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JOE LACEFIELD PHOTO

8 COVER STORY
Have Kentucky's Turkeys Peaked?
New study examines causes of fluctuations
By Lee McClellan

On the cover: A cluster of turkeys in search of mates emerge from their forest hideout so they can start their displays in an open field in Rick Hill's "Three Toms."



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Spring/Summer 2022

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Kentucky AFIELD



The official publication of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources – your partner in the great outdoors



JOHN MACGREGOR PHOTO

Spring/Summer 2022

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Volume 78 Number 1



FRONT PORCH

• By Kentucky Afield Editor Dave Baker

Catching Up

IT'S JUST ABOUT impossible to launch a touchdown pass when you're standing 7 yards deep in your own end zone. The smart move is to throw the ball just far enough downfield to give your team some breathing room.

We at Kentucky Afield magazine find ourselves facing a similar situation. We are far enough behind on the production schedule that we are not getting caught up. While our readers enjoy the content, they aren't happy that stories are coming out too late to enjoy the season being written about.

Top that with staff shortages and supply chain difficulties that hold up paper shipments from overseas by a month or more, and these pandemic years have been quite the challenge.

We're not punting the magazine, however. Instead, we're calling a timeout.

We are combining the spring and summer issues. To overcome the paper supply hurdle – a significant challenge other publishers are also facing – this special issue is being offered online only.

Barring continued paper supply issues, Kentucky Afield returns to print for the fall

issue in September. We are extending all paid subscriptions by six months so there is no net loss for subscribers.

This was not a decision made lightly. But it is the best route to get us back in the game. (For perspective, the magazine dropped from six to four issues a year in 1998 for this very reason.)

For years, we've prided ourselves on bringing readers relevant and useful content about the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, its ongoing research and its work to support conservation. We write these stories with the knowledge that each will serve as an historical reference 50 years from now. That's why accuracy and honesty are paramount.

We also think of ourselves as the sportsman's license of publications. Kentucky Afield is not narrowly focused. Our content includes stories, tips and tactics about a variety of hunting and fishing topics. The magazine is a great resource for those who hunt and fish for the fun of it.

To our readers, we say thank you for your patience as we break for the goal. ■

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ZACK COUCH PHOTO

Researchers use tags such as this to track migration patterns of bats.

The Traveler

WE ARE CAPTIVATED by stories of adventure. And most stories of adventure revolve around a journey. In nature, we often observe these journeys unfold before our eyes. From the latitudinal travels of waterfowl and songbirds heading south for the winter, to the white bass heading upstream in the spring, adventure is all around.

When volunteers and biologists with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources documented the migration of an Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) from Pennsylvania to Kentucky, we witnessed the culmination of an epic journey.

The story begins in September 2021, when biologists with the Pennsylvania Game Commission captured Indiana bats emerging from a summer roosting site in Berks County, Pennsylvania. They attached a radio transmitter and a bright orange forearm band to each bat as part of a migration study.

However, researchers lost contact with one of the bats when a thunderstorm moved

through on Oct. 1, 2021. The bat seemingly disappeared. All good stories are filled with suspense.

In January 2022, when volunteers and biologists with Kentucky Fish and Wildlife were surveying a cave in Carter County for hibernating bats, they discovered one with a bright orange forearm band.

After a few emails and checking of field notes, the results were in. This bat, weighing a little less than a mustard packet, had traveled more than 420 miles. Even more amazing is to think that, in the spring, this bat will emerge from its winter home in Kentucky and migrate back to the same roost site

in Pennsylvania. How bats migrate between the same winter and summer roost sites is unknown. All good stories are filled with mystery.

While many outdoor enthusiasts are familiar with duck and goose banding programs, many people aren't aware of banding studies with other wildlife species. Since 1996, biologists in Kentucky have placed forearm bands on more than 17,500 bats.

Banding studies provide valuable information, including how long bats can live (over 14 years) and how far they can migrate. Indiana bats captured in Kentucky have been observed in Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, Illinois, Michigan and now Pennsylvania.

Sometime in March or April of 2022, a bat with a bright orange band will emerge from the cave in Carter County. Weighing about 50 percent less than in did when it arrived, it will begin to make its way back to Pennsylvania. Will it survive the trip and make its way back to Kentucky this fall? All good stories have a sequel.

How can you write yourself into this story? If you see a banded bat, please email Zack Couch at zack.couch@ky.gov with location information and photos. ■



Your Kentucky Wild membership helps fund research and monitoring for species like bats, that aren't hunted, fished, or trapped. Kentucky Wild recently purchased poles, mist nets, and thermal imaging equipment used to monitor Indiana bats and Virginia big-eared bats. Visit fw.ky.gov/kywild about how you can become a part of these conservation efforts and help us keep Kentucky Wild!



LEE MCCLELLAN PHOTO

Fish more effectively by adjusting your line to the species and fishing conditions.

Fluorocarbon lines have been on the market for a while, but many anglers are reluctant to try them due to its high cost. Fluorocarbon runs from \$10-\$30 for 200 yards of line. Anglers can save money by using some old monofilament line for backing, then filling the last

75 yards of the reel's spool with fluorocarbon.

Fluorocarbon line is stealthy and nearly invisible to fish. Its density allows lures to stay in the strike zone longer and transmit bites more efficiently.

Fluorocarbon is a great choice for fishing clear reservoirs like Lake Cumberland, Laurel River Lake or Dale Hollow for black bass, or clear streams for trout or smallmouth bass. Anglers fishing the bottom for walleye, sauger or saugeye get maximum strike detection by using fluorocarbon.

Monofilament lines remain effective despite their falling out of favor with some anglers. Monofilament is affordable. It stretches, which better distributes the force of fighting a fish and protects knots from breaking.

Monofilament is good for murkier water found in farm ponds or lowland reservoirs such as Lake Barkley. It is a great choice for topwater lures as it doesn't sink fast like fluorocarbon. The line's stretch helps keep fish from throwing topwater lures.

When choosing the best line for you, always consider the price, what you're fishing for and the technique you plan to use. ■

Line Selection

IT STARTED WHEN a friend invited you to fish in a subdivision lake full of chunky bass. You had a ball catching 16- to 19-inch fish. You've now decided it's time to get your neglected fishing equipment back into action.

Respooling your reel with fresh line is the first thing to do, but it's been a few years since you last did it. Now you face a wall of options and don't know where to begin. Braid? Expensive fluorocarbon? Old-school monofilament? What do you choose? There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

Braided line consists of woven synthetic fibers that resemble the old black Dacron lines of yesteryear. It is extremely strong.

"I like braid because it has no memory and casts farther. Braid is also sensitive," said Chase Winger, branch manager for "Ken-

tucky Afield" television – and braid fanatic. "It doesn't have any stretch."

Winger prefers 8-pound braid (which has the diameter of 1-pound monofilament) for smaller species such as white bass or stream smallmouth. He uses heavier braid for bigger fish, such as hybrid striped bass in the Ohio River.

Heavy braid is great for snaggy environments like rivers or tailwaters. It excels for big fish such as blue catfish, striped bass or flathead catfish.

Braid slices through weeds, making it good for fishing in heavy vegetation for largemouth bass. This line, however, is not invisible underwater. Many anglers overcome this disadvantage by pairing 20- to 50-pound braided line tipped with an 8- to 12-pound fluorocarbon leader.



Shaved or Shaggy?

SOME HUNTERS WANT a primitive experience to get away from it all. Others want gravel roads and planted fields for their public lands experience.

Making that selection now will be easier, thanks to a new system of categorizing wildlife management areas (WMAs) launched this year by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

“Staff with an intimate knowledge of our public lands worked to categorize each area,” said Wildlife Division Director Ben Robinson. “They based their decisions on the property’s management potential and the resources available.”

Areas are now divided into three categories: high, moderate and low intensity management. What the system is not, however, is a rating of how good an area is for hunting or wildlife watching. A low management intensity area, for example, may offer great hunting because fewer people are using it.

Staff availability and getting the most efficiency out of the limited equipment on hand factored into the categorization process.

“One of our biggest challenges is our

motivated staff,” Robinson said. “It is hard to keep them from bouncing around to do some work on all of the WMAs. That is not always efficient, because it takes time to move staff and equipment around. This new system will help them prioritize their work and really focus their efforts.”

Areas with a high management level will receive active management on the majority of the property’s tracts. These areas typically have an office, staff and equipment on site. They will also have a long-term management plan. Examples of high level management include the use of prescribed fire, strip disk-ing, annual and perennial food plots and the planting of dove fields.

Wildlife management areas with a moderate management level have some active management such as timber stand improvements. Robinson said visitors won’t see much active management on these properties. Staff and equipment are typically not stationed onsite. Area managers will employ long-lived management activities on these properties as opportunity arises.

Properties categorized in the low man-

agement level are not actively managed. Robinson explained these properties are often in remote areas with terrain a bit harder to traverse. They have no staff or equipment on site.

The categories are not rankings of an area’s worth.

“I don’t want folks to get discouraged about a low intensity management area,” Robinson said. “I’ve had people tell me they are going to target this type of area to get off the grid and away from people. These areas still have wonderful access, still have good populations of game, just not the active management you see on other areas.”

Three management areas are categorized as Shooting Sports and Dog Trial Areas: Curtis Gates Lloyd WMA in Grant County, Miller Welch-Central Kentucky WMA in Madison County and West Kentucky WMA in McCracken County.

“These activities take precedent on these areas and may have different season frameworks,” Robinson said.

