



Ballard
duck hunt
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Fisheries Division gears up for fish habitat season

January and February are prime months for fisheries habitat enhancement projects at Kentucky's top recreational fisheries.

Christmas tree dropoff locations have been established throughout a number of locations and provide residents the opportunity to let their expired Christmas tree go towards a great cause as opposed to simply putting it out on the curb for garbage.

Staff in the Western Fishery utilize these trees in order to develop deep water fishing attractor sites at such lakes as Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley. Typically one or two trees are tied together and attached to concrete blocks and placed in areas devoid of suitable habitat for recreationally important fish species such as largemouth bass, white and black crappie, bluegill, redear and catfish.

Ideal sites for placing deep water fish attractors include sloping points, near creek channel drop offs, and on deeper flats. All in all, staff from the Western



Private businesses, such as Lowe's of Paducah, often donate their inventories of unsold Christmas trees following the holiday season. *Paul Rister photos*



Unsold Christmas trees provide outstanding fish habitat on exposed mud flats, especially along creek channel edges. This mud flat is exposed at winter pool, but will have five feet of water over it at summer pool.

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WE GET MAIL

Letters to the Commissioner's Office

The following note came addressed to Commissioner Gasset from Eric Hardin of Lebanon, KY. Mr. Hardin wrote, "I wanted to thank you for all the good work the Department does. Our fishing and hunting keep getting better and better. My son and I just finished an amazing bow season! Thanks especially for keeping the public land hunter in mind."

This note came to Director Karen Waldrop from Greta Steverson. Ms. Steverson wrote, "I wanted to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for the award I received December 6th as the NRCS Area 3 Conservationist of the Year. I am very honored and humbled to have been nominated. My role as a conservationist is made much easier by the support and assistance I receive from your wonderful staff at KDFW. I would be remiss if I didn't let you know that you have some absolutely great people in your department who are a joy to work with! Throughout my career with NRCS, I have had the pleasure to work with **Chris Grasc, Clay Smitson, Chris Garland, Derek Beard, Danny Hughes and Zak Danks**. These guys are the tops of the top in what they do and their assistance to me has been invaluable! I look forward to continuing my partnership with KDFW and doing more good things with wildlife conservation. Thanks again."

We received the following note from Jacob Cundiff in Magnolia, KY. He wrote, "THANK YOU! Dear **GreenWing helpers and providers**, I had a great time. The gifts (door prizes) at the end were amazing. It was just like Christmas. I hope I get to go next year. P.S. My Grandpa had a great time, too."



Members of the Fish and Wildlife Commission presented Bobby Reese with a retirement plaque at their December meeting in thanks for the many commission functions he helped with throughout his career.



John Aldridge pauses with some of his fellow workers. From left are Patrick Roberts, Joann Mattox, Aldridge, Pete Elliott, Chris Sutherland and Todd Murphy.

Reese, Aldridge, Bucy, Grundy retire

The Department sends best wishes to two longtime Headquarters employees who retired at the end of December.

Bobby Reese and **John Aldridge** of Administrative Services Division combined for nearly three decades of service to our agency, and each helped in so many ways that many say that the full impact of their leaving might not be known for a long time.

Reese, after a long farming career, started with the department in June 1989 as a janitor. He quickly moved up

to Clerk, later to Maintenance Worker, and Maintenance Supervisor. He retired as Maintenance Superintendent. He was a key part of multiple department special functions throughout his entire career, and his assistance will be missed. He plans to stay busy on his Shelby County farm. We wish Bobby well.

Aldridge began his Department career in 1987 as a seasonal watchman after 30 years working in the private sector. He

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Kenneth Bucy



Jim Grundy

“Retire,” continued

served the department as Security Guard, Facility Security Officer, Fish and Wildlife Technician II and Maintenance Superintendent during his 25 years and eight months. We wish John well in his well-deserved retirement.

The Fisheries Division also announces the December 31 retirement of long-time Fish and Wildlife Technician **Kenneth Bucy**.

Bucy started his career with the Department as a creel clerk on Kentucky Lake in the spring of 1990, following his retirement from General Tire in Mayfield, Kentucky. He did such an outstanding job that he was immediately hired as a full time Fish and Wildlife Technician upon the completion of the creel survey. Over the years, his expertise has helped to conserve and manage the fisheries of the 14 western counties (which collectively make up the Western Fishery District) of Kentucky. He helped collect countless numbers and species of fish using electrofishing, trap net, gill net, hoop net, trot line, seine, and back pack electrofishing.

