

# State has places to hunt and fish

By John Van Nostrand

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There are places in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, Wyoming and Montana where an outdoorsman can hunt and fish in the same place.

You can add far northwest Kansas to those places too.

Not far from St. Francis are two state wildlife areas, St. Francis Wildlife Area and the South Fork Wildlife Area.

"These areas are important," said Cris Mulder, a wildlife manager for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks stationed in Norton. "Being that far out in northwest Kansas, there are not many public hunting areas."

Public hunting areas are owned and managed by the state, he said.

Mulder said even though the two areas are in the same county, they are not in the same place.

## St. Francis Area

St. Francis Wildlife Area is five miles southwest of the town of St. Francis, comprises about 480 acres acquired by the state in the 1950s.

The area, split by the Republican River, combines grasslands, crop fields and timber. The grasslands are grazed or burned in the spring to improve conditions, Mulder said. Food plots are planted with wheat, corn, milo, sunflower and alfalfa.

"St. Francis is closer to town and you may see more use," the manager said. "Flows in the river are sporadic with rainfall."

There are two sand pits stocked with fish. One has walk-in access only, he said, but one on the south side has vehicle access.

"You can fish off your tailgate," he said.

Fishing includes catfish, bluegill and largemouth bass.

"Probably the best fishing is in the spring, May and early June," Mulder said.

Hunting includes white tail and mule deer, turkey and dove, but ducks are limited. Trapping for beavers, raccoon and coyotes is allowed.

## South Fork Area

The South Fork Wildlife Area, 12.5 miles northeast of St. Francis, also is divided by the Republican River. It features a mixture of grasslands, crop fields and timber.

The grasslands are grazed or burned in the spring to improve conditions. Food plots con-



Sun shines on a body of water in the St. Francis Wildlife Area, near the town of St. Francis. Cheyenne County has two state-owned wildlife areas, St. Francis and South Fork. Even though they are both in the same county, the areas have diverse terrain and habitat.

— Photo by Karen Krien/The Saint Francis Herald

sist of wheat, corn, milo, sunflower and alfalfa.

Both game and nongame species may be found on the area, Mulder said, but numbers are low. Hunting opportunities are limited, he said, as wildlife is easily harvested or driven off the area. White-tailed deer, mule deer and turkeys are transient visitors, moving on and off the area throughout the year. Pheasant and quail populations are low.

During the spring and fall, however, a few ducks use the Republican River as a resting area.

"South Fork is more limited on fishing. It does not have the sand pits and is mostly low area.

There is a portion on higher ground, which makes it diverse in that respect," Mulder said.

Mulder said the long drought has changed the areas' hunting opportunities, but with the moisture this year, conditions are better.

"With the limited rainfall the last few years, it has made it difficult," he said. "This year there has been more rain than the past five, six years. Cover conditions are a lot better. Hopefully we get a few more wet years back-to-back."

Plans are to improve dove hunting conditions at the areas, he said.

"We see strong numbers for dove hunting

across the nation," Mulder said. "We will see what we can do to attract doves, and other than just in these two areas."

Mulder said he is interested in knowing what users think of both of the areas. When visiting the areas, Mulder said, he tries to talk to visitors and leaves brochures at information sites.

"I don't get much feedback from users, not as much as I like," he said. "Maybe that's because of the distance from Norton."

Mulder can be reached by telephone at (785) 877-2953 or by mail at Box 431, Norton, Kan., 67654

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