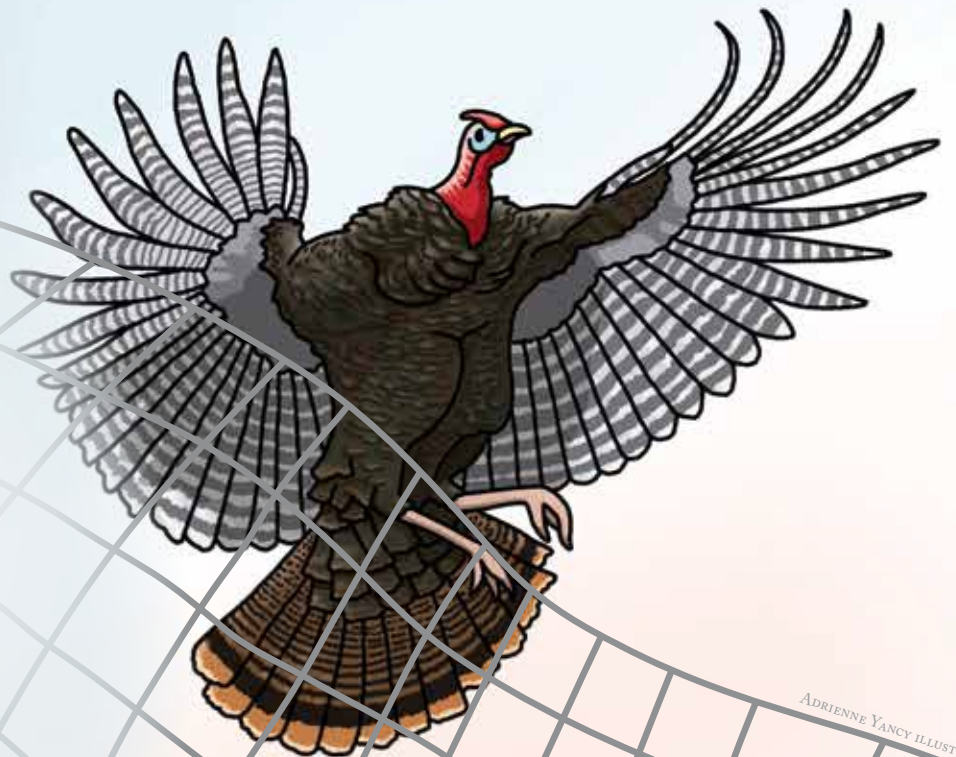
Check the 2022-23 Kentucky Fall Hunting Guide for a complete list of all the wildlife management areas and how they are categorized. ■



HAVE KENTUCKY'S TURKEYS PEAKED?

**New study
examines causes
of fluctuations**

By Lee McClellan



ADRIENNE YANCY ILLUSTRATION



state of the wild turkey flock in both states.

The long net in the Henry County clearing snakes along the ground adjacent to grain placed on the ground to draw in turkeys. Explosive charges in the rockets will launch the net to capture turkeys. Once caught, each bird will receive a leg band then be released back into the wild.

“We don’t want hens,” Danks tells the staff. “We are looking to capture at least

four to five gobblers.”

Researchers started their trapping efforts in various areas of the state beginning in January. Researchers captured and banded 231 gobblers in the spring.

UNDERSTANDING TURKEY DECLINE

Danks said the project came about during a conversation with Tennessee’s wild turkey biologist, Roger Shields, and Dr. Bradley Cohen, assistant professor of wildlife ecology at Tennessee Tech. “During that discussion we said, wouldn’t it be great to collaborate on a research project on wild turkeys that would benefit both states?” Danks recalled.

That ember sparked a conversation about the current state of the wild turkey flock in both states.

Turkey populations are declining across the upper South, particularly in Tennessee. Kentucky’s wild turkey population peaked in 2010, when hunters harvested a still-standing record of 36,097 turkeys. By 2019, hunter harvest was down to 29,500 turkeys.

“The numbers have dropped some and I am concerned based on what hunters are saying,” Danks said. “You don’t see as many big flocks along the Western Kentucky Parkway as you once did. There is a cloud of uncertainty with turkey hunters about what has happened or is happening with the turkey population.”

Researchers will study the impact of turkey harvest by hunters, but that is not the only factor that affects flock numbers. Other contributors include predation by animals, habitat loss, and disease, which can affect reproductive success. Researchers will focus on the big picture.

“By and large, the turkey flock is relatively stable,” Danks said. “For many years, we’ve harvested about the same number of male turkeys. We have the same harvest, but hunters complain about fewer turkeys. Is something wrong with reproduction in our turkey flock? Are we replacing those harvested birds?”

SURVIVABILITY STUDIES

The second component of this intensive research project begins this winter. It will shed light on the reproductive success of Kentucky’s turkey flock.

“This winter, we are going to catch hens and put transmitters on them to track them and determine their behaviors,” Danks said.



DAVE BAKER PHOTO

Above: Wildlife Biologist Zak Danks wires a rocket net launcher in the predawn darkness. Below: Capture net ready to launch over bait pile.



EVAN MOSER PHOTO

AT A CLEARING in Henry County where a house and barn once stood, four hunting blinds line the edge of an immense cedar stand. The cedars have the thick trunks, burned middles and green tops of old trees at the last stages of growth.

Zak Danks, wild turkey biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, is meeting in the predawn darkness with wildlife technicians Jenny Wissman, Mackenzie Clark, Andrew Starr and Eric McDaniel. Before them lay a long length of frost-covered black mesh netting.

The group gathers in preparation to use a rocket-powered net to trap turkeys for an ongoing research project. The goal of the four-year project, which kicked off this year, is to determine the role of hunting pressure on turkey populations and assess reproduction of the state’s flock. The turkey capture effort in Henry County marked the project’s last of the spring season.

Danks stresses safety as he prepares to wire the explosives that will launch the mesh net. “Don’t walk in front of the net,” he cautions the capture crew.

Four metal threaded tubes, perched atop stands made of V-shaped steel prongs, are set up behind the 30x40 foot net. By the light of headlamps and flashlights, Danks splices yellow wires coming from the tubes to a black main wire leading to the trigger system hidden in one of the blinds.

These tubes, yellow wires and netting are the beginning of a two-pronged research project – part of Kentucky Fish and Wildlife’s joint effort with Tennessee Tech University and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency – to get a better grip on the



Turkeys being captured in a rocket net

JOE LACEFIELD PHOTO

“We want to know whether they nest or not, whether they nest again if a nest fails, and poult survival.”

Some studies show that fewer female turkeys are nesting, and fewer are successful when they do nest. This results in a lower number of poults.

“Nesting success and brood survival have been intensively studied in other states historically and recently, but not in Kentucky,” Danks said. “We want to find where they are successful and where they are not.”

Quality habitat for poults is critical for their survival. While a female wild turkey could have a good number of poults, the young turkeys need good habitat during their early life stages. “Studies in south states show on 20 to 30 percent of the nests, at least one egg hatches,” Danks said. “Brood survival is 30 to 40 percent. By the time you funnel down through those stages, you have fewer turkeys.”

Poults need areas with plenty of insects and protective cover from predators. “You need buggy areas for food for the poults,” Danks explained. “When it gets hot, poults go to the woods. If the woods have poor habitat, there could be an impact. Missouri and other states are doing research on this.”

Overly wet weather in spring and summer can decrease hen and poult survival rates. Kentucky has experienced these conditions on and off for several years. “If we get constant rain from mid-April to June during nesting time,” Danks said, “the hen gets smellier while on the nest.”

The increased smell alerts coyotes, bobcats and other predators to the location of the nest.

Rainy weather right after hatching is bad too. “The poults are covered in down and in the first few days, the mother has

to cover them all with her wings to protect them from the rain,” Danks said. “As they grow, they can’t all fit under her wings anymore and some get wet.”

Exposed wet poults can die from hypothermia if the weather is cold.

“Heavy rain also impacts the insect population,” Danks said. “There is also less food for poults in wet weather.”

BEHAVIORAL STUDIES

Another component of the study will help biologists learn more about male turkey behavior during breeding season.

“We are going to employ acoustic recorders to record gobbling and see when they gobble,” Danks said. “One of the key determining factors in hunter satisfaction is that they hear gobbling. Even if they don’t harvest a bird, hunters will have a more satisfying day if they still hear gobbling – it keeps their spirits high.”

The impact of hunters harvesting birds during the spring season naturally influences gobbling activity. George Wright, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife’s colorful, legendary wildlife biologist who spearheaded the state’s turkey restoration program, once said, “Dead turkeys don’t gobble.”

Educated turkeys are much the same, Danks noted. “Once the shooting starts, they don’t gobble as much,” he said. “We want to document the timing of gobbling in relation to the timing of the nesting.”

HAS POPULATION GROWTH PEAKED?

It took decades for Kentucky’s flock to grow from the abyss created by unrestricted



EVAN MOSER PHOTO

market hunting around the turn of the century.

An 1891 Courier-Journal newspaper article noted wild turkeys sold in the market for 12 cents a pound. They were soon overhunted. By the late 1920s, Kentucky’s turkey flock consisted of fewer than 100 birds.

The wild turkey in Kentucky held on by a thread for scores of years. A 1966 population map of turkeys showed just a few pockets left: at modern-day Land Between The Lakes in western Kentucky, Beaver Creek Wildlife Management Area and Wilderness in southeast Kentucky and Mammoth Cave National Park.

Twelve years later, in 1978, hunters harvested just 44 birds in Kentucky. Wright’s aggressive turkey restoration efforts, which started around that time, eventually helped fill in the gaps.

The 200,000-plus turkey flock Kentucky has today is a blessing in comparison to those lean decades. Today, however, the state is reaching its carrying capacity for turkeys.

“Turkeys now occupy habitat in all counties,” Danks said. “For the most part, the turkey flock is really not growing anymore.”



HUNTER WELLS PHOTO

Facing page: Turkey Coordinator Zak Danks (left) and Wildlife Biologist Bryan Cobban band a turkey. Above: Deputy Commissioner Brian Clark first banded turkeys in the 1990s.



Bands contain reporting information.

WAYNE TAMMINGA PHOTO

linked to a disease called blackhead,” Danks explained. “It is caused by parasites that can end up in the gut of turkeys that consume chicken litter. It has long been known as a killer of domestic turkeys. George Wright wrote about its potential harm to wild flocks. This disease is partly why he did not want to use domesticated turkeys for the turkey restoration.”

Danks said the jury is still out on the impact of

blackhead, but notes that poultry litter has been used as fertilizer for years, long before current concerns about turkey populations. Other diseases researchers are investigating include west Nile virus, which can affect the central nervous system of some birds, and lymphoproliferative disease, which causes cancer in birds, including wild turkeys. Danks says time will tell with those but that it’s good they are being studied.

“I would say the impact of harvest pressure and the reproductive success need to be established,” Danks said.

“Until we know those things, it is hard to focus on other things like disease or predators.”

NO SILVER BULLET

One puzzle researchers hope to solve is the coun-

ty-by-county disparities in wild turkey populations. “Some counties in Missouri and Tennessee have sustained substantial declines,” Danks said. “Looking at our harvest numbers, some counties like Logan and Muhlenberg have maintained strong harvest totals, but some nearby counties had some declines.”

“We want to first do research that informs the one thing we can control, and that is our turkey hunting regulations,” Danks said. “We can’t tell people how to manage their property, but we can influence them through regulations. We can advise landowners, but we can’t control their activities.”

Danks thinks the current spring hunting regulations are appropriate and worth maintaining, but he says the study will help gauge whether most restrictive regulations are warranted.

Kentucky’s Fish and Wildlife Commission has voiced support for prohibiting hen harvest during the fall seasons, set a one-bird bag limit at each wildlife management area (WMA) during the spring season and extending the spring baiting ban for two more months (through July 31).