Kenneth’s knowledge of the fishery and Kentucky/Barkley Lakes helped enhance numerous special projects during his career, particularly his knowledge of

crappie and catfish species. His input was regularly sought to help determine ideal sampling areas and techniques. Having commercial fished for a period in his life, Kenneth’s understanding of catfish helped paved the way for many department projects aimed at sampling and collecting data for this important group of fish. Additionally, throughout his career, Kenneth has assisted Fisheries staff with the creation and enhancement of countless numbers of fish attractor sites both locally and throughout the state.

Arguably Kenneth’s most valuable contribution was his ability to fabricate and fix most anything. He is an expert welder and could always be counted on to ensure that equipment was kept in top running shape, in addition to enhancing

existing equipment.

Kenneth retires having worked in excess of 20 years with the Department. He enjoys deer, turkey, and waterfowl hunting, in addition to being an expert angler for crappie and catfish. We are sure that retirement will allow Kenneth to devote more time to his passions, as well as spending time with his wife, children, and grandchildren. Kenneth’s service to the Department will without question be missed.

Jim Grundy, Fish and Wildlife Technician at Green River WMA, retired from Fish and Wildlife December 31. Jim worked for the Department for 12 years. He plans to enjoy his retirement raising cattle and tobacco on the family farm in Lebanon, Kentucky.

Pennington promoted

Josh Pennington was promoted to Fisheries Research Biologist at the Peter W. Pfeiffer Fish Hatchery Jan. 1. Josh has a BS in wildlife management from Ohio University, and has nearly completed a Masters in Aquaculture at Kentucky State University.

Josh started with the Department of

Fish and Wildlife Resources in 2006 as a technician at Clay WMA, and then took a full-time technician position at the Pfeiffer Hatchery. In 2008 he was promoted to Fish Biologist II. Since 2011 he has lived at the hatchery with his wife Mallory, and they now have a one year-old daughter, Madelyn.

Bobcat research in south-central Kentucky



By Steven Dobby

Bobcats are easily recognized as one of the most elusive wildlife species in the eastern U.S. Since last year, however, Wildlife Division biologists have been trapping this wary furbearer in an effort to learn more about its population demographics and movement patterns.

Historically, bobcats have been a

much sought-after furbearer in the Commonwealth and this trend continues today. The most recent five-year average indicates that Kentucky's statewide bobcat harvest averages 2,096 annually for hunters and trappers, with considerable variation in harvest from year to year.

Of particular interest is the trend that approximately 25 percent of bobcats harvested by gun since 2007 took place

during a 9-day window when the modern gun season for deer was open statewide. Ultimately, concerns for excessive harvest led to current research efforts to learn more about this furbearing species that is so iconic to Kentucky.

During the summer of 2012, Wildlife Division personnel implemented a systematic survey of Green River Lake WMA (GRLWMA) using remote cameras to document presence/absence of bobcats and identify occupancy patterns. Trapping efforts began in earnest this past October with a goal of equipping as many cats as possible with GPS-enabled radio collars. In doing so, the Furbearer Program will obtain valuable data concerning habitat use, movement patterns, and survival.

Ultimately, data collected from study animals will provide valuable insight to the habitat requirements of bobcats and factors that influence survival rates. More so, these research efforts will greatly assist in the development of future harvest strate-

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GREENWING SUCCESS

Youth hunters participating in the Camp Currie GreenWing waterfowl hunt at the Po Po Hole in Ballard County Saturday, January 5, came away with six ducks and an all around great experience. First District conservation officers Tony Dunker and Sgt. Garry D. Clark assisted. Youth joined by their fathers for the special hunt were Jordyn Hensley, 12; Jacob Kent, 11; and Travis Priddle, 11.



Clay WMA Technician Brian Wagoner girdles a Licking River box elder to create a small canopy gap for planted oak seedlings.

“Bobcat,” continued

gies as interest in this important furbearing species continues to grow.

Through mid-January, trapping efforts by project researchers have resulted in the capture of 14 (nine male, five female) bobcats. Special recognition goes out to all KDFWR personnel that continue to provide invaluable contributions to this project. Those include Furbearer Biologist **Laura Patton**, Research Program Coordinator **Danna Baxley**, Public Lands Biologist **Brian Gray**, and FW Technician **Casey Hatch**.

Trapping efforts will continue through winter in an attempt to increase our sample size of radiocollared cats on the study area of GRLWMA and some surrounding properties.

