

**McPherson Valley Wetlands Update:**

Hunting season will be here before you know it. Here is a brief look at what has been happening at MPWL.

**Brent Theede, Public Lands Manager**  
 Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks



As of publication time for this newsletter, area habitat and water conditions looked very good from a general, area-wide perspective. The pools we were able to get in and scratch up with a disk look extremely good and include, parts of the Kubin east marsh, clear pond, pools 4, 5, 17, & 18, and the slough behind the office. Several pools at the Chain of Lakes and Farland Lake unit have produced very good moist soil responses.



**Clear Pond**

Undoubtedly, the blazing heat and wind that is sure to come in late July and August will take its toll on water levels. As the water levels recede, area staff plan

to broadcast Japanese millet on the exposed mud flats. Staff will continue to do this until through the first week of August.

Similar to past years, we will have a small portion of pools planted to milo or corn. These pools include Pool18 in the Big Basin, and pools 14 and 16 at the Farland Lake unit. However, corn and milo are usually not completely mature for teal season, so be patient as staff will likely not pump these units until the regular duck season.

Barring torrential rains and mass flooding, the habitat conditions look very promising this year at MPWL. Let's all pray that Mother Nature will hold off until September and allow the emerging vegetation a chance to produce. With good nesting success in the northern part of the flyway and good populations expected in fall flights, hunting this fall at MPWL should be very exciting. As always, we will just need a couple timely rains that produce some run-off late this summer. For up-to-date water levels, please call the area office at (620) 241-7669. If no one is available to take your call, there is a recorded message with current water levels and waterfowl numbers that is updated at least weekly during the waterfowling season.

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**Pumping Regime**

**Remember**, drought cycles are a natural part of a prairie wetland system and occur over consecutive years. Realistically, in our part of the world, we should expect to have water three out of five years. In recent years, we have been blessed with water during the fall on a more consistent basis, which has resulted in increased duck populations in the area and more acres of flooded habitat to hunt. This has in a sense, spoiled us duck hunters. Unfortunately, Mother Nature has a huge part in whether these types of prairie wetland systems will produce hunting opportunities and subsequently, ducks. Good moist soil wetland management includes the periodic release of water, usually in the spring, to promote annual native vegetation (duck food – smartweed, barnyard grass, pig weed, foxtail, etc.). Established areas need a disturbance about every three years (disking, chemical application, or water level manipulation) to suppress unwanted perennial vegetation (cattails, spike-rush, and perennial smartweed) which recently has invaded aggressively. These disturbances also stimulate annual plant production. We are nearing a point at McPherson when this needs to be addressed. Water level manipulations have produced excellent moist soil plant responses this year in basically all the pools that we utilized this management tool. These activities take a lot of time and money to complete, so the staff at MPWL wants these pools full and ready for duck season as much as anyone.



**Big Basin pool 4**

All of the pools at MPWL have the capability to take water through natural flows/run-off through flap gated structures when we receive significant rainfall.

However, timing of these rains is crucial. Flooding a marsh too early will flood out any chance to produce good annual vegetation, which equates to duck food, and chances are, we will lose early spring water to evaporation even if we do try and hold onto it. This is why we don't like to pump water before July 1. Pumps, whether diesel or electric, are expensive to operate, and pumping water early that won't last until teal season is not wise use of hunting license dollars. Management objectives in each pool will determine if water is held or released based on the goals for that pool. However, just because we receive significant rains in any given spring does not necessarily mean we will hold on to it through the dog days of summer. Triple-digit heat and 15 – 20 mph winds can result in a loss of water up to an inch a day in many of our hunting pools. It doesn't take long when the average depth of most of our pools is 18 inches.

**Pump and Water Rights Inventory and Pumping Possibilities**

During dry conditions, our pumping capabilities in the Big Basin from ground water resources encompass six hunting pools (Kubin east and west, pools 4, 5, 17 & 18) and two pools located on the north refuge (clear pond and slough behind HQ). The diversion of water to these six hunting pools comes from two wells. One is located directly south of the HQ (supplies Kubin marshes, clear pond, slough, pools 4 and 5) and one a little east of the HQ (supplies pools 17 and 18).