Any proposed changes would not take effect this year, the first year of the ongoing turkey research project.

The fluctuations with the wild turkey population in Kentucky have complex roots and need a varied approach to get things right.

“People want the silver bullet,” Danks said. “They want the one reason, a culprit, but it is more nuanced than that. There is still much about the situation we must understand. Luckily we have smart researchers and dedicated staff helping us get there.”

This intensive study will provide that valuable information to improve Kentucky’s turkey flock in the future. ■

Once the wild turkey repopulated every nook and cranny of available habitat, fluctuations were all but inevitable.

“This is speculative, but one scientific theory is the best nesting spots are already taken,” Danks said. “It could be density dependence related. When there are not many birds, the flock grows rapidly. When there are a lot of birds on the landscape, reproduction slows down.”

Disease could also play a role in the declines. “Folks are speculating that the spreading of chicken litter as fertilizer on crop fields is



CHRIS MASON PHOTO

Wildlife Technician Justin Tucker with a gobbler ready for banding.

Harris-Dickerson WMA



ERIC WILLIAMS STOOD on a prominence on a warm, cloudy day in late spring, staring into the distance at a bucolic scene along the Pond River in western Kentucky. A boomerang-shaped lake shimmered in the distance. Nearby, an osprey perched on a nest constructed atop a utility pole. Bobwhite quail called from a nearby field.

Williams cast his eyes at a green line of higher bank along the other side of the lake, a body of water locals call Fishhook Lake. “The coal company built that levy to hold back the Pond River so they could mine this property for coal,” explained Williams, who serves as the region’s public lands biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. “It is a 30-foot levee

and part of it wraps around Fishhook Lake.”

Williams was surveying one of Kentucky’s newest wildlife management areas open to the public, the 1,837-acre Harris-Dickerson Wildlife Management Area (WMA) located at the Muhlenberg-Hopkins county line.

The name honors Dennis Harris and Gaither “Red Hat” Dickerson, two coal

Reclaimed mine offers nearly 2,000 acres for hunting and fishing

Story and photos by
Lee McClellan



owned one parcel of the new WMA for nearly 20 years, it was not truly accessible until mining ceased on an adjoining property and the department acquired a second parcel in 2021.

Harris-Dickerson's tracts include the 1,051-acre southern section, consisting of reclaimed mine lands with three lakes: 214-acre Fishhook Lake, 91-acre Banjo Lake and 4-acre Rhatt Lake.

The 726-acre northern section is mitigation for lost bottomland hardwood habitat from mining activities. This area, which is only accessible to the public by boating in from the Pond River, was never mined.

"They planted the northern section in oak and hickory for bottomland hardwood habitat over 20 years ago," explained Williams, who oversees the management of the area. "The oaks should be producing mast by now. Acorns provide good food for waterfowl."

The Pond River at the low level of summer is so small one could literally jump across it in spots. It is a lowland river that looks often like a creek slowly flowing through a forest. After heavy rains, the Pond swells like a rattlesnake digesting rabbit, spreading out well beyond its banks.

The Pond River region drew Native Americans to hunt the many elk, bison and white-tailed deer that once lived here. Just a few miles upstream from Harris-Dickerson WMA was the historic Free Henry Ford, an ancient shallow crossing used by migrating animals and pioneers to cross Pond River.

The most notorious use of Free Henry Ford was by two cousins sometimes referred to as America's first serial killers. The men, Micajah "Big" Harp and Wiley "Little" Harp, were fleeing a posse at the time.

Some sources say the Harps killed more than two dozen people in the late 1700s. A posse for the men formed after a particularly gruesome murder of Moses Stegall's family in their cabin. The posse caught them near Pond River at what is still known as Harps Hill in Muhlenberg County. Afterwards, Moses Stegall removed Big Harp's head and

miners who lost their lives in separate high-wall collapses at a nearby coal mine in the 1990s. The coal company that sold the property to Kentucky Fish and Wildlife requested that it be dedicated to the memory of the miners, both avid outdoorsmen, "with the hope that future generations will remember their sacrifice."

Although the property is located near

Peabody WMA, it is not part of that area. Visitors to Harris-Dickerson do not need to buy the Peabody permit to enjoy all the new WMA has to offer.

"This is a great property for waterfowl hunting and fishing," said Derek Beard, assistant director of the Wildlife Division of Kentucky Fish and Wildlife.

While Kentucky Fish and Wildlife has

placed it for public viewing at a crossroads just north of Dixon in Webster County as a warning to other bandits.

The road passing near this site was called “Harps Head Road” since pioneer days until after World War II. U.S. 41 A approximates this old route.

The Pond River is the dominant feature of Harris-Dickerson WMA. The Pond forms a good chunk of the eastern boundary of the area. Williams, while standing at a newly built boat ramp on the southern end of Banjo Lake, explained how the Pond River influences the two biggest lakes on the property.

“This section of Banjo Lake is flow-through for the Pond River when it comes up. Fishhook Lake is 214 acres at normal level and 400 to 500 acres when the Pond is at flood stage. When water is up, you can access the whole southern unit by boat.”

The area is so new the department’s Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions are still discovering what species the property holds.

“The lakes on Harris-Dickerson are all under statewide regulations for fishing until our biologists are able to access the fish populations,” said Jeff Ross, assistant director of the Fisheries Division of Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. “We can make changes to the regulations later if needed.”

Rhett, Banjo and Fishhook lakes are perfect for small boats and paddlecraft. “They are all idle speed only and all look good for kayaking,” said Maddy Ruble, assistant district biologist for the Northwestern Fisheries District.

Crews have mapped Rhett Lake and plan to map the others soon. Results will be posted on the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife website at fw.ky.gov.

Williams noted kayaks often outnumber johnboats on the lakes of the adjacent Peabody WMA in summer. Because of this trend, plans call for construction of a kayak launch and boat ramp on the southern end of Fishhook Lake, in addition to a ramp near Rhett Lake for Pond River access.

The road leading past Rhett Lake to the access at Banjo Lake has a thick bed of gravel on it. Rhett Lake also has a gravel ramp and parking area. Other roads on the area are unimproved; some may be boggy at times. Visitors driving to Fishhook Lake should use high clearance four-wheel drive vehicles. This road is often underwater for extended periods of time. Kentucky Fish

and Wildlife plans to improve the roads, add signage and build parking areas in the future.

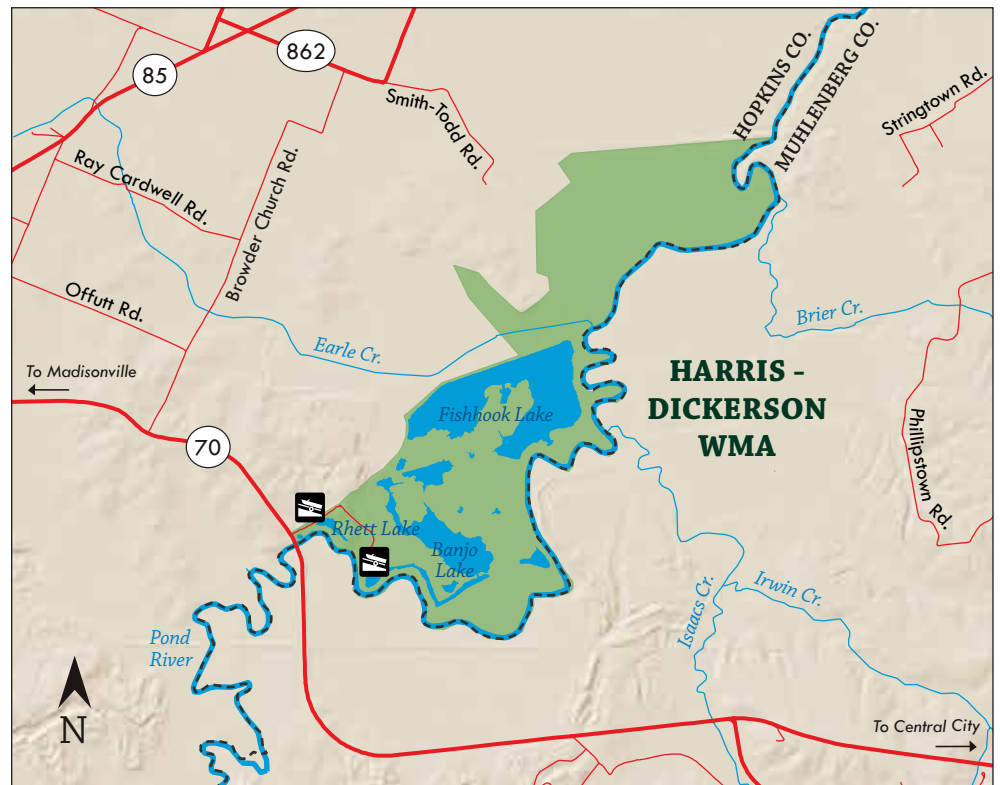
Visitors should also use caution in wooded areas, as the December 2021 tornado outbreak cut a swath of destruction through the heart of the area, leaving many weakened and downed trees.

Harris-Dickerson WMA is open under statewide regulations for all hunting seasons. Department staff plan future habitat

improvement projects to benefit wildlife on the area.

Currently, this area holds white-tailed deer, wild turkey and some bobwhite quail in addition to waterfowl. Harris-Dickerson WMA has tremendous hunting potential for these species.

Harris-Dickerson WMA offers yet another opportunity for fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing in an area already rich in public land. ■



REVERSION

Transforming a drainage ditch into a stream

By Ciara Knisely

PHOTO COURTESY LOUISVILLE MSD

A LONG MILL CREEK in southwest Jefferson County, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources is helping to plan what may become one of the country's largest urban stream and wetland restoration projects.

In effect, it would transform what now functions as a drainage ditch into a naturalized stream surrounded by parkland. Several agencies are involved in the project.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife's Stream Team, a crew of scientists and engineers skilled at stream and wetland restoration, is

looking at 8 miles of poor-quality wetlands and stream between Sylvania Park and the Mill Creek Generating Station.

The sizeable project, much of which is located on public land, could be constructed in discrete sections. Other sections of Mill Creek flow through private property; those owners would have to be agreeable before the project could be built in those sections.

Louisville Metro Parks, which owns much of the property, will develop plans for a new park along the creek. Louisville Metro Sewer District (MSD) will assist in

outreach. The Nature Conservancy, using settlement monies from a pollution case, will administer seed funding for the project.

