

Hunters can buy licenses for furbearers

By Kevin Bottrell

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Although it has lost its national economic significance in the past 100 years, the fur trade is alive and well, and a small fraternity of Kansas outdoorsmen still pursue fur-bearing animals.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks sells more than 4,000 furbearer licenses each season and the fur trade brings in about \$300,000 a year. The Kansas Fur Harvesters Association holds a state rendezvous every year, this year on Oct. 1 to 3 in Osborne.

Furbearers found here include raccoon, bobcat, opossum, coyote, red, swift and gray fox, badger, striped skunk, mink, muskrat and beaver.

The state says raccoons make up about two-thirds of the furbearers taken. They are particularly plentiful in eastern Kansas, where woodlands are more common. Coyote, bobcat, beaver, opossum, mink and muskrat make up most of the rest.

Coyotes are particularly plentiful in northwest Kansas. Not legally classified as furbearers, they're often lumped into the category. The department says about 15,000 are harvested for fur every year while another 60,000 to 70,000 are taken by licensed hunters. Coyotes are often killed because they can injure or kill livestock.

The most common fox in western Kansas is the swift fox. It is usually the smallest of the foxes (typically about 5 pounds) and lives primarily in short-grass prairie. Only a few are taken each year by furharvesters.

Red foxes are one of the most widely distributed animals in the world, but in Kansas their population is limited. About 500 were taken each year over the past decade, but that number was



higher in the 1990s. The red fox is distinguished from its cousins by its red-orange backs and white bellies.

The gray fox's range is primarily in eastern Kansas, but some have found their way west. Only a few hundred are taken each

year, and their gray coats are less valuable than that of the red fox.

Striped skunks are found throughout Kansas. About 5,000 are taken each year. Skunks are susceptible to diseases, especially rabies.

Most furbearer hunting seasons begin at noon Nov. 17 state-wide and end Feb. 15. There is no limit. Beaver trapping season runs from Nov. 17 to March 31. Running seasons for bobcat, opossum, raccoon and red and gray fox begin March 1 and end Nov. 1. Licenses are required.

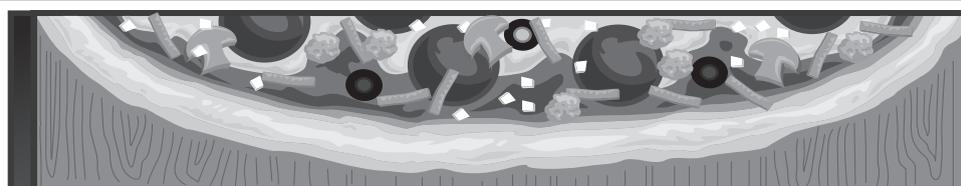
The 2010 Walk-in Hunting Area Atlas lists several good hunting areas on private land where furbearers might be found.

- In Region 1, tracts 73 and 88, about three miles northeast of St. Francis running along the Republican River. These tracts are open from Sept. 1 to Jan. 31.

- In Region 2, tract 69 east of Selden in northern Sheridan County; tract 71, northeast of Rexford; and tract 85 north of Selden along the Prairie Dog Creek. Tracts 71 and 85 are open from Sept. 1 to Jan. 31 and tract 69 is open from Nov. 1 to Jan. 31.

Walk-in Hunting Areas are private lands that the owners have opened up for hunting under a state lease. Hunters still need to follow all regulations and respect homes, buildings and unharvested crops while on private land. Property can be removed from the program at any time.

Full lists and maps of all hunting areas are available in the pullout center section of this guide, or in the state hunting atlas, which can be downloaded from www.kdwp.state.ks.us. Signs are posted around each tract.



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Variety of animals available to hunt

Kansas provides wide opportunities for small game hunting, with species including prairie chicken, cottontail and jack rabbits, squirrels and crows, and nongame hunting of prairie dogs and other rodents.

A hunting license is required to take nongame species such as prairie dogs, ground squirrels, woodchucks, kangaroo rat's starlings and house sparrows. (In Kansas, however, residents do not need a hunting license to take prairie dogs, moles or gophers.) The season is open year around, and there is no possession limit on these nuisance animals.

Some landowners allow hunting of prairie dogs as part of an effort to control the rodents. Wildlife officers usually can provide a list of these areas.

In Sherman, Cheyenne and Wallace counties, the officer is Mike Hopper and he can be reached at (785) 899-5199. In Decatur and Rawlins County and the west half of Norton County, the officer is Dick Kelly at (785) 475-2950. The officer for the east half of Norton County and Phillips County is Larry Stones at (785) 543-5820, and in Thomas, Sheridan and Logan counties, the officer is Michael McGinnis at (785) 462-7602.

Ranchers and farmers in many counties will be trying to control prairie dogs by poisoning them from Oct. 1, to March 30. Contacting the wildlife officer or landowner where prairie dogs are visible is a good plan if you're interested in trying this type of hunting.

Officer Hopper said he has a list of landowners who allow prairie dog hunting, but said this sport takes some patience.

Rabbit season is open year around for cottontail and jack rabbits. Daily bag limit on rabbits is 10 with 30 in possession. Squirrel (gray or fox) season is from June 1 to Feb. 28. Daily bag limit for squirrels is five with a possession limit of 20. Crow season is from Nov. 10 to March 10. There is no limit.

Prairie chicken regular season in the Northwest and East Units runs from Nov. 20 to Jan. 31. In the Southwest Region, the season runs from Nov. 20 to Dec. 31. The daily bag limit is two birds.

The traditional prairie chicken season open-

ing day is the third Saturday in November, and hunters hunting these birds usually take positions around a grain field before dawn, waiting for birds to fly in from surrounding grasslands, said a state wildlife officer.

Hunting and trapping of badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, skunk, weasel season opens Nov. 17 to Feb. 15. There is no possession limit. (All furbearer hunting, trapping and running seasons begin at noon on opening day and close at midnight of closing day.)

Small game in Kansas can be hunted with shotguns no larger than 10 gauge with shot only; center fire and rimfire rifles and handguns; muzzleloading shotguns, rifles and pistols; cap-and-ball pistols; pellet guns; BB guns; bow and arrow; sling shot; and falconry.

Residents 16 to 64 must have a hunting license, (\$20.50 annual fee) and nonresident hunters, regardless of age, must have a non-resident license (\$72.50 annual fee over age 16, \$37.50 for 16 and under). Anyone who has not lived in Kansas for 60 days is considered a nonresident.

Lifetime licenses for residents only are available from the state. Lifetime hunting, fur harvester or fishing licenses cost \$442.15 (add \$40 if paying quarterly); lifetime combination hunting and fishing licenses cost \$882.15 (add \$80 if paying quarterly).

Kansas hunters may purchase over-the-counter game permits online at kdwp.state.ks.us. Kansas hunting and fishing licenses are available by phoning toll-free 1-800-918-2877.

Nonresidents who are full-time students at state colleges or vocational schools may obtain resident licenses and permits, but must carry evidence of their status. These students are not eligible to buy lifetime licenses.

Free vehicle permits for state parks and hunting and fishing licenses are available to active members of the Kansas National Guard. Free hunting and fishing licenses are available to honorably discharged resident veterans with certified service-related disabilities of 30 percent or more. To apply, go to www.kdwp.state.ks.us.



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