

Kansas Water Plan

Water Based Recreation Policy and Institutional Framework

January 2009

Introduction

Increasing recreational opportunities at the lakes, rivers and streams of Kansas is an objective of the [Kansas Water Plan](#) (KWP).

The 2003 KWP contained a brief management section on water-based recreation emphasizing increased access. A policy section of the KWP on *Economic Development Opportunities at Federal Reservoirs in Kansas*⁽¹⁾ was approved in 2006 along with background support papers. This 2009 management section updates these documents and adds descriptive information. It does not include additional objectives, recommendations or implementation strategies.

Overview

The State of Kansas lacks significant natural lakes and contains only three legally navigable rivers. Consequently, water-related outdoor recreation in Kansas is centered on and around the 24 federal reservoirs, 48 state fishing lakes, 198 city and county lakes and hundreds of smaller private impoundments, wetlands and stream reaches.

Permanent standing and flowing waters in Kansas cover about 356,000 acres. This acreage is comprised of the normal conservation pool level of 24 federal and three utility company reservoirs covering 166,000 acres; 9,806 miles of streams amounting to 65,000 acres; over 80,000 private impoundments contributing an estimated 100,000 acres; and more than 300 lakes covering 25,000 acres owned and operated by either the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP), or counties and cities.⁽²⁾ Public reservoirs and lakes are typically adjacent to parks and wildlife management areas which support bank fishing, waterfowl hunting, wildlife observation and other water-related recreational activities.

Development of the Kansas state park system largely followed the construction of federal reservoirs. Of 25 Kansas state parks, 22 are water-based with 19 located adjacent to federal reservoirs and three at smaller state-owned lakes. At the five federal reservoirs lacking state parks, recreational access and facilities have been developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or both.

A key policy issue identified in surveys conducted by the Kansas Water Office (KWO) and KDWP is that demand for water-based recreation exceeds present availability. Visitation at state parks in 1990 was estimated at 4.1 million visitors. By 2001, visitation had increased to 7.52 million. With 30 percent of state park users driving more than 50 miles for access to existing public lands and waters, fuel prices may play a larger role in recreational use than in the past.⁽²⁾

While generally smaller in size, state-owned fishing lakes, along with city and county-operated lakes, offer varied and widely distributed water recreation opportunities. Ranging from small fishing ponds to impoundments like the 1,250-acre Winfield City Lake, these waters offer recreational opportunities close to the majority of Kansas residents.

Kansas contains three publicly navigable rivers available for recreational use: the Kansas, Arkansas and Missouri. Although considered public, the Arkansas River from just west of Garden City to near Larned is often dry. The number of access points on these public rivers has increased in recent years through initiatives by KDWP, local governments and interest groups. A proposal from KDWP in cooperation with the City of Wichita calls for an access point every five miles on the Arkansas River beginning in Rice County and ending near the Oklahoma border. No action has been taken on this proposal as of 2008.

Economic Impacts

The Interdisciplinary Communication Research Institute at Wichita State University conducted a survey of water-based recreational participation and desire for increased opportunities in October 2001.⁽³⁾ Their results are summarized below in Table 1.

A 2005 study by the KWO collected and analyzed physical and natural resource data on all 24 federal reservoirs in Kansas to determine which reservoirs had attributes for different kinds of economic development.⁽⁴⁾ After data were collected on each of the reservoirs, a statistical tool was used to group reservoirs with similar attributes for three development categories: residential, resort and recreational.

Table 2 shows the results generated by the KWO study. The intent of this analysis was to evaluate only the physical and natural resource characteristics of the federal reservoirs in Kansas. It does not cover all attributes that could make successful development possible or desirable.

Boating

There were 103,170 registered boats in Kansas as of December 31, 2000, contributing an estimated \$388,870,600 to the Kansas economy with \$105,343 of this coming from personal watercraft owners.⁽²⁾ Recreational boating accounted for 3,627,524 user days of activity in 2000. Kansans spent \$43,864,000 on boat purchases, \$13,906,000 on outboard motors, \$1,318,000 on boat trailers and \$11,114,000 on boating related accessories in 1999. By 2002, boating registrations generated a total of \$823,250 in KDWP revenue.⁽⁵⁾ Some trends in boating use are evident. While personal watercraft (jet skis) use has become increasingly popular, small craft sailing has decreased. Kayaking is one of the fastest growing sports nationally with participation increasing by more than 182 percent from 1995 to 2000.⁽⁶⁾ Vessels propelled by hand are not required to be registered in Kansas, so tracking participation for this recreational segment is not possible.