MSD aims to create a space where accessible outdoor recreation and healthy wetlands can co-exist. "Being such a large project with city infrastructure in the mix, it was obvious we needed ecological expertise, but it wasn't immediately obvious who had that insight and capability," said Erin Wagoner, the agency's Community Benefits and Partnerships Manager.

The Stream Team, which works under Kentucky Fish and Wildlife's fee-in-lieu-of mitigation program, had funding for a starting section of the project. The team's role would include design, construction, native vegetation plantings, invasive plant control and monitoring.

Long ago, Mill Creek had been straightened to make flood reduction its primary purpose. Bennett Knox, parks administrator of Louisville Parks and Recreation's Natural Areas division, said the location does have potential. It just needs some work.

"This project will restore riparian habitat and lead to park improvements that will compliment other community assets," he said.

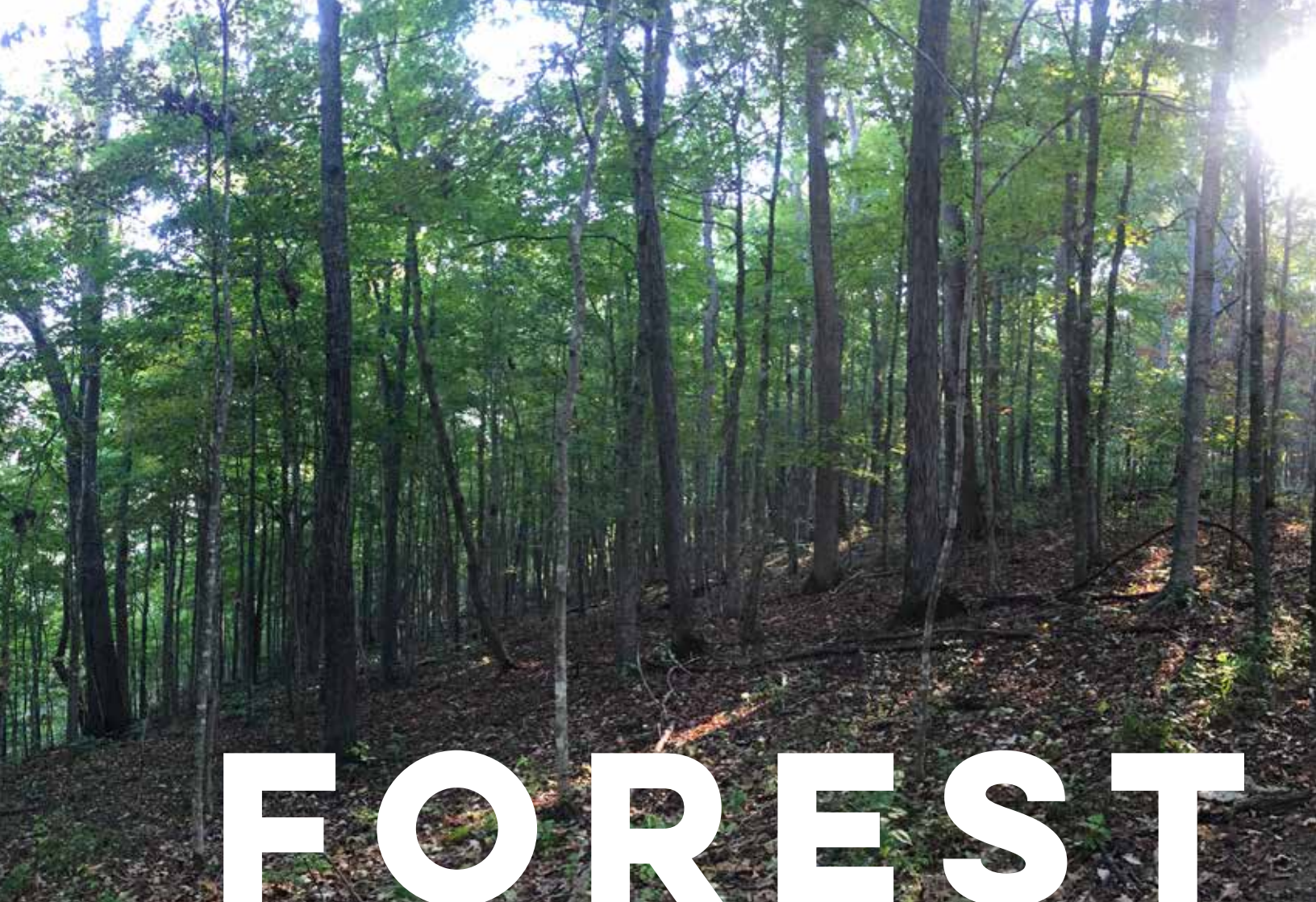
Members of the Stream Team, who generally work on smaller-scaled, rural restoration projects, are excited to see plans unfold.

"It's your case of stereotypical urban drainage," said Program Coordinator Rob Lewis. "Being a valley near a four-lane highway, it's a flood-prone area that's really affected by storm and wastewater drainage rather than erosion. An opportunity like this is unique for the crew, as we typically work in very remote locations that don't see many visitors."

Lewis said it will take at least a year to evaluate the area. "We'll have to assess what habitat is missing, like riffles, pools and bank vegetation," he said.

For Knox, restoring Mill Creek is the best of both worlds: increasing public recreation by means of improving natural resources.

"With various stream improvement projects happening throughout the county, such as Wolf Run at Jefferson Memorial Forest, Floyds Fork near the Parklands and Beargrass Creek, this project is another step in the right direction for the city of Louisville and its local environment," he said. "Even repairing one stretch of Mill Creek will be beneficial." ■



FOREST

A concern for Kentucky

By Lee McClellan



IN THE YEARS before the Civil War, many Kentucky forests held extensive stands of the towering American chestnut tree, particularly in the Appalachian Mountains, the Knobs and large portions of the Pennyroyal region. The delicious nuts produced by the tree inspired holiday songs and provided high quality nutrition for wild turkey, white-tailed deer, black bear and even the passenger pigeon.

Chestnut trees imported into the New York City from Asia in the early 1900s, however, lit a fuse of destruction that still resonates. These trees carried a bark fungus from East Asia called the chestnut blight, which spread like wildfire throughout the nation. The blight reached Kentucky's mountains in the 1920s and spread across the state by the late 1930s, rendering the species functionally extinct in Kentucky by the 1950s.

"The American chestnut was the ulti-

mate tree: fast growing, rot resistant, had good form and were the best tree for wildlife," said Josh Frazier, public lands forester for the Northeast Wildlife Region for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. "It was perfect."

The loss of the chestnuts, combined with disease, pests and poorly planned timber harvesting procedures, have battered Kentucky's forests since the late 1800s.

"Our forest health is poor," said Zak Danks, wild turkey program coordinator for Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. "We have continued to abuse the timber stands."

The need to address forest management on its wildlife management areas compelled the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources to hire Frazier, its first of two dedicated foresters, in 2019. While the department previously had staff with forestry training, their primary roles were as wildlife biologists.



The right side of this image reveals lush forest growth that has occurred after the canopy was opened through thinning. The left side shows less understory growth due to the amount of shade.

HEALTH

JACOB STEWART PHOTO

Chestnut blight was only the first wave of diseases and pests that changed the shape of Kentucky's forests. In the 1930s, Dutch elm disease devastated the American elm. The southern pine beetle outbreak from 1999-2002 cleared pine stands in eastern Kentucky. Emerald ash borers today have left huge swaths of dead ash trees in their wake.

These fungal diseases and pests are incredibly destructive to Kentucky forests now, but pale in comparison to the forest changes

Ash trees throughout Kentucky are being reduced to snags as emerald ash borders girdle the trunks, starving the trees. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife is managing its forests to encourage the growth of replacement oak and hickory trees.



ELLEN CROCKER PHOTOS

Right: An introduced blight that swept across the United States a century ago wiped out Kentucky's native chestnut forests. Chestnuts can still grow from the roots, but blight (evidenced by the orange cankers) kills the tree above ground once it reaches a certain age.



brought from the crosscut saw. The decades following the Civil War saw forests in Kentucky nearly disappear; large scale logging stripped Kentucky's mountains of 99 percent of its forests during this period.

"Earlier generations left behind undesirable trees, then the next generation cut even less quality timber," Danks said. "The future will be even less quality," Danks said.

The timber harvest practice known as "high grading" is taking a toll on the health of forests in Kentucky and throughout the timbered regions of the country. Decades of high grading in timber harvest has degraded the quality of the state's forests.

"High grading is cutting the most valuable trees only," Danks said, "and leaving less desirable trees."

These practices produce conditions that favor red maple, a species less desirable for wildlife. "Red maple is increasing in domi-

nance," Danks said. "If we don't do anything, eventually red maple will dominate. Deer browse red maple, bees use them, but this tree otherwise provides little to no food for wildlife."

Slower growing oaks prefer filtered light; any disturbance in the forest canopy works against them if undesirable species such as red maple are not kept in check.

"It is all about disturbance and light," Frazier explained. "Red maple, beech and black gum grow well under a shady forest canopy. When there is a disturbance to the forest that creates openings in the canopy, these species jump into the canopy to take advantage of the new-found sunlight. In contrast, oaks are less tolerant of shade and are slower growing. They get outcompeted."

White oak is also under tremendous pressure from commercial harvest. The bourbon boom is generating huge demand for mature white oaks trees to make bourbon barrels. Kentucky straight bourbon can only be aged in newly charred oak barrels, with white oak the favorite wood.

"You cannot really blame the landowner," Frazier said. "White oak value is really high. It is going for over \$2 per board foot for barrel stave logs. I thought I would never see prices that high."

Frazier also said the high prices for white oak bleed over into other oak species.

He said chestnut oak is also selling for high prices, and that timber markets across the board are the highest he has seen in his career.

"People cut the 18- to 20-inch white oak and leave the others around it," Danks said. "Once they grow that large, white oaks aren't that good at growing from the roots. If you don't have any sapling oaks to shoot up and grow when the main tree is cut, you are in trouble. If you just cut the good white oak, with none waiting in the wings, there will be no white oak in the future."

The Bourbon Flight Newsletter reported earlier this year that Kentucky's northern Cumberland Plateau still has a significant supply of white oak, but that more than 50 percent of Kentucky's white oak stands are not regenerating.

"You don't have great acorn crops every year," Danks said. "You can't just rely on acorns and those that germi-



BEN ROBINSON PHOTO

GIRDLING

Jim Robinson uses a hatchet to "girdle" an undesirable red maple to help open the forest canopy for more desirable oak and hickory trees. Cutting a ring entirely around a trunk blocks the transfer of nutrition between the leaves and the roots.

