

Missouri Basin High Priority Issue

Increased Water Recreation Use and Access

January 2009

Issue

A lack of access to water-based recreational resources in the [Missouri basin](#) inhibits recreational activity and the associated economic, educational and stewardship benefits.

The Missouri basin does not contain the large federal reservoirs that support most water-based recreation in Kansas. There are two state fishing lakes managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) plus ten county and community lakes in the basin.

The Missouri River borders Kansas for 1212 miles and is one of three rivers legally open to public recreational access. There are currently public boat ramps in Leavenworth, Atchison, Elwood, White Cloud and Kansas City, Kansas. There are additional ramps and accesses on the Missouri side of the river.

Benedictine Bottoms near Atchison was acquired by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and has been managed for wildlife habitat and hunting since 1999 by the KDWP. Benedictine College also conducts biological research at this location. Two new parcels acquired under the Missouri River Mitigation Program will more than double the acreage in Kansas under this program. While management emphasis will be on habitat restoration, expanded recreational opportunities may be available at the new mitigation sites.

Description

The Missouri basin has the smallest land area of the twelve major river basins in Kansas. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, the total [population](#) of the seven counties that are contained in whole or in part by the Missouri basin was 284,011 in 2000, or about 10.5% of the State population. By 2040, the population of these counties is projected to increase by about 16% to 330,470. However, nearly all this increase is projected to occur in Wyandotte and Leavenworth Counties which are influenced by the Kansas City metropolitan area which is the largest potential recreational user base in the state.

There are no state parks within the basin. As measured from the City of Atchison in the central portion of the basin, the closest state parks are Perry (44 miles), Clinton (58 miles) and Hillsdale (81 miles). In Missouri, Lewis and Clark and Weston Bend State Parks border the Mis-

souri River. The Missouri Basin Section of the *2003 Kansas Water Plan* identified an issue for future action on development of a "Missouri River Bluffs State Park." Due to the lack of a suitable location and funding constraints, action has been deferred on this issue.

The Missouri basin contains two state fishing lakes managed by the KDWP.⁽⁴⁾ Brown County State Lake is a 60 acre impoundment near Robinson with an adjoining 188 acre wildlife area open to public hunting. In addition to fishing, picnicking and primitive camping are allowed at the lake with limited facilities. Atchison County State Fishing Lake northwest of Atchison contains 66 surface acres of water and 182 acres of land of which approximately 136 acres, plus the lake, are open to hunting. A rental cabin is under construction at Atchison State Fishing Lake to complement the existing primitive camping facilities.

One of the more widely distributed water-based recreational resources in the Missouri basin are small lakes and parks operated by cities and counties. Collectively known as community lakes, they have been developed and maintained by local governments with assistance through the Community Fisheries Assistance Programs, Land and Water Conservation Fund (parks), both administered by KDWP.⁽¹⁾ Table 1 identifies community lakes in the Missouri basin.

| Community Lakes – Missouri Basin | | |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Lake | Water Area | Managed By: |
| Atchison City Lakes 1-4, 6-9, 23, 24 | 90 acres | City of Atchison |
| Atchison County Lake | 60 acres | Atchison County |
| Hiawatha City Lake | 7 acres | City of Hiawatha |
| Lansing City Lake | 1 acre | City of Lansing |
| Leavenworth - Jerry's Lake | ¾ acre | Leavenworth County |
| Sabetha City Lake | 100 acres | City of Sabetha |
| Troy 4-H Lake | 5 acres | City of Troy |
| Wyandotte Co. - Big 11 | 3 acres | Unified Gov. - KCK, WYCO |
| Wyandotte Co. Lake | 407 acres | Unified Gov. - KCK, WYCO |
| Wyandotte Co. - Pierson Park Lake | 12 acres | Unified Gov. - KCK, WYCO |

The Missouri River typically flows at four to five miles per hour creating potentially hazardous conditions for boaters. Wing dams, buoys, bridges, barge traffic and sand dredges can present hazards to watercraft when combined with the speed of the current. Due to the wide channel, high winds affect canoes and kayaks.⁽⁶⁾ It is legal to camp along the river below the normal high water mark but sand bars are often covered during summer due to navigation releases from upstream of Kansas reservoirs.

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The distance between access points is important to unpowered recreational water craft. While access points are well-spaced in the upper river, access points are further apart above Kansas City.

The Missouri River Mitigation Project is administered by the Corps to acquire and develop aquatic and terrestrial habitat to compensate for losses resulting from past channelization of the Missouri River.⁽³⁾ In Kansas, the 2,111 acre Benedictine Bottoms was purchased in 1994 and developed in 1998. Along with habitat restoration, the area supports research, fishing, bird watching, hiking and hunting (by special permit). Overnight camping, campfires, and/or motorized vehicles are not allowed on the mitigation lands.

Two additional properties have been acquired under the Mitigation Project near Elwood and Atchison. These additional parcels will approximately double the area managed under the program. While habitat restoration will be the primary purpose of these areas, options may exist to develop compatible recreational activities.

In 1989, the KDWP found that 30% of Kansas State Park users drive more than 50 miles for access to public lands and waters.⁽¹⁾ Fuel prices are likely to play a larger role in recreational use than in the past, making local access to parks, lakes and natural areas increasingly important. While the availability of public lands is not likely to significantly increase, planning to make optimal use of existing recreational resources will be needed.



Benedictine Bottoms. Photo courtesy Corps of Engineers

Recommended Actions

1. Evaluate the placement of existing access points on the Missouri River in both Kansas and Missouri, to determine the need for additional access points in Kansas.
2. Encourage recreational use of private lands through access programs such as walk-in hunting and fishing and other programs administered by Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.
3. Develop recreational opportunities on Missouri River Mitigation Program properties as consistent with the primary purpose of habitat restoration.
4. Emphasize the educational potential of existing water resources through interpretive signage and programs.
5. Investigate non-governmental support and funding to develop water-related recreation and educational opportunities in Kansas.

Resources

1. Kansas Wildlife and Parks. 2005. *Strategic Plan, Seventh Edition*.
2. Kansas Wildlife and Parks. 2003. *Kansas Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*.
3. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Accessed September 2008. Missouri River Mitigation Project, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska. <http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/projects/mitigation/index.htm>
4. Kansas Wildlife and Parks Locations. Accessed September 2008. http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us/news/kdwp_info/locations
5. HTNB Corporation. April 2002. *Missouri River Recreation Study*.
6. Dave Murphy. 2008. *Paddling Kansas*. Trails Books. www.trailsbooks.com.