

Recreation

Introduction

Water-based recreation provides important assets to the citizens and economy of Kansas. Since 1955, the state has developed extensive statutory authority to protect, provide and improve outdoor recreation and the natural resources of the state (K.S.A. 82a- 907(a)(b)(d)(i)(m)(n)). These authorities recognize the public health, cultural and economic benefits of public access to outdoor recreation.

There are 858 unique water rights; 995 unique points of diversion and a total of 338,804 acre feet authorized for recreational diversion by the KDA-DWR. A recreational water right authorizes the use of water that provides entertainment, enjoyment, relaxation and fish and wildlife benefits. Appropriated recreational water rights account for the smallest use category for water statewide.

Sources of Water for Recreation

Permanent standing and flowing waters in Kansas cover about 384,766 surface acres.

Water-based recreation demand is addressed by the use of federal, state and local reservoirs, rivers and wetlands. However, in many areas of the state the availability of surface water for recreation is limited and the public must travel long distances for water-based recreation opportunities. Kansas lacks natural lakes and contains only three legally navigable rivers. Consequently, water-related outdoor recreation in the state occurs mainly 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.

Supply of Water for Recreation

Most federal reservoirs are surrounded by public parks that offer a variety of water-based recreation activities including boating, fishing, waterfowl hunting and wildlife observation. Park lands are managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism (KDWPT) or the Corps. In some cases, both KDWPT and the Corps operate separate parks at the same reservoir, differing in the type of facilities offered. KDWPT also operates

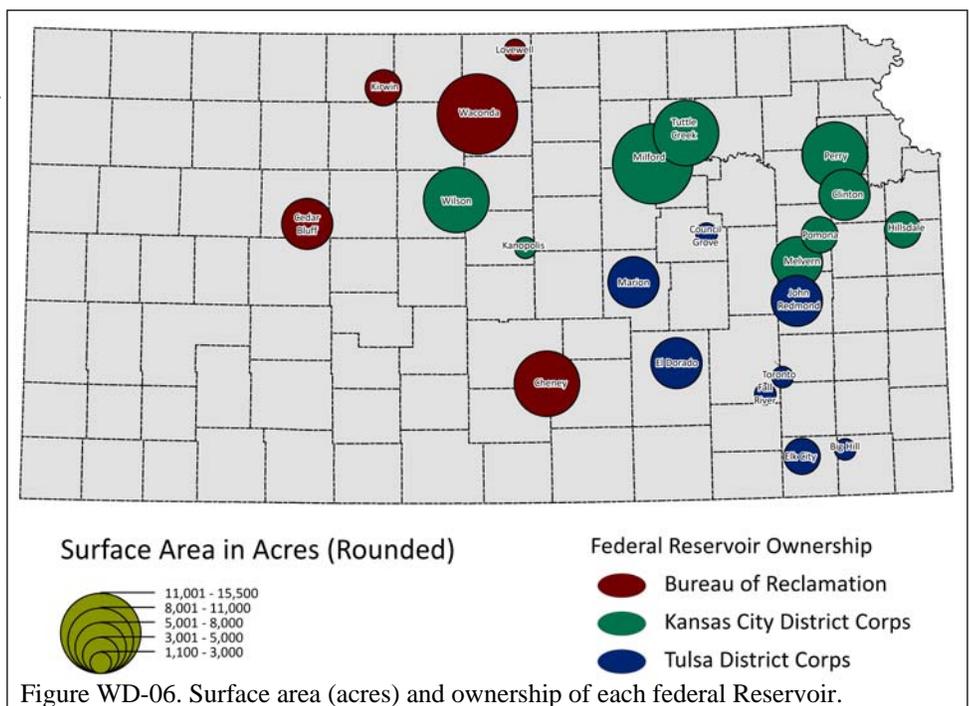
state parks around some state owned lakes and reservoirs owned by the Bureau of Reclamation. Table WD-06 provides an inventory of surface water sources for recreation. While recreation is an authorized purpose at all federal and state reservoirs, it is often secondary to other uses such as

Table WD-06	
Sources of Surface Water for Recreation	
Source	Acres
Federal reservoirs	166,000
Streams	9,806 miles/65,000 acres
Private Impoundments	80,000/100,000 acres
Publicly owned (KDWPT, municipalities)	75/25,000 acres
Wetlands	28,766 acres
Total surface acres	384,766

public water supply, flood control, irrigation and river navigation. During drought or flood, reservoirs are managed for the primary purposes and recreational access often is compromised due to these differences in priority.