The only other pumping facilities we have are located in the Big Basin marsh unit in the southwest corner of Pool 8 and on the south refuge in the middle of the old Culver fish farm property. First observations of these pumping facilities would lead one to believe that these wells tap into ground water. However, that is **NOT** the case. The pump station in Pool 8 is located on the Blaze Fork ditch, which supplies these pumps water. If we do not experience rainfall amounts that produce significant run-off, we have no water to pump. The same is true for the pump station on the south refuge, however it is situated on another drainage system. In other words, until we receive run-off, we cannot pump any of the pools located in the Big Basin unit south of Moccasin Road, including pools 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, & 13. There is one ground water well located at the Farland Lake unit southeast of Inman. This well is

equipped with an electric motor that eases the burden of pumping, financially and physically. It can supply water to pools 13, 14, and 16, and significantly improves habitat conditions during dry years.

The Division of water resources limits the amount of water we can pump from any well, including ground water wells. Pumping activities any earlier than the first of August, with dry and windy conditions, makes pumping not cost effective (i.e., we lose more than we gain to evaporation). This becomes especially true with current diesel fuel prices. We have more than enough surface water rights (pumping run-off or natural flows water) to fill the entire area, but never have enough run-off for a long enough period of time to do so. Ground water rights are a little more restricted, and require a little more management. KDWP has 10,433 acre feet of water appropriated to it at the MPWL project to be taken from surface water run-off. These acre feet can either be captured through natural flows (6,819 AF) or be pumped through the two surface water re-lift stations (3,614 AF). In comparison, there are only 392 AF available from the three ground water wells located on the project.

**Maintenance Projects for 2010**

There are currently several projects slated for the summer of 2010. Several have been put on hold due to wet conditions but will be completed as soon as possible.

The first project that has been on-going for over a year is the placement of rip rap on the east and south dike of Pool 8. Pool 8 was originally designed as our main water storage pool, and wave action from a few years of holding water high has taken its toll on this dike system. To stop these effects, staff have ordered several hundred tons of rip rap to be placed on these dikes. Currently, the rip-rap is sitting just south of the HQ on Moccasin road and will be placed on the dike by the KDWP heavy equipment crew as soon the ground dries out. Even though this project is not complete, staff have opted to hold a little water in Pool 8 just in case we don't get any more runoff in hopes of providing a little hunting opportunity come teal season.

The second project, that is also ongoing, is a small addition that was added onto the area office. The current office is very small and is hardly large enough for the area manager. During summer months, when multiple seasonal staff members are working, things

become quite crowded. The addition is nearing completion, and includes a room 12 feet by 24 feet attached to the south end of our current office inside the shop building. If you get in the area, stop by and take a look, it is a huge improvement over our current accommodations.

The third project on the list is to re-rock most of the parking lots on the entire area. Along with parking lots, plans are to re-rock the driveway to the headquarters and around the shop, and depending on funds, the road from 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the Pool 1 parking lot on Limestone Road. Some of these areas are overdue and are especially in need after this wet spring and summer. This project will be a great improvement for the area and its users.

The last project slated for this summer involves spraying of invasive weeds in several of the marsh units. Pools 10 and 11 in the Big Basin have significant problems. Pool 10 has developed an ash tree problem on the south half, which needs attention this year. Either staff or local commercial sprayers will get this sprayed prior to the middle of August. This problem will be pretty simple and cost-efficient now, but waiting a year or two will result in much more effort and cost to control the problem. Pool 11 has been plagued with cattails that have reached the point of requiring action. Area staff pulled the plug on this pool located inside the south refuge and will hire a local commercial sprayer to apply herbicide on this tract as soon as conditions allow.

**Dove Banding at MPWL 2009 & 2010**

Staff at MPWL have participated in the morning dove banding program currently underway throughout the Central Flyway. In 2009, area staff banded 200 doves! After only a week of trapping in 2010, staff caught and banded 63 doves.

Periodically, research staff in the KDWP Emporia research office will receive updates of any doves that were banded in Kansas that have been reported to the migratory bird banding lab. In June of this year, one of the doves banded at the McPherson Wetlands project was reported in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico. This is roughly 1,400 miles from where staff at the wetlands banded it less than a year ago.

So this year when you are out dove hunting, please be sure to check all your harvested doves for the presence of leg bands. Dove legs are pretty small and bands can easily be overlooked, but the information

gained from banding is extremely important to researchers.



