

# Program for walk-in hunting one of most successful in country

By Pat Schiefen

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The Kansas Walk-In Hunting Access program allows hunters many more acres to hunt as permission becomes harder to get for private land, becoming one of the most successful programs of its type in the country.

Every hunter with a Kansas license can hunt in these areas, whether or not he knows the landowner. The majority of the land allows upland game bird hunting with some open for deer, waterfowl and squirrel. Other land may be open for spring turkey hunting.

In northwest Kansas, the number of acres varies from county to county: Sheridan County has 8,296, Wallace 31,341, Cheyenne 23,389, Rawlins 26,048, Decatur 9,540, Norton 24,986, Sherman 18,499, Thomas 10,860, Logan 9,874 and Gove 23,189.

Wildlife Conservation Officer Mike Hopper of Goodland, who covers three counties border-

ing Colorado, said both landowners and hunters have been pleased with the program.

"There have not been a lot of problems," Hopper said. "It has expanded the areas for hunting and had a positive effect on the wildlife habitat."

The state pays landowners for allowing public access for hunting, depending on how many acres they enroll and how long the contract is. Contracts can run from Sept. 1 or Nov. 1 through Jan. 31. Spring turkey areas are leased from April 1 to May 31.

Land enrolled in the program can include Conservation Reserve Program acres, native rangeland, wheat or milo stubble and riparian or wetland areas. The program started in 1995 and by 2004 had enrolled more than a million acres.

Walk-in access is for foot traffic only. No special permission is required.

The program also offers landowners the chance to start wildlife management practices, said Hopper, including food plots, tall wheat stubble, controlled burning of conservation re-

serve land, strip discing and others.

Some areas may be cultivated or planted to winter wheat. These are likely to be areas donated to the program to make it easier to place the signs or have access, but wheat fields may be leased for goose or crane hunting.

Walk-in areas are posted with signs, Hopper said, and safety zones are marked. Wildlife officers patrol the areas.

Landowners are protected from liability for land leased to the state for recreational purposes. State law provides immunity from damages or injuries resulting from ordinary negligence, says Hopper.

Land can be removed from the program at the owner's request or due to poor habitat.

Money for the program comes from hunting licenses and federal aid to wildlife restoration. People can donate to the program by sending money to the Department of Wildlife and Parks, 512 SE 25th Avenue, Pratt, Kan. 67124.

Hunters are encouraged to check with wild-



life officers for rules and regulations governing state and federal hunting areas, including Walk-In Hunting areas.

Phone numbers for all the wildlife officers are in the state hunting booklet, along with the department's state and regional offices.

In northwest Kansas, Hopper (785) 899-5199 covers Cheyenne, Sherman and Wallace counties; Richard Kelly covers Decatur, Rawlins and the west half of Norton (785) 462-7602; Benny Young covers Thomas, Sheridan and Logan (785) 462-7602; Jason Hawman covers Gove (785) 743-2942; and Larry Stones covers the east half of Norton (785) 543-5820.

## Hunt with respect to landowner by following rules

Before you oil up that shotgun and head out looking for a place to hunt, you might think about state-leased land in the Kansas Walk-In Access program.

Over 200,000 acres have been leased so hunters can have more open land and to alleviate some of the pressure on public lands across the state.

Here are some of the rules issued by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks for public access to private ground leased for Walk-In Hunting.

Hunters should respect landowner's property and follow a few rules:

1. Obey the safety-zone concept. Allow a buffer around livestock and buildings. Know your target and what lies beyond it.

2. If the walk-in property is bordered by a hedge row or creek, hunt only on the side which is in the program. Do not walk or hunt on adjacent property. Hunting on the wrong side of the walk-in boundary is trespassing and jeopardizes the future of the program.

3. Do not damage standing crops.

4. Obey all Kansas hunting rules and regulations and respect the rights of the landowners and others using the area. Treat the land as if it were your own and act responsibly. Sportsmen's behavior will decide the future of these areas.

5. Take all your trash with you when you leave. If someone using the area before you left trash, remove it, too.

6. Walk-in leases are for foot traffic only. Do not open gates or enter property with vehicles.

Park along the road or in areas designated for parking. Do not block access to fields or county roads. Landowners are working fields with big equipment, especially in September and October, so give them room to pass. Avoid stretching fences when crossing them.

7. Walk-In Hunting Areas are for hunting only. Other activities are prohibited, unless specifically allowed by the property owner. Do not enter abandoned or maintained buildings.

8. Do not attempt to contact landowners for the purpose of hunting on other parts of their land. They may have enrolled in the program to reduce contact with hunters.

9. Walk-In Hunting Areas are open to hunting Sept. 1-Jan. 31, or Nov. 1-Jan. 31. (A few areas in the east may be open through March 31.)

Check the hunting booklet legend or area signs to determine lease length. A separate atlas will be produced for the spring turkey hunt.

10. The following public land regulations are enforced on walk-in lands: no target practice, no trapping unless specifically allowed by property owner, no dog training, no fully automatic rifles or handguns, no camping, no horseback riding, no stocking or releasing of wildlife, no operation of vehicles, no discharge of fireworks, no fires, no littering, no alcohol, and no destructive acts, including digging, destruction or removal of signs or vegetation.

11. Do not leave game remains in parking areas, roads or roadside ditches.

12. Report violations to a wildlife officer or the county sheriff.

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