ASH SALVAGE HARVEST

Ash trees affected by the emerald ash borer are cut from the forest, allowing the remaining oaks and hickories more daylight to grow.



JACOB STEWART PHOTO





JACOB STEWART PHOTO

PRESCRIBED FIRE

Managed fire burns away leaf litter, giving native plants a better chance of thriving on the forest floor.

nate. Deer eat them and squirrels eat them. With white oaks – unless you plan before you cut with some timber stand improvement and removing less desirable trees – they have a hard time reaching maturity. Sapling oaks need to get 5 to 6 feet tall to compete and establish themselves.”

Frazier explained his current work on wildlife management areas aims to establish multi-age forests to grow for the future. Mixed-aged forests are better for wildlife.

“We have mainly mature forest on our wildlife management areas,” he said. “Right now, we are creating more young forest that provides dense cover for ruffed grouse and a variety of other species. We are working on north-

and east-facing slopes where fast-growing yellow poplar is common, making red maple less of a worry.”

Management goals include more diversity, higher stem densities and more competition for a quality forest stand.

Thinning mid-story trees improves the quality of favorable regeneration of timber stands on wildlife management areas and creates a good environment for young oak trees to thrive.

Current harvest efforts will produce the type of young forests used by a variety of species. What’s next? “We are planning mid-story management on drier oak sites prior to harvest to assure we are regenerating and maintaining our oak stands,” Frazier said.

Danks believes if medium-sized trees brought a higher price, loggers would cut more of those trees and dramatically improve Kentucky’s forest health.

“Our smaller stuff doesn’t get cut because markets are only strong for the bigger white oak, walnut and cherry trees,” Danks said. “We do a lot of good for many species if we could log off more of the smaller diameter, lower value trees and leave some of the bigger trees for wildlife.”

With more enlightened practices, the future forest should look better and provide better habitat for wildlife. ■



One week after herbicide

INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife will use herbicide if necessary to clear unwanted invasive species from the woods, giving more desirable trees more room to grow. At left is the forest one week after application. Four weeks after application (below), the forest is considerably more open.



JACOB STEWART PHOTOS

Four weeks after herbicide

The European Starling

Interesting, adaptable and frustratingly successful

Story by Laura Burford

Illustrations by Rick Hill

Eugene Schieffelin decided America needed all the birds mentioned in the works of playwright William Shakespeare. So, on a cold wintry day in 1890, he released 60-100 starlings in New York City's Central Park. What seemed like a harmless and perhaps even beneficial act at the time instead started a population explosion that resulted in the establishment of one of the worst nuisance birds on the continent.

Currently there are more than 85 million starlings living across North America, ranging north into Canada and Alaska and south into Mexico. These boisterous and crafty birds, natives of Europe, southwest Asia and northern Africa, thrive in human landscapes, frequently causing problems for people and disrupting native bird species.

Starlings are chunky, dark birds with a short tail, triangular wings and a long, pointed beak. In fresh winter plumage, they have dark bills and brown feathers with brilliant white spots that will eventually fade with wear. In summer, breeding adults have bright yellow beaks and feathers that are a glossy, iridescent purple and green.



Accomplished mimics, starlings have extremely complex vocalizations - complete with clicks, rattles and whistles. They also may imitate other birds, including killdeer, meadowlarks, robins and red-tailed hawks, or humans and inanimate objects like alarms and bells.

Starlings are common and widespread. They are typically found in populated areas like cities, suburbs, towns and farms. They congregate in trees and on buildings and power lines, especially during fall and winter. Their larger roosts and the droppings created can be undesirable and problematic in areas frequented by people.

Starlings eat nearly anything, but they prefer insects and invertebrates. They also eat fruits, berries, seed, grains, livestock feed and garbage. They can consume large amounts of grain crops and may cause farmers problems by spreading the seeds of weed species.

Starlings are cavity nesting birds, using holes and crevices to raise their young. They are extremely tenacious and will use just about any cavities they can find in trees, outbuildings and sheds. Starlings are prolific breeders and will often raise three broods in a season. They are extremely aggressive competitors for nesting sites and often outcompete native species. In many cases, they take over the nests of native birds and expel or kill the occupants. They also dominate bird feeders and run off many native species.

Starlings are social birds and form large flocks - sometimes numbering in the thousands - and often congregate with other species of native blackbirds. In flight, starling flocks often move in unison as they swirl and change direction. This behavior, called a murmuration, is used to evade predators, or descend to a feeding ground or roost.





Bridges Hardin caught this smallmouth bass while wading the Elkhorn Creek.



Fishing Forecast Highlights

EVERYONE HAS INDIVIDUAL motives and preferences while on the water. Some folks fly fish, some wade creeks during summer and others have a blast bluegill fishing for dinner off the banks. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources' Fisheries Division creates an annual Fishing Forecast to help anglers be successful during every season. This year, Kentucky Afield showcases opportunities based on access type, including fishing off the bank, with a bow, from a boat and when wading or paddling.

The Fishing Forecast rates fisheries throughout the state. The following areas are a mere handful of top fishing locations in Kentucky highlighted to accompany fisheries biologists' countless hours spent evaluating and managing state waters.

Search online at fw.ky.gov to view information including the full-length 2022 Fishing Forecast, coordinates of underwater Fish Attractor sites and the current Fishing and Boating Guide.

It's a new year, so make it a goal to try something new. Teach someone what you know. Travel somewhere you have never been or search for a species you haven't caught before. Take pictures of fish you

catch and reel in while catching up with someone you've missed – or plan a solo trip just to get out on the water.

Eastern Fisheries District

Wade or paddle Levisa Fork into Fishtrap Lake for smallmouth bass, catfish and white bass.

"There are plenty of places along KY 1499 between Mouthcard and Nigh where people can pull off and fish in the Levisa Fork," said Eastern Fisheries District Biologist Jason Russell. "Once you reach the boundary of Fishtrap Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), all bank access is open to the public."

The Levisa Fork also offers a lengthy float of approximately 8 miles for anglers. "For canoe and paddle access, locals use a road department right-of-way to walk down at the Toonerville Bridge for put in, then take out at the Biggs Bridge at Fishtrap Lake near Nigh, Kentucky," explained Russell.

Fishtrap Lake's white bass, rated excellent in the fishing forecast, move into Levisa Fork during spring. Crappie of 9 to 12

MIKE HARDIN PHOTO

Best bets for fishing from the bank or boat • By Ciara Knisely

inches can be caught throughout the year. Excellent populations of blue and channel catfish are also found within Levisa Fork, where anglers can hand-grab catfish in season or use live bait.

On the main lake, fishing from boats allows anglers to reach more remote habitat.

Be aware of zebra mussels present in this lake and its tributaries. Avoid spreading the invasive species by cleaning all fishing gear and equipment that had been in the water. Drain all water from the boat, including the livewell, and spray off the boat hull and trailer.

Dewey Lake provides bank and boat fishing opportunities for muskellunge, largemouth bass and crappie.

The tailwater offers bank access with restrooms and a picnic area nearby. The lake has ample roadside bank access and is especially good for crappie and catfish. Hand grabbing catfish during the June 1 - Aug. 31 tickling and noodling season is popular in mid-summer.

The main lake is great for blue catfish, flathead catfish, largemouth and bluegill. Muskie can be found following groups of shad and in larger coves.

Northeastern Fisheries District

Kayak fishing is popular at Grayson Lake.

Hybrid striped bass, bluegill and channel catfish are top catches, although the lake also holds flathead catfish, crappie and spotted bass, too.

"It's a pretty cliff-bound area, better for kayaking, utilizing some of the riverine nature of the lake to get away from bigger boats," advised Northeastern Fisheries District Biologist Tom Timmermann.

Crappie stick close to brush piles and fish attractors. Paddle into the lower portion of the lake during summer for great catfish, spotted bass and hybrid striped bass fishing. Fish areas 5- to 6-feet deep for sunfish and along shoreline vegetation for largemouth bass in summer.

Lake Reba offers excellent bank fishing for sunfish and largemouth bass.

Lake Reba is a great option to avoid choppier waters of larger lakes. It is a high-

ly pressured fishery for its smaller size, so finding overlooked areas will prove most successful.

Bank access can be utilized through roadside pull offs in the city park. Bluegill, redear sunfish and largemouth bass are the popular catches. Target the banks and rocky habitat for bluegill; most fish are under 8 inches. Anglers after redear and largemouth will see the best success by fishing deeper waters from a boat.

Cave Run Lake, which features handicap-accessible fishing, is a highly-rated fishery for muskellunge, white bass and spotted bass.

The lake is considered one of the best muskellunge fisheries in the upper south. It has yielded the last several state records, including the current 47-pound record caught in 2008. The Shallow Flats Fishing Access site offers bank fishing and handicapped accessibility.

Fish for muskellunge near gravel banks or channel drop-offs in September and October. Search fish attractors and shoreline habitat for crappie, catfish, spotted bass and sunfish.

