

# KEITH SEBELIUS Reservoir News

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FISHING — HUNTING  
CAMPING — RECREATION

The Norton  
Telegram

## WATER WOES

Wildlife and Parks and Irrigation District work out way to keep water in reservoir

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) and the Almena Irrigation District recently signed an agreement, which is intended to maintain the water level in Keith Sebelius Lake at a higher level that will insure more water for recreational and conservation interests. The lake, which is located just west of Norton, is currently more than 16 feet below what is considered “full”, or what is termed the “conservation pool”.

Under the two-year agreement the KDWP will annually pay the District a specified amount of money to not withdraw water from the lake until the elevation reaches 2,290 feet mean sea level (msl). Currently the lake is at 2,287.9 msl. Once the elevation reaches or exceeds 2,290 msl, the district may release water to an elevation no lower than 2,288 msl. Any irrigation water releases in the next two years will stop once the reservoir water level drops to 2,288 msl.

The agreement will not affect the city of Norton’s ability to release water for their public water supply because those releases have little effect on reservoir water levels. Despite the agreement, without water inflows, evaporation alone could drop the lake level several feet over the next two years.

KDWP Region 1 Public Lands Supervisor, Bruce Taggart, commented that the agreement proves that irrigation interests and public recreational interests can work together to maintain a healthy lake level. Taggart said that under the agreement, “Irrigators will gain fiscal relief from operations and maintenance costs and will retain some assurance of having enough water to meet the requirements of the Republican River Compact with Nebraska. Likewise water recreationists will have more water to enjoy, and the higher water levels are critical to extend the exceptional fishing opportunities available. This improvement was made possible only through the leadership shown by the president of the Almena Irrigation District, Norman Nelson; the members of the District; and Mike

Hayden, Secretary of KDWP. Hopefully this agreement will help spur similar agreements in the future, which will benefit irrigators, recreational users, and ultimately the economies of the communities surrounding other irrigation reservoirs in western Kansas.”

The KDWP, under licenses from the U.S.

Bureau of Reclamation, operates and maintains both Prairie Dog State Park and Norton Wildlife Area on the shores of Keith Sebelius Lake. The lake provides a great place to boat, water-ski, and fish. The park and wildlife area provide many opportunities for wildlife watching, including chances to view pheas-

ant, prairie dogs, Canada geese, wild turkeys, mule deer, and whitetail deer. The park also offers camping facilities, hiking trails, and contains two historic structures that give visitors a glimpse of Kansas’ past. All of these activities are dependent on the lake remaining at a viable level.



Nick Fischer and Brady Rogers work hard to set up a tent during their Memorial weekend stay at the Sebelius Reservoir. See more pictures on Page 8.

— Telegram photo by Veronica Monier