

# Norton Wildlife Area forms partnerships

When it comes to upland bird hunting on public lands, Norton Wildlife Area has long since been near the top of the list.

The nearly 7,000 acre area is dotted with agricultural fields, shrub thickets, grass uplands and dense bottom ground that provides excellent habitat for pheasants and quail. Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism staff realize what an incredible resource to the community Norton Wildlife Area is and are working toward improving the already great property.

Blake Klema, Area Wildlife Manager, has been busy forming partnerships with both Pheasants Forever and National Wild Turkey Federation over the past several months.

These two organizations have been involved with wildlife conservation on a national level and are now partnering with the Norton Wildlife Area to help improve upon the existing upland habitat. Partnering with these two incredible organizations will provide the support needed to improve habitat on a much larger scale around the area.

As most hunters that have been on the area already know, the dominant grass species found around the reservoir is smooth brome. The brome grass was seeded shortly after the reservoir was built and has continued to invade the

remaining native grass stands with each passing year.

While the brome grass does provide some benefits to upland birds when it comes to nesting, it is not the most desirable ground cover for a majority of wildlife species. For wildlife to better utilize the large number of acres currently covered by brome grass, the plant species composition needs to be converted to a mix of native warm-season grasses and forbs.

Converting cool-season grass to native warm-season grass is a project that takes several years to see the end result. The first step in the process is killing the smooth brome which is accomplished by spraying the grass in the fall with a non-selective herbicide.

A controlled burn in late winter or early spring is beneficial in removing the existing dead plant material from the ground exposing the soil. If any of the smooth brome survived the first round of spray the previous fall, it will green up in the early spring and can be treated one last time to ensure a good kill on the cool-season grass.

Once the brome has been eradicated from the area, the native grass mix can then be planted. It is best to get the native grass seeded as soon as possible to catch the critical spring rains, which we all

## Prairie Dog State Park News

Blake Klema  
Wildlife Manager

know are too few and far between!

While it can take a few years for the native grass to establish, beneficial weeds will immediately grow in the areas that have been sprayed and will provide great cover for a variety of wildlife.

Two locations have been selected to begin the long process of converting the smooth

brome to native grass. The first of the two project areas is located on county road W9 on the west side of the property and the second site is located on the east side of Highway 383 south of the bridge.

Both project areas have been cleared of existing non-desirable trees and the first application of herbicide has been applied. Along with the native grass and forbs, shrub thickets will be established in the project areas. The shrubs are a requirement for quail to call the areas home and will also provide some diversity that will benefit other game and non-game species.

The partnerships formed with Pheasants Forever and National Wild Turkey Federation will help provide funding to accomplish these as well as future habitat projects on Norton Wildlife Area.

A special thanks is given to the Norton Longspur chapter of Pheasants Forever for donating locally raised dollars to help improve upland bird habitat right here around our community. Anyone interested in getting involved with the local chapter or donating to the cause can attend the annual banquet. The banquet will take place at the Eagles Lodge in Norton on Nov. 9.

## Hunters should be aware of possible baiting

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reminds all hunters and landowners of federal waterfowl hunting regulations concerning crop manipulation (baiting). Farm producers who use their land for hunting or lease the hunting rights on their land need to make sure they are following federal waterfowl hunting regulations concerning baiting.

Waterfowl hunters or land managers bear responsibility to know and obey all federal and state laws regarding migrating waterfowl.

Legal waterfowl hunting can occur on manipulated crops only if the crop is 'normally' harvested. Rotary mowing of a corn crop, for example, would not be a 'normal' harvest, and hunting waterfowl would not be allowed on or near the areas manipulated.

Hunters should avoid hunting waterfowl over unharvested crops that have been trampled by livestock or subjected to other types of manipulations, such as disked down crops where grain has been scattered or exposed. Areas where grain is pres-

ent and stored, such as grain elevators and grain bins, are illegal to hunt waterfowl over, as are areas where grain is present for the purpose of feeding livestock. Additionally, hunting over freshly-planted wildlife food plots that contain exposed grain is illegal. Finally, it's illegal to hunt croplands where a crop has been harvested and the removed grain is redistributed or "added back" onto the area where grown.

On the other hand, waterfowl hunting is allowed in fields of unharvested standing crops, including over standing crops that have been flooded. It's also permissible to flood fields after crops are harvested and use these areas for waterfowl hunting. It's advisable for landowners to follow normal harvesting timelines if corn fields are planned to be used for hunting waterfowl.

For additional information, see Waterfowl Hunting and Baiting and Dove Hunting and Baiting, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov), or call 785-232-5149 or 316-788-4474.

## "HAPPY FISHING"

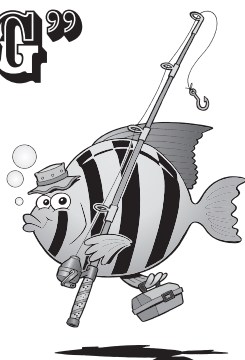
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