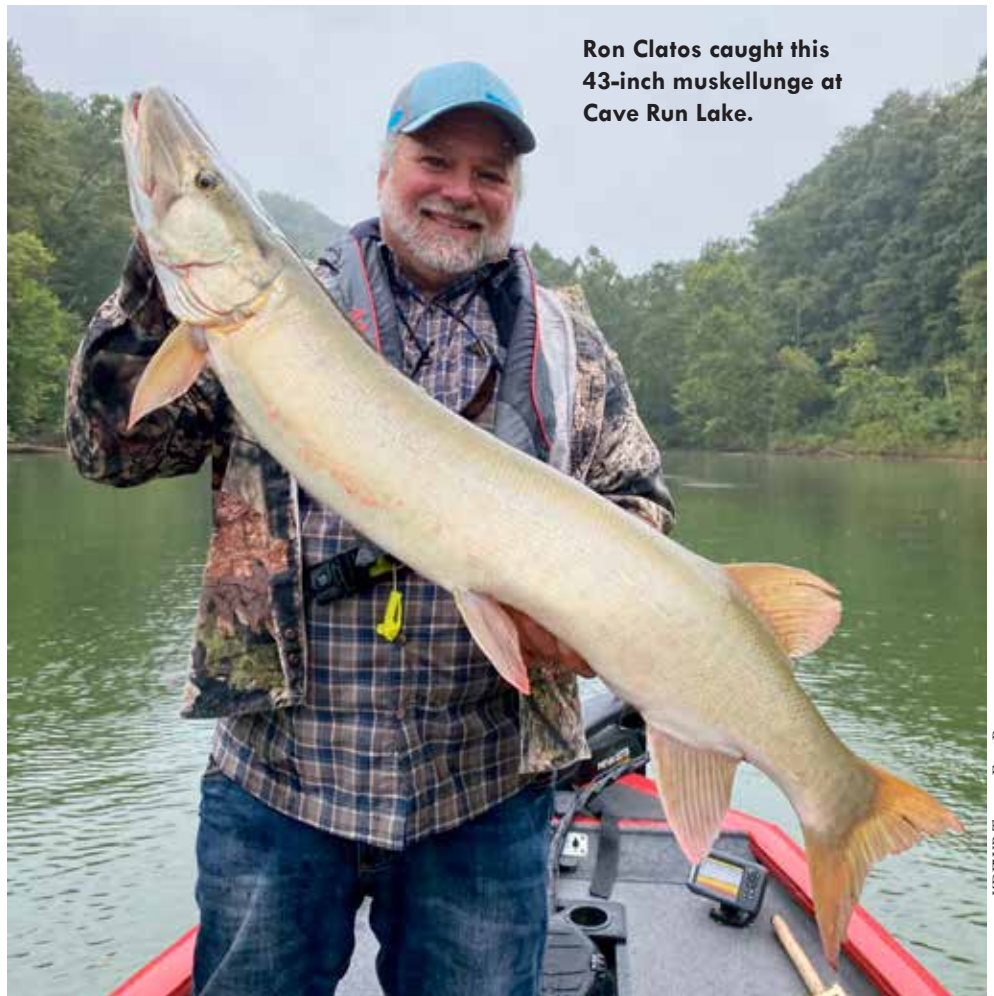
Western Fisheries District

Anglers can fish the Lake Barkley tailwater from the bank; the area is popular for bowfishing from boats as well.

Wintertime bank fishing at the lake tailwaters can make for less pressured fishing. Bank access to the Cumberland River is available near the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office and across the river at the Barkley Dam Boat Ramp site.

Invasive carp (silver, bighead, grass and black carp) are present in Lake Barkley and into the Cumberland River. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife works to reduce negative impacts of these destructive, non-native species and highly encourages their harvest. Anglers should not dump carp carcasses on the bank, however.

Anglers should consider keeping unwanted silver carp to cut up and repurpose as catfish bait. Fresh shad, skipjack or stinkbaits also work well. Fish the bank for channel catfish before summer fully hits. Blue catfish linger around deep channels, so tar-



Ron Clatos caught this 43-inch muskellunge at Cave Run Lake.

KDFWR Trophy Fish Program Photos

get pools that are flowing well for trophies weighing upwards of 50 pounds.

“At places like Lake Barkley, silver carp are so common they might even get tossed into your boat just by choppy water,” said Easton Copley, aquatic education program coordinator for Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. “They’re caught so frequently that many people will simply give them away to fellow anglers.”

The tailwaters boast an up-and-coming population of sauger. Yellow bass are often tossed back, but the area’s booming population bites easily and has no size or creel limits. The current state-record yellow bass was caught here.

Anglers can bank fish or launch boats into Kentucky Lake dam tailwater to experience bowfishing and highly regarded bass fishing.

Two piers near the Kentucky Dam Visitors Center provide access the tailwater. The eastern shoreline has good, rocky riprap habitat.

Fishing techniques will be similar to those at the Lake Barkley tailwaters, especially for carp and catfish. Bowfishing is permitted below Kentucky Dam and makes for an exhilarating fishing experience.

In the tailwater during fall, rocky areas of shoreline are great for largemouth bass fishing. These banks are also good for black crappie in late winter through early spring. Look out for bluegill feasting on hatching mayflies along the shore during summer; fly anglers will find great sport here.

Ideal months for catching blue catfish are April through May, and again from October through November. Channel catfish hug riprap shoreline around the dam as well, but blue catfish outnumber channel cats.

Southwestern Fisheries District

Green River Lake offers trophy fishing from a boat or the bank.

The Holmes Bend Marina and Resort access site offers a fishing pier to the main lake. The lake and its tailwater offer good fishing for muskellunge, walleye and catfish, in addition to spotted, largemouth and smallmouth bass.

Southwestern Fisheries District Biologist Eric Cummins recommends the Ramp 1 access site (also called Site 1) near the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office for its combination of bank access, fishing pier and parking space alongside the boat launch. More bank access is available above the dam at the Green River State Marina.

Sizable bluegill and spotted bass are other possibilities throughout the lake. Fish the Robinson Creek arm for catfish and crappie. Go to the main lake for muskellunge and for potential trophy largemouth bass.

Try Barren River Lake for trophy largemouth bass and fantastic catfish, crappie, hybrid striped bass and yellow bass fishing.

Bank fishing and parking is available at the tailwater near the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office. To avoid overfished

areas and boating traffic, try the Austin Ramp or Browns Ford Ramp access sites.

Largemouth bass fishing peaks mid-summer through autumn; fish caught at Barren River Lake must be 15 inches or larger to keep.

Hybrid striped bass are stocked annually; there are good numbers of fish exceeding 25 inches. Target areas near islands on the main lake; the waters around Bailey’s Point are particularly good. Near the dam in the early morning is another promising spot. The tailwater of Barren River Lake produced the current 20-pound state record hybrid striper.

Anglers can fish at night for catfish. Large blue, channel and flathead catfish are best fished for near creek channels. Target crappie near fish attractors or around habitat structures deeper in channels. The lake is also an excellent source of yellow bass.

Southeastern Fisheries District

Bank fishing and wading the Lake Cumberland tailwater offers a successful day for experienced and beginning anglers alike.

Southeast Fisheries District Biologist Marcy Anderson noted that anglers can catch many trout while wading below Wolf Creek Dam at the end of Ray Mann Road near Little Indian Creek. The tailwater also offers good fishing for striped bass, sauger and walleye.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife annually stocks rainbow, brown, brook and cutthroat trout into the Cumberland River tailwater. Good-sized rainbow trout are plentiful. Catching brown trout larger than 20 inches is possible, although the species is in lower density. The department first stocked cutthroat trout in 2019 and again in 2021.

The tailwater is home to four state records: a 7-pound sauger, 21-pound brown trout, 14-pound rainbow trout and 3.5-pound brook trout.

Check the generating schedule of Wolf Creek Dam beforehand as water levels change daily and are not always conducive for wading. The daily generating schedule and lake levels can be found on the Tennessee Valley Authority’s website and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Nashville District website.



Kyle Wilmoth caught this 7-pound largemouth bass in Green River Lake.

Davina Davis and her 11.5-inch redear sunfish caught in Cedar Creek Lake.



KDFWR TROPHY FISH PROGRAM PHOTO

Cedar Creek Lake is a top fishery for panfish and trophy largemouth bass with several designated bank fishing access sites.

Access at the lake includes a fishing pier, three boat ramps and two carry-down only access sites for paddlers. “There’s lots of parking at the main (lower) boat ramp and at the ramp off Old KY 150. There’s good bank fishing on the grassy area near the dam,” Anderson said.

A 300-foot buffer around the lake allows anglers plenty of public access along the shoreline. Submerged trees can create challenges when casting, but high numbers of largemouth bass and bluegill make it worthwhile. There is a one fish, 20-inch minimum size requirement on largemouth bass.

Target aquatic plant stands on lake flats using mealworms for shellcrackers, or redear sunfish larger than 10 inches. While Cedar Creek Lake was built with an abundance of fish attractors, Anderson said efforts are now being made to add more habitat closer to the shoreline.

Lake Linville offers bluegill bank fishing, boating access and a unique variety of fish species.

Popular catches include bluegill, spotted bass, hybrid striped bass, largemouth bass and channel catfish. Fish the banks for bluegill in the spring and summer using crickets or redworms.

“Being a smaller lake it’s a great fishery for families,” said Anderson. “There’s plenty of bank access for easy bluegill fishing. Something cool about Lake Linville is its yellow perch population, which you don’t see too often in Kentucky.”

Hybrid striped bass range from 10 to 14 inches, with some larger fish available. Channel catfish are stocked in even-numbered years.

It’s another great lake for kayak fishing as

well. From boats, anglers will have more luck fishing near habitat structures such as vegetated coves. Boat ramp access and parking is available year-round at the Lake Linville Boat Dock.

Central Fisheries District

Elmer Davis Lake offers a fishing pier, two boat ramps and opportunities for larger-sized fish.

The lake’s largemouth bass, bluegill and redear sunfish populations received excellent ratings. Others praise its crappie fishing. There’s also unique potential for warmouth.

The lake has benefitted from recent habitat work. In February 2022, fisheries crews placed 3,000 donated Christmas trees into the lake. “We

put them in strategically, based on past locations and need,” said Jeff Crosby, Central Fisheries District biologist. “On Elmer Davis we’ve placed habitat near the pier for anglers without boats.”

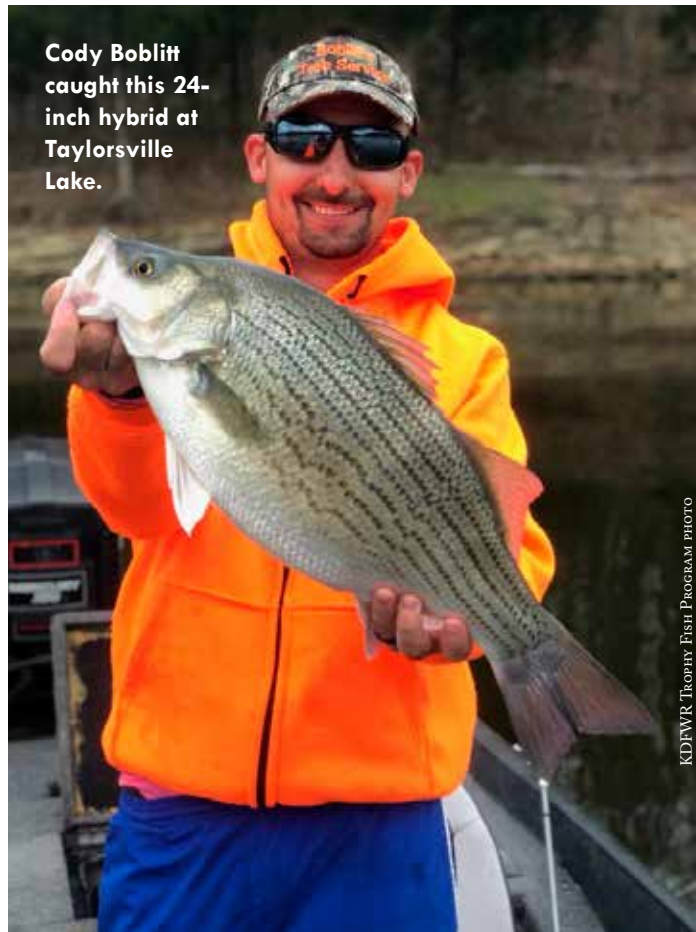
Anglers have success catching redear and crappie from these submerged trees. “Shellcrackers,” or redear, larger than 10 inches are potential catches. Crosby expects a good crappie spawn from two years ago to increase numbers of larger fish this year.