Demand for Water Based Recreation

Water-based recreation demand can be indirectly measured by the number of annual visits to state and federal parks. Permits are required to enter these parks and can be quantified. Approximately 6.75 million people visited state and federal parks in 2012, down from a peak of 7.94 million visitors in 2002. Figure WD-07 summarizes monthly visitation to all state managed parks from 2008–2012. Reservoir park visitation comprises the majority of visits.



Total Kansas State Park Visitation By Month

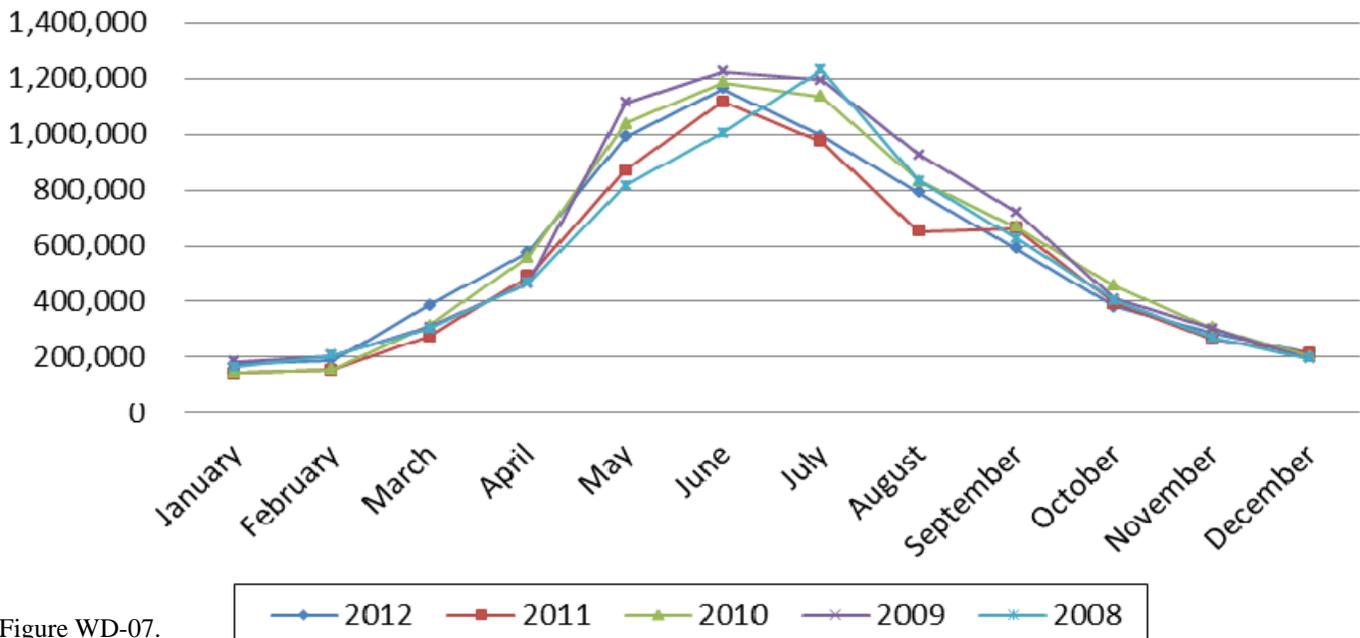


Figure WD-07.

Eastern and centrally located state parks experience higher visitation demand, due to higher populations in those parts of the state. Influences on park visitation appear to be multifaceted. Floods, droughts, blue-green algae, inclement weather and economic conditions were all major influencing factors to state park visitation between 2008 and 2012. High water levels and changes in economic conditions appear to have caused relatively low visitation to several state parks in 2008. During the summer months of 2009, an economic shift occurred and gas prices were \$1.37 lower on average than in 2008, and there was visibly higher visitation in 2009 for many state parks.