Facilities to support recreational boating have been impacted by sedimentation as reservoirs age. Entire recreation areas in the upper reaches of Perry and Tuttle Creek reservoirs have been converted to wildlife areas as the shoreline silted in and boat ramps became unusable. Ramps at the upper end of John Redmond and Melvern reservoirs no longer allow access to the main water body due to log jams. Marina development at federal lakes has been stable with commercial facilities located on most federal reservoirs.

According to KDWP, about 404,000 anglers 16 years of age or older fished in Kansas during 2005.⁽²⁾ Of those, 88% were residents; up from 75% in 2001. A national survey in 1985 determined that anglers in Kansas average about 20 fishing trips annually.⁽⁷⁾ Results of a Kansas Licensed Angler Survey conducted in 1995 showed that lifetime license holders averaged 24 one-day fishing trips and four overnight trips; residents made 22 one-day trips and four overnight trips; and non-residents made 16 one-day trips and four overnight trips.⁽⁸⁾ Kansas supported an estimated 7.8 million fishing trips by adult anglers in 1989 (including unlicensed residents). The *2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation* estimated that fishermen participated in 5,662,000 days of activity in Kansas.⁽⁷⁾

In a 1987 KDWP survey of resident licensed anglers, lakes supported 31% of the total fishing pressure; private impoundments, 26%; reservoirs, 23%; and streams, 20%.⁽²⁾ By 1995, preference had changed to federal reservoirs, with private lakes and ponds second and state fishing lakes third.⁽⁸⁾

In 2002, the KDWP was reimbursed \$4,837,091 from a federal excise tax on the sale of fishing equipment and motor boat fuels. Income to the Department also came from the sale of 252,000 resident fishing licenses in 2004.⁽²⁾

Hunting

Hunting is not as obviously tied to water resources as boating and fishing, but significant activity occurs on public wildlife areas associated with reservoirs, public and private wetland areas and adjacent to private streams and ponds. Federal funds collected as excise taxes on the sale of hunting and recreational shooting equipment and ammunition are proportionately distributed back to the states. The KDWP reimbursement for

federal projects is about \$3 million per year.⁽²⁾ Hunting expenditures bring millions of dollars to Kansas economy. According to the *2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation*, total expenditures in Kansas were \$236 million for hunting.⁽⁷⁾

Wildlife Watching and Other Activities

Similar to hunting, areas associated with water bodies in Kansas support bird watching and other activities such as bicycling, hiking, triathlons and outdoor education. Shorebird watching is a major tourist attraction in central Kansas at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and the nearby Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. A new visitor center and education building has been constructed at Meade State Park in southwestern Kansas and a visitor center is under development at Cheyenne Bottoms.

Kansas Water Plan Objective

- Increase public recreational opportunities at Kansas lakes and streams.

Statutory Framework

Since 1955, the state has developed extensive statutory authority to protect, provide and improve outdoor recreation and the natural resources of the state. These key mandatory water-based recreation considerations are found at K.S.A. 82a- 907(a)(b)(d)(i)(m)(n).

- It shall be the policy of the State of Kansas to protect, provide and improve outdoor recreation and natural resources in this state and to plan and provide for the wise management and use of the state's natural resources, thus contributing to and benefiting the public's health and its cultural, recreational and economic life (K.S.A. 32-702).
- Outdoor water-based recreation has long been an important consideration in the management of Kansas water resources as recognized in the State Water Resource Planning Act (K.S.A. 82a-901 *et seq*). This Act provides guidance in formulating the *Kansas* recreation related issues that the KWO must consider.
- Day use, camping, boating, fishing and other recreational opportunities are developed by KDWP along with federal and local government. Facilities are in place and managed at small fishing lakes, and major irrigation, flood control and water supply reservoirs by KDWP (K.S.A. 32-807; K.S.A. 32-837).
- Assistance is provided to communities to enhance fisheries and associated recreational opportunities by KDWP through the Community Fisheries Assistance Program (K.S.A. 32-807, K.S.A. 32-829).
- Recreation is an authorized purpose under the multipurpose small lakes program administered by the State Conservation Commission (K.S.A. 82a-1602; K.S.A. 82a-1603(l)).

Resources

1. Kansas Water Office. 2006., [*Kansas Water Plan, Volume II.*](#)
2. Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. 2005. *Strategic Plan, Seventh Edition.*
3. Interdisciplinary Communication Research Institute, Wichita State University. 2001. *Water Recreation Needs Assessment.*
4. Kansas Water Office. 2005. Background Paper No. 74, *Economic Development Opportunities at Federal Reservoirs in Kansas.*
5. Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. 2003. *State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).*
6. U.S. Forest Service. 2000. 1999-2001 *National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, (NSRE 2000).*

7. U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. 2002. *2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*.
8. Burlingame, Matthew. 1997. *1995 Kansas Licensed Angler Use and Reference Survey and Attitudes Towards Angling by Secondary Education Students*.