Central Fisheries District biologist David Baker noticed a growing population of nice-sized warmouth during annual fish sampling. “Sonar comes in handy. Cast near fish attractors as well for warmouth, such as stocked Christmas trees, beaver habitat, weed beds or woody brush,” he said.

Taylorsville Lake offers bank access and several boat ramps for a well-rounded fishing trip.

Anglers typically head to Taylorsville Lake for crappie, bass, saugeye, bluegill, catfish and spring runs of white bass. Saugeye and hybrid striped bass are also stocked annually at the lake. Year-round bank access is available at the tailwater and at the Possum Ridge boat ramp, inside Taylorsville Lake State Park. The lake has five additional ramps so boaters can easily reach the main lake flats.

Cody Boblitt caught this 24-inch hybrid at Taylorsville Lake.



KDFWR TROPHY FISH PROGRAM PHOTO

During spring and fall, the Salt River headwaters host runs of hybrid striped bass and white bass. Approximately two miles of seasonal bank access to the Salt River is available on Taylorsville Lake Wildlife Management Area via River Road.

Crosby expects 2019's outstanding crappie spawn to provide good numbers of fish over 10 inches in the lake this year. To catch the lake's highly rated largemouth bass and bluegill, target timbered coves.

For channel and flathead catfish, use live bait along shoreline points near river or creek channels. The small coves on either side of the Possum Ridge ramp are good examples of catfish habitat. Use live bait over open waters for blue catfish. Some fish are larger than 40 inches, so prepare for a fight.

Elkhorn Creek is prized for its scenic Bluegrass views and smallmouth bass angling.

Fish along the banks, from a kayak or canoe, or by wading into the creek for a history-packed stream-fishing experience. Wading limits fishing gear to whatever can be conveniently carried on hand.

Many anglers "wet-leg" the creek when waters are warm enough at this highly rated smallmouth bass fishery. Don't wear open sandals if you wade. Wading boots or old tennis shoes offer more protection against rocks or debris.

Along the main stem, anglers can catch good numbers of smallmouth; some fish can exceed 16 inches. In spring, fool trophy contenders by casting from the bank with live crayfish, a minnow or a Ned rig.

Local angler Mike Hardin and his son, Bridges, caught several oversized smallmouths in early May by using live crayfish seined from the creek.

"It was just warm enough to skip wearing heavier wading gear. We especially like wet-legging because nearby fish might get spooked by sensing vibrations from footsteps on the banks. Wading gives a bit more sound-cover," Hardin said. "We caught all the day's fish within five feet of the bank."

The Elkhorn is a heavily visited paddling destination, so it's best to fish early or late if you're fishing on foot. The creek is best fished via kayak or canoe due to limited public access.

Anglers can catch quality rock bass, as well as channel and flathead catfish, in bigger pools of the main stem.

Northwestern Fisheries District

Carpenter Lake offers bank fishing and boating access for saugeye, catfish and trophy largemouth bass.

Offshore fish habitat near a handicapped-accessible fishing pier plus gravel jetties provide great bank opportunities, noted Northwestern Fisheries District Biologist Jeremy Shiflet.

Fish these spots for channel catfish with a nightcrawler or chicken liver underneath a bobber. For largemouth bass, bank anglers should try plastic worms and creature baits around woody structures in 2- to 6-feet of water.

Boaters should go deeper for larger fish. Target the lake bottom or near the dam at night for catfish exceeding 20 inches. Use shad-imitating lures to draw out bass 18 inches and larger.

The lake also has a good population of saugeye. "We stocked saugeye in Carpenter Lake during the past three years. During sampling last fall, we found some fish up to 19 inches," said Maddy Ruble, Northwestern Fisheries District biologist.

At Nolin River Lake, fishing from a boat can dish out coveted catches year-round.

Fishing at Nolin River Lake varies with the water levels. "Being a flood control reservoir, Nolin's water level fluctuates widely. Anglers need to be highly adaptable and willing to try different locations, baits and tactics," said Shiflet.

Largemouth bass, white bass, crappie and walleye are most sought-after by anglers. "In general, spring and fall are preferred fishing periods," Shiflet noted. "Summertime brings a tremendous amount of recreational boating traffic. Early morning is the best time to fish and avoid boaters during the summer."

Crappie especially linger around fish habitat structures. Try shallow and rocky banks in late winter through early spring. In summer and fall, fish woody brush and standing timber in 12-18 feet of water. Fish for white bass and walleye at night under lights in summer using jiggging spoons or live minnows.

Most anglers associate white bass fishing as only seasonal, but the lake holds many good-sized fish that are active throughout summer. Fish the upper section of the lake during spring spawning runs and move to main lake points in hotter months. ■



Nolin River Lake yielded this 15-inch crappie for Mary Stickler.

KDFWR TROPHY FISH PROGRAM PHOTO



Fish & Wildlife

OUT-DOOR NEWS

The rainbow darter is one of Kentucky's most colorful and visually pleasing fish species. They inhabit shallow riffles in streams from the Land Between The Lakes eastward, except in the Tradewater and much of the lower Green River basin.

Rick Hill illustration



Compiled by Dave Baker, Ciara Knisely and Lee McClellan



Stripers are 1.5 inches long when stocked.

LEE MCCLELLAN PHOTO

Department stocking more striped bass in Lake Cumberland

THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT of Fish and Wildlife Resources is significantly increasing the number of striped bass stocked in Lake Cumberland.

For years, the department stocked the lake annually with 350,000 striped bass. Every third year, the department would bump the number to half a million. Increased stockings will now occur every year to help fill gaps in the year classes.

"We are going to stock 500,000 stripers every year for the foreseeable future," said Jeff Ross, assistant director for the Fisheries Division of Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. "We will start the stockings this year in June."

Ross said the stocked striped bass will average about 1.5 inches in length.

Southeastern Fisheries District Biologist Marcy Anderson, who oversees the lake's fishery management, said while the numbers of big fish are peaking, there are size distribu-

tion gaps.

"We had a record catch rate of fish over 25 inches in our fall sampling for striped bass last year," she said. "The 2018 and 2019 year classes were really low and it is obvious these years are missing in the population."

Ross said the gap exists in fish measuring from 22-25 inches.

The record pool level in February of 2019 of 756.52 feet above mean sea level may have impacted the striped bass stocked in 2018.

"Some of that year's class could've gone into the tailwater during the record lake levels," Anderson said. "Growth rates of the striped bass in the lake were really good last year and there is good number of fish just under the size limit. Those fish should be growing into the size limit this year and into next year."

There is a 22-inch minimum size limit and two-fish daily creel limit on striped bass in Lake Cumberland.

Special deer regulations extended for Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman and Marshall counties

FIVE COUNTIES IN western Kentucky will remain under special regulations for deer disease monitoring during the 2022-23 seasons.

Last year, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources established a special Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Surveillance Zone in Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman and Marshall counties after a deer nearby in Tennessee tested positive for the disease. CWD is a disease fatal to deer and elk.

While the disease has not been found in Kentucky, special regulations designed to help Kentucky Fish and Wildlife detect and contain any potential spread of CWD have been continued this year. Surveillance zones may be expanded if CWD spreads to new areas; the latest information is posted online at fw.ky.gov/cwd.

Disease monitoring regulations in place this season in the special zone include:

- Mandatory CWD Check Stations for select dates during modern gun season.
- No feeding or baiting of deer at any time in the CWD Surveillance Zone.
- No transportation of harvested deer or their intact heads out of the CWD Surveillance Zone.

Inclusion in the surveil-

lance zone does not change the county's deer seasons or bag limits.

Hunter participation is vital to disease monitoring efforts. To obtain an adequate sample size for testing, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife is operating 13 mandatory, in-person check stations within the CWD Surveillance Zone. The 2022-23 Kentucky Hunting Guide includes a map of locations.

All deer harvested in Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman and Marshall counties by any method during the following dates in 2022 must be brought to a CWD Check Station for sampling:

- Nov. 12-14 (Saturday-Monday)
- Nov. 19-21 (Saturday-Monday)
- Nov. 26-27 (Saturday-Sunday)

Check stations will only operate on these dates. There is no mandatory deer check station requirement outside of these dates.

Archery hunters, muzzle-loader hunters and landowners hunting on their own property also must bring their deer to a check station during these dates. All deer should be telechecked before coming to the check station.

Check stations will operate from 9 a.m. - 7 p.m. (Central). Hunters may bring in an intact



Check stations return this season

CHASE WININGER PHOTO

deer carcass, a field-dressed deer or just the head of the deer for sampling at a check station.

Any hunter wanting their deer tested at no cost can use a self-serve Voluntary Deer Sample Collection Site. Go online to fw.ky.gov/cwd for a map of sites. Only the deer head is needed for sampling; instructions, bags and tags are located at each sampling site.

Special regulations in these five counties also prohibit the use of grain or mineral blocks to bait deer. This helps prevent deer from concentrating, which increases spread of disease. Bird feeders in yards, planted food plots and normal agricultural practices, including mineral blocks or feed for cattle, are

allowed. Hunters can still use scent attractors.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife no longer requires a special carcass tag for deer harvested in the CWD Surveillance Zone. However, hunters must still immediately complete their harvest log prior to moving the carcass and telecheck their deer by midnight on the day of harvest.

Carcasses or high-risk parts of deer harvested within the CWD Surveillance Zone may not be taken outside of the zone. Only de-boned meat, antlers, antlers attached to a clean skull cap, a clean skull, clean teeth, hides and finished taxidermy products may be taken out of the CWD Surveillance Zone.

The eastern kingbird often perches on wire fences to wait for an insect to fly past. Many rural Kentuckians refer to these insect-eating birds as “bee martins.” Eastern kingbirds know no fear; they will attack much larger birds that invade their territory, including crows, great blue herons and red-tailed hawks.

Woods and Water Law Quiz

Test your knowledge of Kentucky's boating regulations. Do you know the answers to the following questions?

1. You just bought your first boat and plan a trip to Kentucky Lake this summer. A friend of yours said to remember "red, right, returning" when dealing with the red and green channel marker buoys on the lake. Does that mean you always keep the red buoy on your right?
2. Do you have the right-of-way on a lake if you're driving a motorboat and you meet a kayak?
3. Your inexperienced brother roared into a marina's No Wake Zone at full speed before realizing his mistake and dropping to idle speed. He threw a huge wake, causing boats moored in the marina to rock violently. Is he responsible for any damage caused by this huge wake?
4. You're a little confused about boating regulations and rules of the water. Where can you learn more?

