

Hunter education among issues that see changes

With the 2004 Legislature almost adjourned, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) has provided a summary of legislation that impacts outdoor recreation in Kansas. Although for most Kansans, happenings in Topeka may feel far removed from the recreational opportunities they enjoy, the actions of elected officials have the ability to impact every facet of KDWP activities and the constituents they serve.

Hunter Education — In an attempt to recruit youth to hunting, beginning Jan. 1, 2005, the minimum age for taking hunter education will be 11 years of age. Persons younger than 12 will not need to have hunter education in order to hunt but must be supervised by a person 18 or older while hunting. Persons between the ages of 12 and 15 must have hunter education to hunt unaccompanied, but they may hunt without hunter education if supervised by a person 18 or older.

In addition, there will be no minimum age to apply for and receive a big game permit, but persons younger than 14 must have bow-hunter education to hunt big game with archery equipment.

A nonresident hunter education course has been authorized that is a combination online and hands-on course. The certification will only be valid in Kansas and only through the following January 31. Nonresidents must pay

a fee to attend this course.

Wild Turkeys — Wild turkeys have been removed from the definition of big game, effective Jan. 1, 2005. The new statutes pertaining to wild turkeys retain some of the components and characteristics of the former big game statutes, including penalties and tagging requirements. However, the primary purpose of removing turkeys from big game was to make the regulations easier to understand for new hunters. The number of turkey hunters is increasing as a segment of the hunting population, and the classification of the wild turkey as big game was somewhat confusing.

Criminal Hunting — A new crime of intentional criminal hunting was created. Intentional criminal hunting is hunting, shooting, furharvesting, or pursuing any animal or bird, or fishing upon any land or water body of another, by anyone who knows they are not authorized to do so and 1) remains there after being told to leave, or 2) the premises are posted by signage stating written permission only or purple paint. Conviction or diversion for this offense requires forfeiture of hunting, fishing or furharvesting privileges for six months, one year or three years dependent on past criminal history, effective July 1, 2004.

Deer Archery Management Units — The Department has been directed to develop a minimum of nine archery deer management

units by Jan. 31, 2005. The Department intends to take public comment at commission meetings and statewide meetings throughout the summer and fall prior to issuing a regulation.

Landowner Deer Management Program — The Kansas Legislature has directed the department to initiate a pilot program regarding landowner deer management. The pilot program would contain no more than five locations geographically distributed throughout the state, and the landowners participating in the program would be guaranteed deer permits valid only upon their property, as determined through an agreement with the department. Landowners in the pilot would not be eligible to receive nonresident transferable permits through the draw system. A sunset clause was placed in the statute causing the pilot program to expire on Jan. 1, 2008. The Department intends to take public comment at commission meetings prior to announcing regulations and requesting proposals from landowners.

Disabled Licensee Assistants — Assistants who help disabled licensees fill their game bag and creel no longer must be licensed, effective July 1, 2004. However, the assistant may not be a person who has lost their hunting, fishing, or furharvesting privileges. They must also be in close proximity to the disabled licensee when conducting such ac-

tivities in the field.

Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH) — This statute authorizes the creation of a new fund for FHFH and a provision for a donation of \$2 or more by persons purchasing hunting and fishing licenses and permits. All funds derived through such donations will be collected and remitted to FHFH.

Illegal Commercialization of Wildlife — The statute pertaining to illegally commercialized wildlife, in particular fish and muskies, has been updated to make use of a new version of the American Fisheries Society Publication No. 30. The statute applies when wildlife has been illegally commercialized and sets values for such wildlife.

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Game Warden Dogs — Game warden dogs are now protected under statute the same as police and arson dogs. The statute makes it a crime to inflict harm, disability, or death on a game warden dog, effective July 1, 2004.

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