In 2011 the state hit historic records with respect to the number of days above 100°F. Many reservoirs experienced blue-green algae blooms and the extreme weather showed effects on park visits. Milford, Hillsdale, Meade, Clinton and Perry State Parks all experienced decreased visitation in 2011 during high levels of blue-green algae events.

Other factors influencing park visitation include activities of adjacent parks at the same reservoir. Promotional activities, changing park fees or changing reservation processing can all influence visitation to federal and state parks.

The Kansas City and Tulsa Districts of the Corps also keep track of visits to these recreational areas they manage

and operate. Figures WD-08 & WD-09 summarize visits to Corps parks from 2009-2012.

River Based Recreation

Access to these rivers is only allowed where a public access point exists. This is the major limitation to river recreation. If no public access exists, boaters have to receive permission to access the river through private property.

Public access is generally provided on navigable rivers and the upper reaches of public reservoirs. Only three rivers in Kansas are legally navigable and open to public recreation: the Arkansas, Kansas and Missouri rivers. Canoeing and other float type activities have become popular in Kansas, with reported participation increasing by 80% in the last decade. The Stream Access Program of KDWPT is used to provide a systematic approach to implementing general access to navigable Kansas streams. With the recent designation of the Kansas River as a National Water Trail, interest in river recreation is expected to increase. This designation will bring federal funds to the state to develop additional facilities along the river.

The number of public access points on the three navigable rivers has increased in recent years through initiatives by KDWPT, local governments, and interest groups. More information on these rivers and access availability can be

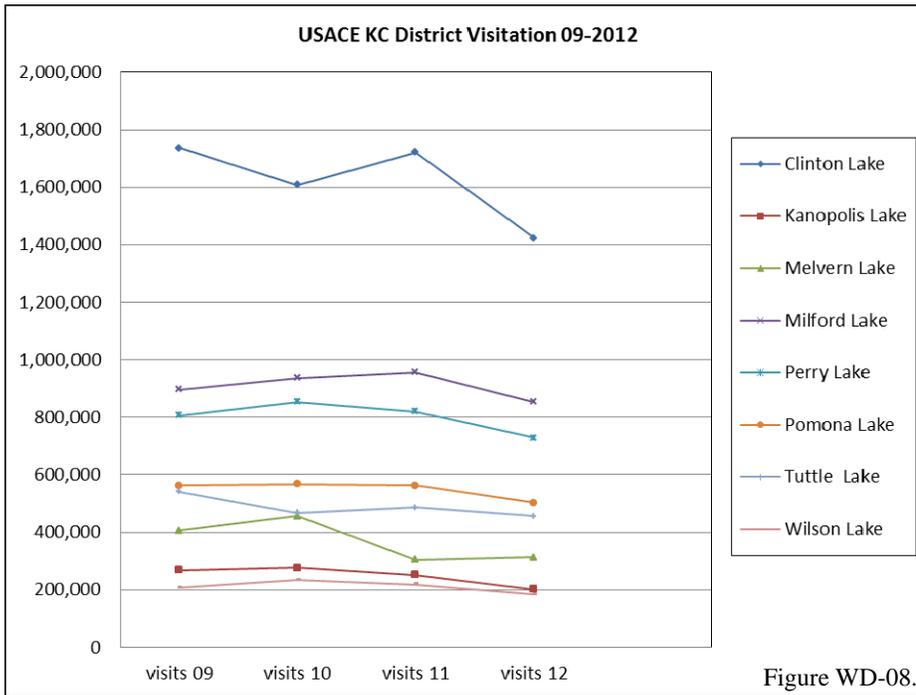


Figure WD-08.

DWR proposed development of an in-stream water right that would allow releases from either federal, state, or private reservoirs to keep water in the streams to provide adequate habitat for mussel beds. The proposal also included protection of stream reaches by obtaining a water right with a beneficial use of instream needs, to ensure water remains in the streams for habitat or aesthetic needs. Twenty three total TMDLs based in part on downstream aquatic needs are also in place.

