

## **POWER COMPANIES ENERGIZE SOUTHWEST KANSAS SAND SAGE PRAIRIE**

**Posted: 29 Mar 2007 11:08 AM CDT**

*Southwest Kansas companies to add 34,000 acres of native habitat;  
potentially the best lesser prairie chicken area anywhere*

In an example of how corporate expansion can enhance the needs of native wildlife habitat, Wheatland Electric Cooperative, in cooperation with Sunflower Electric Power Corporation, has purchased 34,000 acres of irrigated cropland and plans to restore it to native grass, approximating the region's original sand sage prairie. The effort is part of a Sunflower Electric Plant expansion project in Finney County. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP), the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Pheasants Forever, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other conservation groups have also been involved in the project.

Lynn Freese, director of Member Services for Wheatland Electric Cooperative explains how this purchase is good for both people and land.

"The land purchase was made primarily to acquire the water rights associated with it," Freese explains. "These sand hills are currently irrigated, but there's a power plant project underway that requires water for cooling of the plant and various other plant processes. We purchased those water rights with the purpose of converting them to industrial or municipal use. That leaves basically dryland farm acreage, and the sand hills are not very conducive to farming under dryland conditions. The option is to convert it back to native cover to keep those hills from blowing.

"We've established a three-year program to get a cover crop planted on it and then come back in and seed a native grass mixture recommended by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Office in Finney County," Freese continues. "Then it should take another two years to get the grass established. At that time, we can convert the water to our power plant and other uses."

The 34,000-acre site will contribute a sizeable area of permanent grass cover to the Sand Sage Prairie Region of Kansas, which already provides critical habitat for [lesser prairie chicken](#), [northern bobwhite quail](#), and numerous other native species.

"Everything I've read reveals that these sand hills are extremely important for lesser chickens in this part of the state," says Freese. "We've seen lessers on and around the property, so I would expect that

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restoring these blocks of land close to the native habitat that once existed would greatly benefit these birds. Quail and practically any native animals in the area should benefit."

Although the primary purpose of the purchase is to obtain the water rights, Freese says it's not only good business, it's good policy overall.

"Certainly, conservation is something that a lot of people are looking at today -- conserving land, conserving soil, conserving water -- and I think anytime a landowner participates in these types of programs, the community looks upon them favorably. And in this case, the policy makes good monetary sense."

The area being purchased is adjacent to 20,000 acres of native sand sage prairie that already provides habitat for lesser prairie chickens, northern bobwhites, loggerhead shrikes, and Cassin's sparrows, among other prairie birds. Together with the 34,000-acre site, the total area will greatly improve native wildlife habitat in Finney and Kearny counties.

The power companies consulted with the KDWP, Pheasants Forever, Sharp Brothers Seed Company, and the original landowners to develop a restoration plan that KDWP biologists believe is on the right track.

"Most of the credit lies with the power companies," according to Randy Rodgers, upland game bird biologist for KDWP. "When KDWP got involved, they were well down the road and headed in the right direction, and I think they have every intention of managing the property well. This has the potential to be one of the best prairie chicken areas anywhere."

Purchasing the land was essential to Sunflower Electric's plan to build two additional 700 megawatt plants. The plants will be concentrated on a few hundred acres adjacent to the current plant. Since the area is located in an Intensive Groundwater Use Control Area (no more water rights available for allocation), the only way to get the water needed to operate the plants was to purchase the land and water rights.

"Restoring the land to native sand sage habitat was simply good citizenship," says Freese, whose western Kansas roots and personal involvement with [Pheasants Forever](#) may have influenced the company's plans.

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## **[YOUNG TURKEY HUNTERS INVITED FOR HUTCHINSON AREA EVENT](#)**

**Posted: 29 Mar 2007 10:46 AM CDT**

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*Space available for Hutchinson area youth hunt*

On April 6 and 7, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will sponsor the Hutchinson area's 8th Annual Youth Turkey Hunt. Event coordinators are Steve Adams and Kyle McDonald, both of Hutchinson.

All youngsters age 12 through 16 are eligible to apply for the hunt. There is no direct cost for the hunt although youth hunters will have to bring their hunter education cards and pre-purchase a turkey permit. The youth hunters will be paired with an experienced guide and have access to private property to hunt. KDWP will have shotguns, ammo, and camouflage for the young hunters, or they may bring their own.

Ten to 12 youth will be selected for the hunt. In past years, 50 to 60 kids have applied, so a drawing will be held to select the youth hunters. Preference will be given to those who haven't hunted turkeys before.

Registrations for the youth hunt can be made through March 30 by calling Steve Adams at 620-665-3048 or 316-772-2702. One parent is allowed to go along with the youth hunter and guide.

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## **ARCHERY-ONLY, YOUTH SEASONS EXPAND TURKEY HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES**

**Posted: 29 Mar 2007 10:42 AM CDT**

### *Youth and archery seasons added to regular spring season*

In 2007, Kansas turkey hunters will enjoy the longest spring turkey season ever. With the addition of an archery-only season, April 1-10, Kansas hunters will be able to hunt for two full months.