Improving the mix

Managing wildlife habitat can be a bit tricky sometimes. Managing forest wildlife habitat can be downright complicated because present day forests are a product of their current environment as well as decades and even centuries of human use.

The Clay Wildlife Management Area encompasses more than 12 miles of Licking River frontage in Nicholas, Fleming, and Bath Counties. One concern of KDFWR biologists responsible for managing this WMA is the composition, or mix, of forest habitat.

This is especially true in many bottomland riparian areas along the river. A lack of hard mast (acorn) production in many of these areas seriously degrades their overall value for wildlife.

Light seeded trees such as sycamore

and box elder now dominate most of these riparian bottomland areas and have for so long that heavy seeded trees such as swamp white oak, pin oak, and bur oak are now rare or gone.

KDFWR staff are working to improve wildlife habitat in these Licking River bottomland riparian areas by reintroducing prolific acorn producers back into the mix.

That can be easier said than done, because the present day, light-seeded trees such as sycamore and box elder are aggressive growers and seed producers. Flood waters, heavily laden with their light seeds, add to the problem of their dominance.

Our strategy is to punch small holes in the current riparian forest by girdling box elder and sycamores, and planting vigorous oak seedlings in the canopy gaps.

By working on this forest mix we hope to someday make these areas once again the highly productive wildlife areas they once were.

This is a long-term project that may require many years of effort to rectify, but any improvement in hard mast production in these areas will be a major improvement in wildlife habitat quality.

“Fisheries,” continued

Fisheries District typically refurbishes approximately 130 units of brush annually at such deep water sites. Newer sites are developed if the number of available trees is adequate.

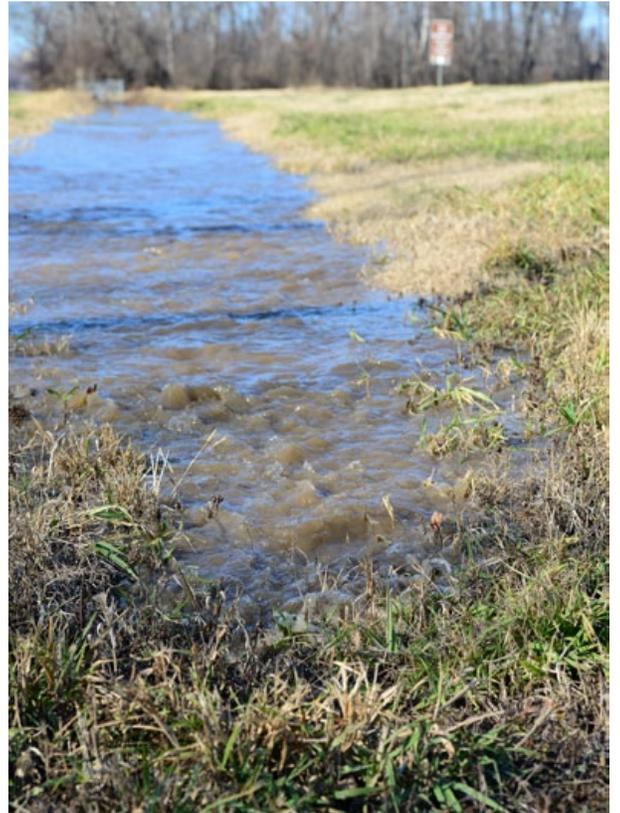
In addition to these deep water sites, staff also utilize trees to develop shallow water fish attractor and spawning sites. Such areas are often located along exposed mud flats at winter pool elevations, that will provide anywhere from two to five feet of water once reservoirs reach their summer pool elevations in late spring/early summer.

In the Western Fishery District,

donated trees are often provided by private individuals and businesses. Over the last several years, Home Depot and Lowes (both of Paducah) and Wal-Mart (Benton) have graciously donated a large supply of those trees that were unsold during the holiday season.

Staff also work with local volunteer groups, such as the Calloway County High School Bass Club to help create fish habitat.

A large amount of effort goes into these habitat enhancement projects, all with the ultimate goal to help increase angler catch rates and provide suitable spawning habitat for sport fish.



BALLARD MALLARDS

A flock of mallards takes off from a flooded area at Ballard Wildlife Management Area earlier this month. The Ballard staff turned on the main pumps that pull water from the river to flood the WMA's many moist soil areas which are drawn down in the summer to stimulate growth of natural duck foods. *John Brunjes photos*





DUCK HUNT

The Ballard Wildlife Management Area is usually teeming with ducks this time of year and after a recent hunt, Wildlife's John Brunjes returned with some enduring photographic memories.