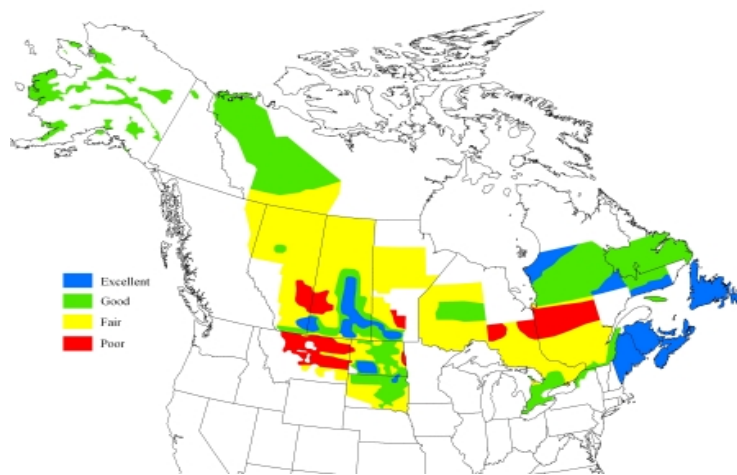
**USFWS 2010 Breeding Duck Survey**

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service have released the mid-continent breeding duck and habitat report that is conducted in May. Surveys report a total duck population of just fewer than 41 million ducks, which is very similar to last year’s estimate and is 21 percent above the long-term average. Mallards, gadwalls, American wigeon, green-winged teal were very similar to last year, but blue-winged teal, northern shovelers, and canvasbacks were down from last year. Northern pintails, scaup, and American wigeon are still below their long-term average. Habitat conditions across the U.S. and Canadian prairies, which are predominately where our ducks originate from, generally look good. (See below table and map for more details).

2010 Estimates of May Ponds and Breeding Ducks (in millions)

Species	2009	2010	% Change From 2009	% Change from Long-term Avg.
May Ponds (U.S. & CAN)	6.434	6.665	+4%	+34% *
Total Ducks	42.005	40.893	-3%	+21% *
Mallard	8.512	8.430	-1%	+12% *
Gadwall	3.054	2.977	-3%	+67% *
American wigeon	2.469	2.425	-2%	-7%
Green-winged teal	3.444	3.476	+1%	+78% *
Blue-winged teal	7.384	6.329	-14% *	+36% *
Northern shoveler	4.376	4.057	-7%	+76% *
Northern pintail	3.225	3.509	+9%	-13% *
Redhead	1.044	1.064	+2%	+63% *
Canvasback	0.662	0.585	-12%	+3%
Scaup	4.172	4.244	+2%	-16% *

\* indicates significant differences



Breeding waterfowl habitat conditions during the 2010 Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey, as judged by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Flyway Biologists.

**Upland Bird Habitat Disk Strip Project**

Pheasant hunting at the MPWL project continues to be a very popular activity, and area staff really focused on what could be done to improve pheasant numbers on the area. First we took an inventory of all habitat types needed by pheasants at various stages of their life cycle.

1. Food
2. Water
3. Nesting habitat
4. Brood rearing habitat
5. Escape / winter Cover

At the McPherson Wetlands project, there is (usually) an abundance of water located in all the marsh units. There is also an array of food sources, including insects, native plant seeds (smartweed, foxtails, barnyard grass, thistle), and agriculture seeds (milo, wheat, corn, etc). There is good nesting cover in the form of wheat fields, native warm season grass, and brome fields. And, good escape/winter cover in the form of cattails, switchgrass, standing milo, etc.

The only thing lacking at the wetlands is suitable brood-rearing habitat. These habitats are characterized by clean soils with a good canopy of annual plants (annual sunflowers, pigweed, ragweed, and maximillian sunflower) to give young birds a chance to forage for insects and not be detected by avian predators. Trees, which serve as perch sites for avian predators, are almost completely absent on the area due to significant

financial investment and physical efforts, including chemical application, hand removal, and contracted tree shear work. Even though these perches have been removed, avian depredation is still a concern for small birds. Starting this spring, staff has implemented what will become annual disked strips to disturb grass tracts and stimulate annual plant responses.



**Disked strip in native grass.**

This spring, strips were established in the north refuge, brome field around pools 15 and 16, and native grass around pools 1 and 2. All of these are located in the Big Basin unit. These strips look very good and have blossomed just as planned. Besides providing brood-rearing habitat, they will provide a little extra food resources for all wildlife with the production of seeds from these annual plant communities.



**Disked strip in brome CRP**

**Dove / Sunflower field**

As was provided last year, KDWP will have a dove management field on the farthest east edge of the Farland Lake unit southeast of Inman. This field is approximately 60 acres of sunflowers, of which 25 percent will remain as KDWP's share of the crop. This 25 percent will be mowed in stages prior to the September 1 dove season opener. This field is located one mile north of 11<sup>th</sup> Road and Arapahoe. There is an iron ranger on site to collect daily hunting permits. Remember, non-toxic shot must be used for hunting doves.



