

HUNTING OUTLOOK

Norton Wildlife Area for 2004-2005

Waterfowl — Sebelius Reservoir is one of the few bodies of water in northwest Kansas that can attract and hold enough waterfowl for season long hunting opportunities. Several consecutive years of drought conditions have left Sebelius over 17.5 feet below pool level. Record numbers of ducks and geese are not expected for this year, due to low water levels. Reduction in surface area will make the lake a likely candidate for early freeze up, so hunt early in the season. Generally, the first large flight of ducks occurs in late October. Traditionally, most goose hunting has occurred on private land, but with the larger flats exposed there are chances for some limited goose hunting on the property. Sebelius Reservoir has a seasonal waterfowl refuge in effect from Nov. 1 through March 1. During this time the area designated as refuge is closed to all activities. Maps showing the refuge boundaries are available at the office and are posted at all of the information signs around the lake. Weekly waterfowl reports are available on-line at www.kdwp.state.ks.us.

Upland Birds — Expect pheasant numbers to be about the same as last year. Early summer rains stimulated broad-leafed weed growth, providing much needed brood rearing cover. However, drought conditions persisted throughout the re-

mainder of the summer making chick survival more difficult. Most of the pheasants produced on the Wildlife Area are harvested during the first few weeks of the season. Late season hunters will experience less competition from other hunters, but will have fewer opportunities to harvest a rooster.

Quail numbers are very low in this area of Kansas. There are a few coveys on the Wildlife Area, but expect opportunities for quail to be limited.

Big Game — Norton Wildlife Area is host to both white-tailed and mule deer. White-tailed numbers far outweigh mule deer numbers. Deer numbers on the Wildlife Area have been slowly increasing with lower lake levels. Look for deer numbers to increase a bit more as terrestrial habitat becomes available. No form of deer management is practiced on the Wildlife Area, however food plots are planted and population surveys are conducted annually. Hunting pressure during the early muzzleloader season varies from year to year. The archery pressure is moderate and is mostly local. Rifle season pressure is very heavy. Game tags are NOT valid on the Wildlife Area.

Turkey numbers are on the increase. The last few years have been excellent for production. Turkeys do not winter on the Wildlife Area. They usually winter on pri-

vate land, move to the Wildlife Area in early spring to mate and nest, and with increased hunter activity they are pushed off the area in the fall. Norton Wildlife Area has little hunting pressure for the fall turkey season. The opportunity is there, people just aren't taking advantage of it. Just the opposite occurs during the spring season. In the spring, the Wildlife Area receives heavy hunting pressure, with most of the harvest being early, before toms become wary and call shy.

Small Game — Small game such as rabbit and squirrel are an underutilized resource. Cottontails are in season all year, and can be a great species to a beginning hunter. Cottontail numbers are up and will provide a good hunt for those who choose to take advantage of them. Fox squirrels are generally abundant and can be hunted from June 1 through Feb. 28.

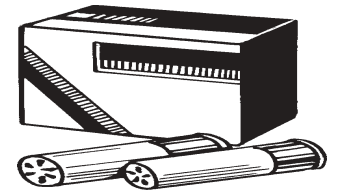
Coyotes and Furbearers — Hunting and trapping pressure on coyotes and furbearers is usually tied to current market prices. The higher fur prices that we experienced last year were reflected by an increased amount of trapping activity. Trapping pressure on the Wildlife Area is expected to be light, with raccoon, beaver, and bobcat as the primary target species. Calling pressure for coyotes has increased in past years and is expected to be moderate this season.

Check stations are a 'must' for deer hunters

New this year, deer hunters harvesting deer in management units 1, 2, 3, 17 and 18 are required to take their deer to check stations within 48 hours after they harvest the deer.

Check station locations are listed in the 2004-2005 Kansas Hunting Regulations. Local check stations include Phillips 66 in Norton, Phillipsburg Locker Plant in Phillipsburg, Dale's Fish and Fun in Oberlin, and J & M Taxidermy in Hill City.

At the check station, data will be collected from the hunter and a seal will be attached to the deer. The primary reason for the check stations is to create locations where large numbers of deer may be examined and samples obtained to monitor the health of the herd, including checks for chronic wasting disease.




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