Wetlands

In several areas across the state, wetlands are managed to provide migratory bird habitat, hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities. Maintaining water levels in these managed wetlands requires a

found at the [KDWPT website](#) and the [Friends of the Kaw website](#). Efforts are also underway to provide additional access along the Arkansas River, especially in the reach between Hutchinson and south of Wichita. Local communities recognize the health, social and economic value of providing river access in their communities and are willing to provide local funding and in-kind services to assist with access development.

No visitation numbers are regularly compiled for river float trips as most are organized by either private individuals or non-profit organizations and no permit is required.

Protection of Stream Flows or Recreation

Recreational use is not only for human needs, but also for the protection of fish and wildlife. Water-based recreation is affected by drought. Water quality and quantity in streams are compromised during low flow conditions. Federal reservoirs are used to make water quality releases to insure that water is available for aquatic communities downstream.

There is not currently a water right designated for instream flow to maintain water in a stream to protect aquatic habitat or for aesthetic reasons. In 2011 the KWO and KDA-

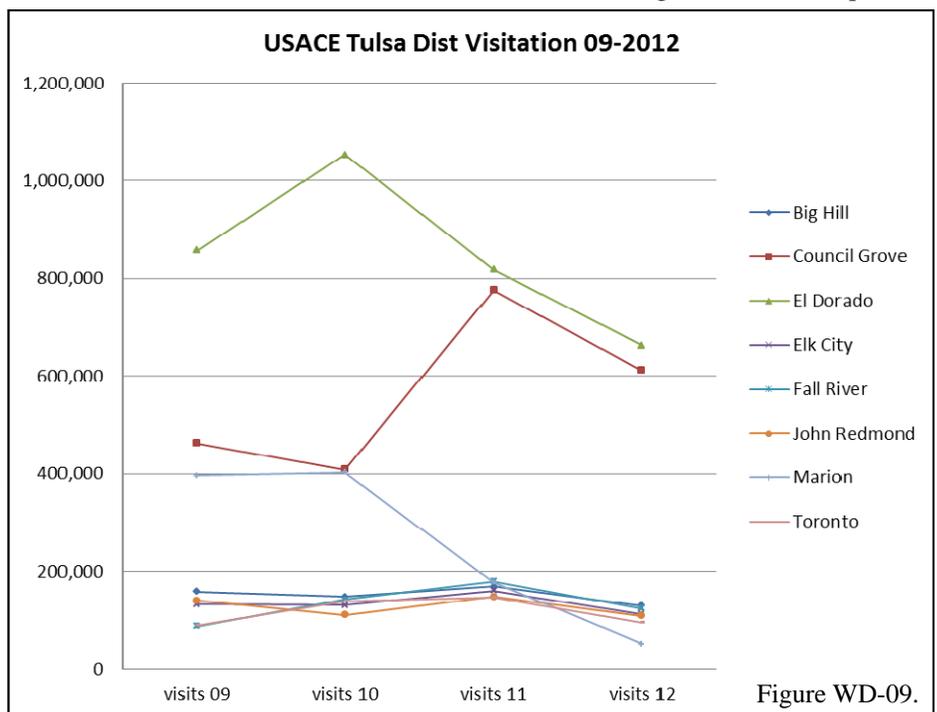


Figure WD-09.

water right with a beneficial use of recreation to pump and store the water. Especially during annual migratory bird seasons, wetlands are heavily used for hunting. In addition, these wetland complexes provide tourism sites for local communities that attract visitors seeking wildlife viewing opportunities. Two wetland systems in Kansas are recognized as Wetlands of International Importance, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms. These sites attract thousands of visitors from across the country, as well as international visitors, seeking opportu-

nities to view many species of shorebirds, waterfowl and iconic species such as the Whooping Crane, especially during the spring and fall migrations. Wetlands may be publicly and privately owned, but annual visitation numbers are not compiled.