**Farland Lake sunflower / dove field.**

Last year this field was extremely productive and very popular with local sportsmen, even though the field was planted and matured a little late. From September 1 through September 27, this field hosted 201 hunters who harvested 1,264 doves as reported on daily hunting permits. This equates to 6.3 doves / hunter / trip. This year the field was planted on May 8, and will be mature by the early to middle part of August. This should give the doves plenty of time to find and utilize this field prior to the opening of hunting season.

Check the waterfowl reports or area news links on the MPWL webpage for updates about this field. There is no better way to introduce a youth to hunting than at a good dove field. The action can be fast and furious and supply lots of shooting opportunity for impatient youth. Not to mention, it's a pretty good time for adults too!

**Froggin’ at the McPherson Wetlands**

This summer has been an exceptional year for the bullfrogs at the wetlands. Sufficient water levels the past several years has really given our local population a boost, and several sportsmen have come out to reap the benefits of this tasty late night croaker. However, management and law enforcement staff has encountered many violations among this group of sportsmen and a courteous reminder of the regulations covering bullfrog hunting seems appropriate:

- Bullfrog season runs from July 1 through October 31.
- Daily creel limit is 8, with a possession limit of 24 bullfrogs.
- Unless exempt, a valid fishing license is required.
- Legal method of take includes dip net, gig, hook and line, hand, bow and arrow, or crossbow. A line must attach bow to arrow and the arrow must have a barbed head. ANY OTHER METHOD OF TAKING BULLFROGS IS PROHIBITED!

If you have never come out for an evening of froggin’, it is definitely worth the trip. All that is needed is a pair of old shoes, shorts, flashlight, and a fishing pole or gig, (most people use a gig), will get you going. Bullfrog legs are sometimes called the shrimp of Kansas because their taste and texture is similar to that of shrimp. Not exactly like shrimp, but similar.

**Moving all Three Units of the McPherson Wetlands into the Early Zone?**

The USFWS periodically allows states to adjust or re-adjust duck zone boundaries in each respective state. As you all are aware, Kansas has three such zones including the High Plains Zone, the Early Low Plains Zone, and the Late Low Plains Zone. McPherson Wetlands is split between the latter two. The Big Basin and Chain of Lakes Unit is located in the current Low Plains Early Zone, and Farland Lake is located in the current Low Plains Late Zone. Staff have received different views on this situation ranging from great support to great opposition. Some argue it is nice to have a place to hunt when the other zone is closed, and some suggest the regulations are too confusing when a public wildlife area is split basically in half.

After analyzing daily permit data back to 2004, it seems this split has been limiting opportunity, in terms of harvest predominately, but also in hunter days afield by placing Farland Lake in the late zone. Below is a breakdown of the harvest data reported on the daily hunting permits (by year) for duck harvest on MPWL after December 15 of each year.

Year – Ducks Harvested after Dec. 15:

- 2004 – 40
- 2005 – 1
- 2006 – 2
- 2007 – 21
- 2008 – 87
- 2009 – 19

This figures out to about 28.3 ducks/year harvested after December 15. It seems a little better if we throw out 2005 and 2006 data which was during significant drought years, we increase to 41.75 ducks/year harvested after December 15.

Now let’s look at the other end of the season -- the first segment in the early zone when the late zone has not yet opened. This is usually a two -week window, and below is a list of harvest data from daily permits for those first two weeks of the season when the Farland Lake unit is closed.

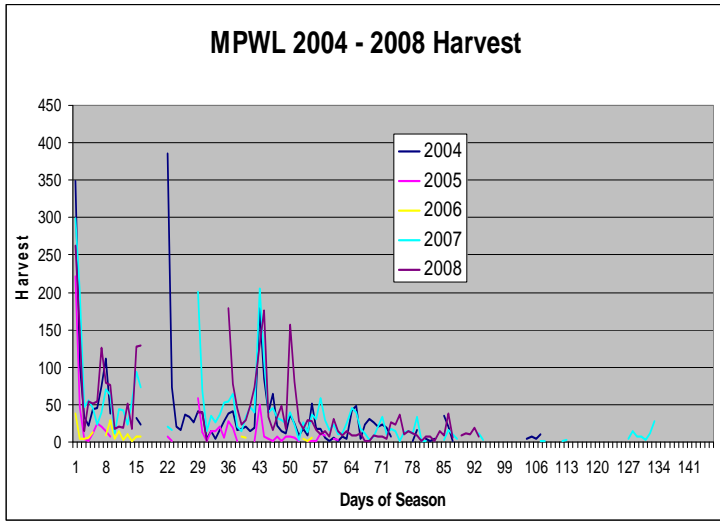
Year – Ducks Harvested (first two weeks of season):

- 2004 – 741
- 2005 – 178
- 2006 – 24
- 2007 – 711
- 2008 – 932
- 2009 – 1006

By completing the same calculations as above, this comes out to roughly 598.7 ducks/year harvested during the first two weeks of regular duck season. Again it looks even better when we throw out 2005 and 2006, (drought years) we come up to 847.5 ducks/year harvested during the first two weeks of season.

