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Kansas' walk-in hunting program allows hunters a chance to work areas, where they don't know the landowners or who to ask for permission.
— Photo by Dave Bergling/The Oberlin Herald

Part of the hunt is finding right spot

By Tom Dreiling
The Norton Telegram
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Hunters are always looking for that special place to set their sights. They'll walk mile after mile after mile in quest of the spot that will produce the take they await.

Looking for the right place is part of the sport. Any veteran hunter will tell a novice to exercise patience while on the lookout, but to also keep your feet in motion, because the right spot might just be a few yards down the row.

While looking, a hunter might come across a sign that carries four letters — WIHA — that stand for Walk-in Hunting Access. This denotes an area where hunting on private property is allowed without permission.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks says the Walk-in Hunting program got started in 1995 — 13 years ago — in an attempt to enhance the strong Kansas hunting heritage by providing access to private property.

The department said the program has grown leaps and bounds and become one of the most successful in the country.

Just a few years ago, the program exceeded one million acres enrolled, providing countless

opportunities for sportsmen to pursue game at no charge. And although the majority of the acreage provides good to excellent upland game bird hunting, some of the areas provide opportunities for deer, waterfowl and squirrel hunting as well.

Landowners, the department says, receive a modest payment in exchange for allowing public hunting access. Payments vary by the amount of acres enrolled and length of contract.

Contract dates can be established from Sept. 1 or Nov. 1 through Jan. 31 of each year.

Other lands are leased for spring turkey hunting only (April 1-May 31). Land enrolled can be in the Conservation Reserve Program, native range land, wheat or milo stubble and riparian or wetland areas.

The Walk-in Hunting Access area is posted with signs. The areas are patrolled and safety zones clearly marked. Liability is waived for landowners who lease land to the state for recreational purposes, the department said. State law provides immunity from damages or injuries resulting from ordinary negligence.

So, if the sign says WIHA, walk-in. And good luck as your zero in on the chosen game.