

**Presentation on the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
To
The House Committee on Water
By Brad Loveless
Secretary
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February 9, 2020

MISSION

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's mission is to: Conserve and enhance Kansas' natural heritage, its wildlife and its habitats to ensure future generations the benefits of the state's diverse living resources; provide the public with opportunities for use and appreciation of the natural resources of Kansas, consistent with the conservation of those resources; inform the public of the status of the natural resources of Kansas to promote understanding and gain assistance with this mission; encourage the public to visit and travel in Kansas and stimulate tourism and travel-related spending in the state by promoting recreational, historic, cultural and natural attractions.

WHAT WE DO

Monitor, conserve, advocate for, and protect the state's natural resources, primarily wildlife and its habitats and promote the importance of these resources to our citizens. The majority of funding for this work is provided by hunters, anglers and campers through license and permit fees and excise taxes on fishing and hunting gear, so the department works closely with a variety of constituent groups to provide them with opportunities they desire to enjoy these wild resources and places.

DIVISIONS

The department has seven divisions and three sections and 464 full-time employees.

The Fisheries Division includes 52 employees, including district fisheries biologists, research biologists and fish hatchery biologists. District biologists monitor and manage fish populations and angling opportunities on 400 bodies of water, including state fishing lakes, community lakes and federal reservoirs, as well as 9,000 miles of streams. Nineteen hatchery biologists and maintenance staff operate four fish hatcheries (Meade, Pratt, Milford, Farlington) and produced 50 million sport fish in 2020 for stocking in state waters. Research staff conduct surveys and scientific research to learn more about important fish species and how they can be better conserved, while providing Kansas anglers opportunities they desire.

The Public Lands Division has 55 employees, 41 of whom are fully law enforcement certified. They manage 173 properties covering 315,000 terrestrial acres (120,000 acres owned by KDWPT and 195,000 acres of federal land leased to the department). Land is managed to provide optimum wildlife habitat and maximum outdoor recreation opportunities for the public. Agriculture, including cropping and grazing, is a part of most management plans, contracting with local farmers and providing revenue for enhancement efforts. Many areas

have electronic check-in procedures for hunters, allowing staff to monitor hunting pressure, harvest and hunter satisfaction.

The Wildlife Division consists of 47 wildlife biologists and research biologists. District wildlife biologists work with private landowners to enhance wildlife habitat on their land, utilizing state and federal cost-share programs. The division's Habitat First program treated 13,434 acres of private land in 2020, which affects 134,340 acres with benefits to wildlife. Wildlife biologists also assist in delivering wildlife-friendly programs in the federal Farm Bill and conduct status reviews for the Conservation Reserve Program. To provide additional public hunting access in a state where only 2 percent of the land is open, wildlife biologists leased 1,181,000 acres from private landowners in 2020. Landowners enrolled in the Walk-in Hunting Access Program (WIHA) receive annual payments to open their land to hunting activities during specific times of the year. Wildlife research biologists conduct surveys and scientific research to monitor wildlife population trends, identify limiting factors and habitat needs, and learn about hunter preferences and attitudes.

The Parks Division has 116 employees, 55 of whom are full law enforcement certified, who manage and operate 28 state parks, providing more than 8.6 million visitors (2020) with camping, boating, hiking, biking, equestrian, wildlife viewing and other outdoor opportunities annually. State parks are diverse, from the wild and undeveloped Little Jerusalem State Park in western Kansas to those with modern camping accommodations situated on the shores of state and federal reservoirs. State parks offer full RV hook-ups, primitive camping and many have full-service cabin rentals. Two state parks are renowned trails for hikers and bikers, the 117-mile Flint Hills Trail and the 51-mile Prairie Spirit Trail. State parks are funded almost entirely through entrance and camping fees.

The Law Enforcement Division's 90 staff members include 83 fully-certified Kansas law enforcement officers – 65 game wardens, 11 lieutenants, six captains, two investigators, two majors and a colonel. Staff members' primary responsibility is enforcing outdoor recreation- and wildlife-related laws, but they regularly assist with search and rescue efforts and assist local and state law enforcement agencies in criminal investigations. Each game warden covers a district that includes a county or more and they must work closely with landowners and private citizens to stop wildlife poaching. All game wardens are actively involved in hunter education and outdoor skills training events in their communities.

The Education and Licensing Division has 16 educators who administer wildlife, hunter, boater, furharvester, and aquatic education programs. Staff operate four nature education centers (Pratt, Milford, Southeast Kansas, Great Plains Nature Center) and provide nature education at the Wetlands Education Center and Prairie Center. Staff also coordinate Archery in the Schools, Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites, Becoming an Outdoors Woman, She Goes Outdoors, Varsity Archery, Student Air Rifle, EcoMeets, and Shooting Range Development programs. Six Licensing Section staff coordinate with a license software/electronic sales contractor and 600 license vendors across the state to oversee the sale and fulfillment of more than 849,000 licenses, permits and boat registrations annually, collecting more than \$30 million in license revenue.

The Tourism Division has 12 employees who work to encourage travel to and throughout Kansas by promoting and developing the recreational, historic, and natural advantages of the state and its facilities. Staff members' efforts include marketing, product development, as well as research and education. Marketing campaigns are focused on domestic leisure travelers, travel writers, motor coach tour operators, and the international travel community. Tourism staff also operate two travel information centers, Goodland and Bell Plaine. The division produces an annual Travel Guide and *KANSAS Magazine*.

The Public Affairs Section has six full-time staff members who serve as an information liaison between the department's subject matter experts and the department's constituents through news releases, media relations, print publications, digital communications, and marketing and advertising campaigns. Staff also coordinate agency-specific Kansas Open Records Act requests and legislative updates. Publications produced by Public Affairs include *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*, the *Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary*, the *Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary*, as well as the annual WIHA/hunting atlas and various other publications.

The Ecological Services Section has 12 aquatic and terrestrial biologists who are responsible for regulatory review of the Kansas Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Act (ESA), Kansas Department of Health and Environment solid and hazardous waste proposals, 404 notices (Corps of Engineers), Water Projects Environmental Coordination Act reviews (Kansas Department of Agriculture), and National Environmental Protection Agency grant proposals addressing environmental and conservation issues for all divisions of the department. ESS staff conduct both stream and terrestrial surveys annually to document the distribution, abundance, and community assemblages for fish, mussels and other nongame wildlife species occurring in the state. ESS administers State Wildlife Grant funds, Section 6 Endangered Species Program funds, Pittman-Roberts Wildlife Restoration Grants, and other grant programs. This includes a large private landowner habitat incentive program for species of greatest conservation need.

The Administration Services Section has 58 employees who conduct various duties providing oversight and assistance to the entire department, including planning and federal aid, legal counsel, information technology, budget, engineering, human resources, business management and fiscal, purchasing and buildings and grounds maintenance.

Reporting Structure

The department is a part of the governor's cabinet, and is headed by Secretary Brad Loveless. Outdoor recreation activities are administered and governed through a mix of statutes and regulations. An appointed seven-member non-partisan commission advises the department and approves regulations based on recommendations from staff and input from the public. Regulations governing hunting, fishing and state park use, such as fees, hunting season lengths, bag and creel limits, and methods of take are discussed at a minimum of three public meetings before being voted on by commissioners in a public hearing. A series of statutes also govern activities overseen by the department. The department's annual budget appropriation is approved through Division of Budget, the Governor and the Legislature. In addition, the department answers to a broad constituency of outdoor recreationists and natural resource stakeholders, and works closely with local municipalities, county governments, state agencies, and federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation.