

IMPROVING RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO OUR CITIZENS

Issue Statement:

Recreational opportunities improve the quality of life for the citizens of Kansas and contribute to the state's economy. The availability of recreational destinations and activities provides Kansas the opportunity to prosper economically and increases the value of natural resources in the state. While recreational opportunities are currently available in the State, more focus on promoting, expanding and protecting recreational activities is needed. Water-based recreational opportunities are threatened by low water levels, reservoir sedimentation, poor water quality, diminished instream flows, invasive species, and in some areas a lack of available water.

Why this is important to Kansas:

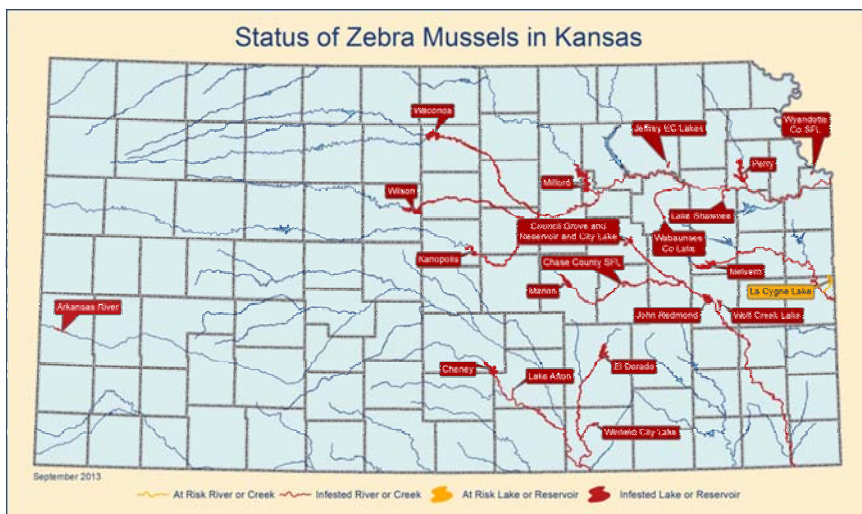
Outdoor recreation is a growing industry that produces significant economic benefits. In Kansas residents and visitors spend approximately \$7.1 billion annually on outdoor recreation, supporting 85,400 Kansas jobs, generating \$2 billion in wages, and producing \$477 million in state and local tax revenue (*Wichita Business Journal April 1, 2013*). Kansas offers outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities at diverse destinations and these outdoor experiences produce significant economic benefits (Outdoor Industry Association June 2012) as well as healthy activity for our citizens.

As individuals take advantage of recreational opportunities offered in Kansas the intrinsic value of natural resources of the state will increase. With increased value placed on those natural resources there is the need to protect, maintain and improve existing opportunities and offer additional opportunities.

Gaps to meet this Goal

Overall, improvement of water quality is essential to offer enhanced and additional outdoor recreational opportunities. The benefit of improved water quality expands beyond recreation into improved drinking water and better human and animal health. Reduction of harmful algal blooms (HABs) reduces the cost of water treatment and results in consistent availability of reservoirs for water based recreation.

Increased focus to maintain, protect and improve recreational opportunities is also needed for controlling Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) including public education to prevent the spread of ANS. The invasion of ANS has already hindered recreational opportunities through degradation of aquatic species habitat and recreational areas. Zebra mussels, Asian carp, and White perch are just a few of the species of ANS that have impacted fishing, boating, and other outdoor recreation. And in the case of Asian carp, have the potential to make activities like boating more dangerous and expensive. While new bait regulations went into effect in 2012, and KDWPT has been continuing their mission of educating boaters and fisherman to *Clean, Drain, and Dry* their boats and equipment, the spread of ANS continues. Additional attention is needed to provide opportunities to educate the public on ANS and monitor access points to prevent the spread of ANS. The map below shows the current locations of Zebra mussels and Asian carp in Kansas.



Additional information on all ANS can be found at the KDWPT website: <http://www.kdwpt.state.ks.us/news/Fishing/Aquatic-Nuisance-Species/Aquatic-Nuisance-Species-List>.

A third area needing additional focus is increasing access to recreational opportunities and educating the public on the opportunities already available. By offering additional river access points and providing information about opportunities currently available, residents and those visiting Kansas will benefit directly. Allowing the unique chance to enjoy the State's natural resources and infusing local and state economies with additional income sources is an essential role of providing high quality recreational opportunities. Access is also often related to water levels in lakes. Unstable or declining water levels in lakes make access more difficult and dramatically affects visitation at Kansas lakes. There is a very tight correlation between

water level and visitation at state and federal parks at lakes in Kansas. Declining water levels impact both the recreational opportunities available to the public and the local economy.

Approach to Achieving the Goal

Activities to help increase, protect and maintain current recreational opportunities, improve water quality, and enhance local and state economies, include:

- Increase river access points
- Quantify the economic and recreational benefits of instream flow protection
- Secure funding for the prevention of the spread of ANS
- Look for opportunities to provide dependable water levels in reservoirs
- Evaluate opportunities to meet contemporary demands for water based recreation (resorts and lodges, canoeing and kayaking opportunities, etc.)

By focusing on these activities, Kansas can improve the ability to take advantage of the economic benefits of the outdoor recreation industry, and continue to generate jobs. Increased value placed upon the natural resources involved in outdoor recreation will support improved water quality and quantity and overall quality of life for Kansans.