As the Kansas spring turkey hunting seasons approach, hunters across the state are honing calling skills, patterning shotguns, and breaking out camo gear and hen decoys. In addition, several events designed for youth, disabled, women, and novice hunters are scheduled before and during the regular season. (Contact the nearest office of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks for more information on events that may be planned in your area.)

For those required to have hunter education but have yet to take a course, time is running short. A list of certified courses conducted by KDWP may be found on the agency's [website](#). Anyone born on or after July 1, 1957, must successfully complete an approved course in hunter education before hunting in

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Kansas with the following exception: hunters 15 years old and younger may hunt without hunter education certification provided they are under direct supervision of an adult 18 or older.

Spring turkey hunting is a safe and exciting way to get youngsters involved in hunting. The Kansas youth spring turkey season runs April 6-8; the regular season opens April 11 and runs through May 31; and for the first time, archery hunters have their own spring season, running April 1-10. The accompanying adult may not hunt during the April 6-8 youth season. No hunting license is required for resident hunters 15 and younger, but a valid Kansas turkey permit is required.

Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset. Legal equipment includes long, recurve, and compound bows; shotguns; and muzzleloading shotguns 20 gauge or larger. Legal shotgun shot sizes are 2 through 9. Any individual who has purchased a spring turkey permit is eligible for one second turkey game tag, but spring game tags are valid for units 2 and 3 only.

A resident turkey permit costs \$22.15, and a nonresident permit is \$32.15. A second turkey game tag (valid in units 2 and 3) may be purchased at a cost of \$12.15 for residents and \$22.15 for nonresidents. All nonresidents, and any resident older than 15 or younger than 65, must have a valid Kansas hunting license, as well.

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## **FISHING REPORTS, FORECAST CAN BOOST YOUR FISHING SUCCESS**

**Posted: 29 Mar 2007 10:32 AM CDT**

*Public input, reports combine with biologists' data for more complete angling picture*

Want to know where the fish are biting? The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) can help. One of the most popular and useful tools provided by KDWP is the weekly lake-by-lake [fishing reports](#) posted on the agency's website. While these reports complement the [fishing forecast](#), posted on the agency website each February, they provide more timely information for the angler wanting to know where the fish are biting.

Updated weekly by KDWP fisheries biologists, these reports provide the latest ratings on fishing conditions at many department-managed lakes in the state. Information includes a general rating of what the fishing is like -- from poor to excellent -- as well as the size range of fish being caught, and an informative description of successful baits, methods, and locations where anglers are having the most success. This detailed information is included for each species of sportfish in the lake. Water temperatures and lake elevations are also included, along with other useful information and tips each

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biologist thinks might help the angler catch fish.

In 2006, KDWP added a new feature to the online fishing reports to further enhance their usefulness to the angler. A blog entitled [KDWP Public Fishing Reports](#) was added, enabling anglers to provide timely reports and tips the local biologist may not have heard about.

Combined with the fishing forecast and the weekly fishing reports, the public fishing reports provide the most complete picture of angling conditions short of being on the lake. This spring and summer, use a computer to catch more fish.

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## **[CHICKADEE CHECKOFF GETS NEW DEADLINE](#)**

**Posted: 29 Mar 2007 10:25 AM CDT**

*State income tax return box helps conserve wildlife; tax deadline April 17*

While it may not be the greatest break in income tax return history, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has extended the 2006 income tax filing deadline to Tuesday, April 17, this year, giving taxpayers an extra two days to file their 2006 federal tax returns and pay taxes. The Kansas Department of Revenue will also conform to this date, giving the Sunflower State's wildlife enthusiasts an extra two days to make the decision to "checkoff" on the Kansas income tax form and give a portion of returns back to nature.

Since 1981, the [Chickadee Checkoff Program](#) has raised money for endangered species protection, reintroductions, and wildlife viewing and education programs in Kansas. The checkoff has funded dozens of projects that assess the status of threatened and endangered species and other animals on the state's Species in Need of Conservation list. The golden eagle reintroduction project in Russell and Ellsworth counties is just one example of a Chickadee Checkoff-funded project.

Hundreds of research projects and habitat projects have been funded by more than \$3.5 million contributed to the checkoff since its inception. In recent years, the checkoff has concentrated dollars to protect endangered species, develop habitat, monitor frog and toad populations, sponsor bluebird trails, and initiate landowner incentive programs for sensitive species. Additionally, the checkoff has served to document bald eagle nesting success and winter roosts in Kansas.

For several years, the checkoff sponsored the Nursing Home Bird Feeder Program with tremendous success. More than 250 sites were provided with bird feeders and initial bird feed.

Since 1985, the checkoff has sponsored the [Backyard Habitat Improvement Program](#). Besides

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providing information and assistance to people for improving their yards for wildlife, a certification program is offered to recognize those who have created special habitat needs for wildlife in their own backyards.

The Chickadee Checkoff has also supported the Kansas Winter Bird Feeder Survey since 1988. About 1,000 people participate each year and provide valuable information about mid-winter bird populations. Research and habitat management have focused on sensitive river species in southeast Kansas, dwindling resources in western Kansas, and endangered species such as the least tern.

With the help of the Kansas Society of Certified Public Accountants, the Chickadee Checkoff has enjoyed stable contributions of about \$150,000 per year. This year, look for the chickadee on your Kansas income tax form and do your part for Kansas wildlife.