Looking at the graph below for 2004 – 2008, it becomes obvious that harvest at MPWL is predominately an early season event. This is probably due to several factors, including weather, migrations, marsh freeze up, and possibly conflicting interests

among the hunting community (deer season, pheasant season, holidays, etc).



However, it is pretty clear that we are missing out on significantly more harvest opportunity during the early part of the season. Many of us have known this for some time, and seems a “no brainer”. But given this data collected from daily permits, KDWP will suggest that next year (2011) the entire MPWL area, specifically Farland Lake, be moved into the early zone. This will help increase opportunity for area sportsmen, and simplify season dates for the area. Comments, suggestions and opinions on this matter are welcome and encouraged. If you support this change, or would rather see it left how it is, please let us know. Please email the area manager, Brent Theede, with your comments [brentt@wp.state.ks.us](mailto:brentt@wp.state.ks.us).

In conclusion, data collected on daily permits is useful to area managers, for issues just as this one. KDWP realizes that it takes a little time to write down what you harvested, but it can also benefit you as a hunter when the data suggests that changes are needed. Whether it is changes to boundaries, as is the case here, season dates, or limits, information provided in the report cards helps staff make recommendations. Besides, if you get caught without a daily permit, it could result in a citation and fine.

**Management Notes**

September 1 will be here before we know it, along with it the opener of dove season and other hunting seasons to follow. Exact waterfowl season dates, limits, and other regulations will be set at the August 12 KDWP commission meeting to be held at the Mankato Community Center, 214 N. High, Mankato, , starting at 1:30 pm. These waterfowl regulations are dependent on the federal frameworks however, and with preliminary population estimates from the breeding grounds high, we are expecting liberal seasons and bag limit frameworks again. Please be sure to check the McPherson Valley Wetlands webpage and waterfowl reports for more up-to-date information. Updates to these information portals will begin after August 1, 2010. Feel free to call or visit our office anytime with questions or concerns. Staff at the McPherson Valley Wetlands hopes that everyone has a safe and successful hunting season this coming fall. Below is all the available contact information for the area manager.

Be Safe!

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Link to the McPherson Valley Wetlands webpage:

<http://kdwp.state.ks.us/news/KDWP-Info/Locations/Wildlife-Areas/Region-4/McPherson-Valley-Wetlands>

**McPherson Wetlands Law Enforcement Statistics  
2009-2010 Season**

**By Game Warden Hal Kaina**

If you have regularly hunted the McPherson Valley Wetlands property, chances are, you have had the opportunity to meet one of the several KDWP law enforcement officers who patrol this area. Most encounters are routine license checks and friendly in nature. However, game law violations are encountered by our officers every season. Some of these violations occur from honest mistakes and some are clearly deliberate acts. Have you ever wondered what types of violations occur at the MPWL property? Well it's your lucky day. The following is a breakdown of the 2009-2010 hunting season violations encountered by our officers on the property.

<b>Violations</b>	<b>Totals</b>
No hunting license	4
Exceed bag limit, geese	1
Hunting on refuge	3
No HIP stamp	2
Unplugged shotgun	4
No state waterfowl stamp	1
Lead shot	2
Vehicle off road	1
Hunt after legal shooting hours	5
Illegal transportation of migratory game bird	1
Criminal damage to property	1
Exceed bag limit, duck	1
Hunt protected migratory bird (yellowlegs shorebird)	1

The game laws are in place to provide equal hunting opportunities to all hunters. They also help to provide adequate wildlife for hunting by future generations. It only takes a few bad apples to mess things up for everyone. Please take an active role in protecting YOUR public hunting ground from those unethical individuals cheating us all. Write down license plates if possible. Call Operation Game Thief immediately and provide them with as many details as possible. Don't delay. If you wait hours or days after the incident, chances are slim the person will be caught. The number for

**Operation Game Thief is 1-877-426-3843.** Why not program it into your cell phone now, for when you might need it later? The reward for catching these game hogs will be that next limit of ducks that YOU lawfully harvest on YOUR public hunting area. For Game Law questions feel free to contact Warden Hal Kaina at 1-620-628-4754.



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