitat value. Portions of several area grassland tracts were also impacted by the flood, reducing cover values for quail and other wildlife. Although experience has shown that significant flood events such as those experienced in 2019 will have an impact on fall hunting opportunity, they have also shown that wildlife are resilient and will continue to utilize area habitats providing modest opportunities for the upcoming season.



Flooding impacted recreational opportunities during much of the summer of 2019. Impacts will be felt into the fall hunting season as well because flooding degraded the quality of area habitats.

Upland Birds: The fall hunting outlook for quail on the wildlife area is poor. Hunters should see quail numbers that are reduced as compared to last fall. Fall flooding in 2018, followed by winter weather that was likely impactful with frequent and extended periods of snow and ice cover, resulted in breeding populations this spring that were the second lowest recorded since a survey route was established in 2003. Breeding quail were faced with significant flooding this spring that impacted nesting habitats throughout the area. Cool and wet weather conditions during May and June then likely impacted survival of young quail that may have hatched on the area. Some optimism remains however as several quail broods were observed in upland areas away from flood zones, but these observations were late in the season and chicks were noted to be young, providing evidence that earlier nesting attempts had failed. Habitat available to quail this fall and winter unfortunately has been impacted by the flooding that persisted into August. Food and cover conditions are diminished within most habitats, providing concern for quail, particularly if we receive prolonged periods of cold and snowy conditions later this winter. On a brighter note, past floods have been known to encourage desirable quail habitat in subsequent years by stimulating annual plant communities that can provide good food and cover conditions. Although quail hunting opportunity will be reduced on the area this year, hunters have some cause for optimism for the future. Hunters that utilize dogs should be aware that cockleburs are abundant within many fields this year. 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 fair. Waterfowl populations overall are reported to remain strong following another good production year within breeding habitats to the north. Habitat conditions however here are not nearly as strong as those experienced in 2018. Abundant precipitation in May and flooding into early August kept lake levels full for the summer. Food producing vegetation could not become established on lake fringes because of the flood and late dewatering. In addition, nearly all area crop fields were not planted or were lost to flooding this year. As such, few food resources will be available for waterfowl on the wildlife area this season. Full lake levels however will certainly provide hunting opportunity and improved hunter access and concealment. Early season hunters have had some success. 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.

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, deer use was believed to be increasing following several years of improved habitat conditions. Unfortunately, significant drought and fall flooding in 2018 negatively impacted deer habitat and although habitat and deer remain, habitat conditions in 2019 are certainly diminished for a second year. Persistent and extensive flooding that occurred this summer has negatively impacted many woodland habitats. Understory vegetation was removed during the floods and very little growing season remained following the evacuation of flood water. As a result, understory vegetation and the food and cover values that it provides to wildlife will be reduced. Flooding also impacted area crop fields and the wildlife food values that they provide. Nearly 94% of fields were either lost to flooding or remained too wet to plant, further limiting food and cover options for deer and other wildlife species on the area. Although lake flooding has impacted woodland and cropland habitats on the wildlife area and will diminish the ability of the property to hold animals, deer remain and will provide hunting opportunity.

Turkey: The fall hunting outlook for turkey on the area is fair. Populations of adult birds remain and although they are not at levels enjoyed in recent years some hunting opportunity exists. Of concern for turkey hunting enthusiasts is a lack of production this year. Prolonged periods of cool wet weather in May and June and subsequent flooding until August negatively impacted nesting and brood rearing efforts. No young turkeys were seen on the wildlife area this summer. In addition, flooding impacted area woodland and cropland habitats which will diminish the areas ability to hold turkeys this fall and winter. As a result, hunters may still find turkeys, but numbers will be fewer with a greater proportion of older birds in the population. Spring turkey hunters will likely find fewer jakes next year which in turn means fewer 2-year-old birds in the spring of 2021.

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 were likely reduced over much of the wildlife area this year however as a result of long term flooding. Some mast production did occur within some area woods that were not subjected to long term flooding and although overall squirrel numbers were likely reduced, some attractive hunting likely remains in upland woodland areas not impacted by flooding where oak, walnut, and hickory trees are common. Cottontail populations are often not strong, but can provide some opportunity in upland areas away from flood zones.

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. Opportunity for these species will likely be diminished this year however as flooding impacted food and cover conditions and has likely reduced the abundance of prey animals sought by predators. As a result, predator hunters are encouraged to focus efforts within upland habitats away from flood zones.

Fall Outdoor Youth Event a Success!

The Council Grove 16th Annual Outdoor Youth Event was conducted on Saturday, October 26th at Council Grove Lake. Forty-two youngsters and 13 adults from 7 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! 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.



Shotgun Station



Hunting Safety Skills Station



Archery Station

Event organizers were pleased with how all 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 and Farmers and Drovers Bank, to encourage them to take what they had learned one step further and do some hunting this fall. Two lucky attendees also won firearms including a youth model 20-gauge shotgun and .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 Drovers Bank, and KDWPT's "Pass It On", Hunter Education, and Archery in the Schools Programs.

Individuals: Wayne Doyle, Dennis Vincent, Tyler Burt, Jake Spear, Tyler Nelson, Matt Cook, Dennis DeLay, Allan Cashman, Steve Crichton, Mary Kay Myers, James Masters, Anna & Brian Romme, Mat Romme, Tracy Ryff, Jason Harris, Travis Schweger, Sheyanne Masters, Darcy Mathes, 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.

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

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