(answers on page 32)

Pay with plastic at Barkley, Cumberland and Dale Hollow lake campgrounds

THOSE USING CAMPGROUNDS and other facilities at the eight lakes in the Nashville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will now have a cashless pay system for the 2022 recreational season.

The District installed 19 Ven Tek machines to collect admission fees and issues passes without manning a booth. These machines feature both English and Spanish and take all debit and credit cards.

The machines also take fees for services such as firewood, pay

showers, camping management, tours and some boat ramp fees.

The Ven Tek machines were part of a COVID-19 related risk mitigation mandate. The machines free up staff time for other activities. Park rangers spent considerable time pulling each collection box, counting the cash and money orders and validating fees.

The Nashville District lakes in Kentucky with Ven Tek machines are Lake Barkley, Lake Cumberland and Dale Hollow Lake.



KEVIN REXROAT PHOTO

Department builds courtesy dock at Barren River Lake

BOATERS HAVE A better place to dock thanks to a partnership between Barren River Lake State Resort Park and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

The state park had an issue with a failing courtesy dock. They needed some expertise to replace it. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife's experienced engineering crews evaluated the site and determined how to solve the problem. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife agreed to build it if Parks paid for the project.

Work got underway during the last winter drawdown. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife crews tore out the old dock and replaced it with a temporary structure while additional work was underway.

To improve the structure, crews excavated the site to make it more user friendly, poured concrete anchor points for pivots, installed a new courtesy dock then improved the road at the ramp to improve usability. The dock is now in use.

Anglers in Kentucky had some colorful names for fish species back in the day, as seen in the pages of *The Happy Hunting Ground* magazine, the predecessor to *Kentucky Afield* magazine.

In the 1940s and 1950s, anglers often called walleye "Jack Salmon" or "Wall Eyed-pike" and referred to their cousin the sauger as a "Sand Pike." They called rock bass "Goggle Eye" and channel catfish "Fiddler Cat."

Life jacket loaner program expands

THE LIFE JACKET LOANER Program recently expanded to Lake Reba in Richmond. This program promotes construction of kiosks with life jackets available to loan near public waters, providing boaters with free access to these lifesaving devices.

The life jacket loaner station at Lake Reba is named in honor of Emanuel “Manny” Prewitt, a 17-year-old student at Madison Central High School who drowned in Herrington Lake in June 2020. He was not wearing a life jacket.

The loaner program began in June 2021 as an effort to make Kentucky’s waterways safer. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife provides signage, life jackets and building plans for the loaner stations. Public agencies or citizens groups get the necessary materials to build the kiosk, following the specifications provided by the department.

For example, the White Mills Civic League partnered with Kentucky Fish and Wildlife to build a life jacket loaner station at White Mills on the Nolin River in Hardin County last fall.

In addition to the kiosks at Lake Reba and White Mills, there are now stations at Beaver Lake in Anderson County, Romanza Park and Phil Moore Park on Drakes Creek near Bowling Green, Mill Creek Lake in Tompkinsville and the Middle Ramp on Cedar Creek Lake in Lincoln County.

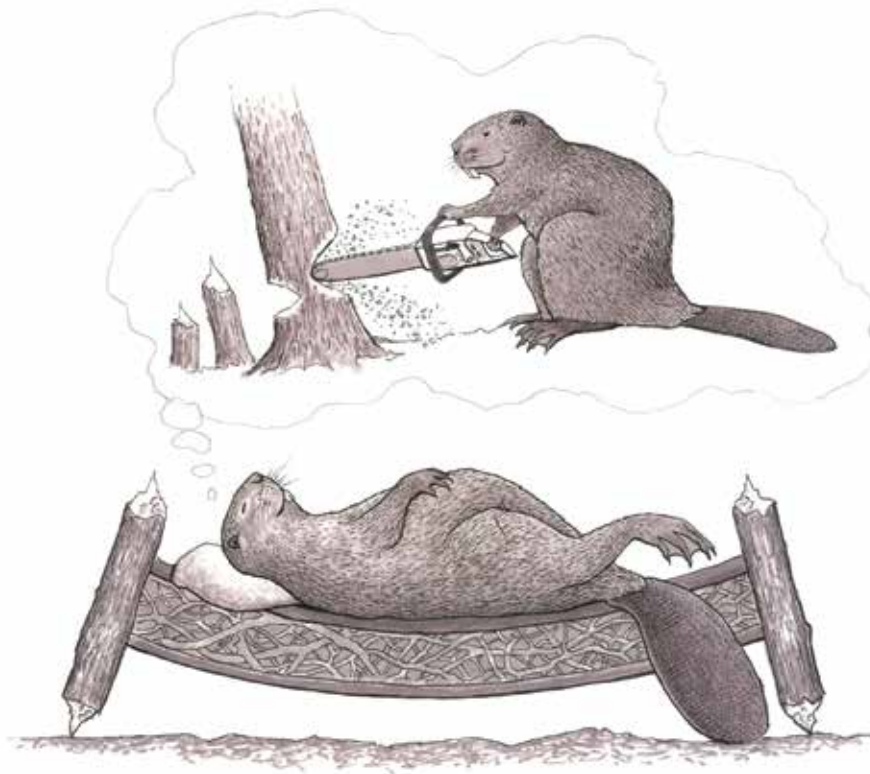
More life jacket loaner stations are planned for Webster, Allen and Jefferson counties. For more information on the Life Jacket Loaner Program, visit the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife website at fw.ky.gov.



RACHEL CUMMINGS PHOTO

Kelly Prewitt, mother of drowning victim Manny Prewitt, cuts the ribbon on the newest Life Jacket Loaner Station in Madison County.

NATURE HILL-USTRATED • By Rick Hill



SAWING LOGS

Conservation officer receives recognition in Congressional Record for assisting shot state trooper

KENTUCKY CONSERVATION OFFICER Samantha Faoro recently received Congressional recognition for her efforts to save a Kentucky state trooper who'd been gunned down during a traffic stop.

The incident occurred on Jan. 28, 2022. Faoro was patrolling in the Cynthiana area when she heard gunshots in the distance. From monitoring the police radio, she knew that a Kentucky state trooper was engaged in a traffic stop in the vicinity.

Then, the radio confirmed the worst fears of any police officer. "I heard the trooper come on and say he was hit,"

Faoro said.

The conservation officer was about two miles away. She did not hesitate to hurry to the



DAVE BAKER PHOTO

U.S. Senator Dr. Rand Paul, far left, honors Kentucky State Trooper Michael Sanguigni II and Conservation Officer Samantha Faoro.

U.S. Senator Dr. Rand Paul came to the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife headquarters campus to present the two officers with copies of the Congressional Record document forever honoring

their courage.

"We're really thankful for the people who are willing to risk their lives every day – doing something that seems really mundane – (but) at one point turns into something incredibly dangerous," Paul said. "We're very lucky that Officer Faoro was there so quickly and was able to take care of him. We want to thank you for being there."

"I'm a firm believer that God puts you where you're supposed to be. I think that's why we're here today to have something positive to talk about," Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Rich Storm said during a ceremony honoring Faoro. "You protect and conserve the resources of our state – and keep our communities safe. We're grateful for your service."

Faoro, who comes from a family of law enforcement officers, is a native of Colorado who graduated from the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Academy in 2021.

scene, not knowing if the assailant was still around. "It felt like forever," Faoro told Lexington's Fox56 news station. "The first thing that went through my mind was, 'Oh crap.' The second thing was, 'Get to him.' No matter where he was at, get to him and get another officer to the scene to get what he needed."

Kentucky State Trooper Michael Sanguigni II had been shot six times. His ballistic vest stopped three bullets, his equipment stopped two more, but one shot had entered his body. Sanguigni was able to stand and talk to Faoro, but he was clearly in need of immediate medical attention.

"I tried to get an ambulance there, but when I couldn't get a response that an ambulance would be there soon, I put him in my truck and drove him to the hospital myself," Faoro said.

Sanguigni still wore a sling during a ceremony nearly two months later to honor his bravery and the actions of Faoro.

Woods and Water Law Quiz Answers

1. No. "Red, right, returning" is an old naval term referring to vessels returning from sea into navigable rivers. This means vessel operators should keep the red buoys on the right while traveling upstream of a river and "returning" from the sea. Boaters navigating waters with red and green channel buoys should keep the red buoy on the right when traveling upstream or up lake (away from the dam), and on the left when returning down river or down lake.
2. No. Paddle-powered craft such as kayaks, canoes and rowboats have the right-of-way over motorboats.
3. Yes, boat operators are liable for any damage or injuries caused by their boat's wake.
4. Check the current Kentucky Fishing and Boating Guide, or go online to fw.ky.gov. Search under the keywords, "boater education."

Kentucky Hunters for the Hungry 2021 impact

THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT of Fish and Wildlife Resources annually partners with a variety of organizations dedicated to the responsible use of natural resources, especially wild game. In 2021, the statewide hunger relief program Kentucky Hunters for the Hungry assisted in the donation of 1,900 harvested deer processed and distributed to foodbanks throughout the state.

According to Kentucky Hunters for the Hungry, one in



every four Kentucky children lives in poverty. The non-profit, volunteer-run organization's mission aims to alleviate hunger and malnutrition by collecting donations of venison and co-

ordinating with volunteer deer processors.

"In 2021 we were able to distribute 294,600 meals," said Roger LaPointe, Kentucky Hunters for the Hungry Executive Director. A single harvested deer provides an average of 40 pounds of venison.

The process of donating deer harvests to the program includes the usual telecheck, proper field dressing and counts toward a hunter's total bag limit for the season. Kentucky Hunt-

ers for the Hungry pays for the venison processing; hunters simply drop off the donation at an approved processor.

In conjunction with the department, Kentucky Hunters for the Hungry coordinates the "Kentucky Whitetail Access" program, a free service that connects interested hunters with local landowners volunteering their land for deer hunting. The program is often used as deer population management for landowners.

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Fisheries

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- Kentucky Lake Tailwater
- Lake Barkley
- Lake Barkley Tailwater
- Lake Beshear

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- Rough River Lake
- Nolin River Lake

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- Yatesville Lake
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- Martins Fork Lake
- Carr Creek Lake
- Buckhorn Lake

SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT

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- Lake Cumberland Tailwater
- Laurel River Lake
- Cedar Creek Lake

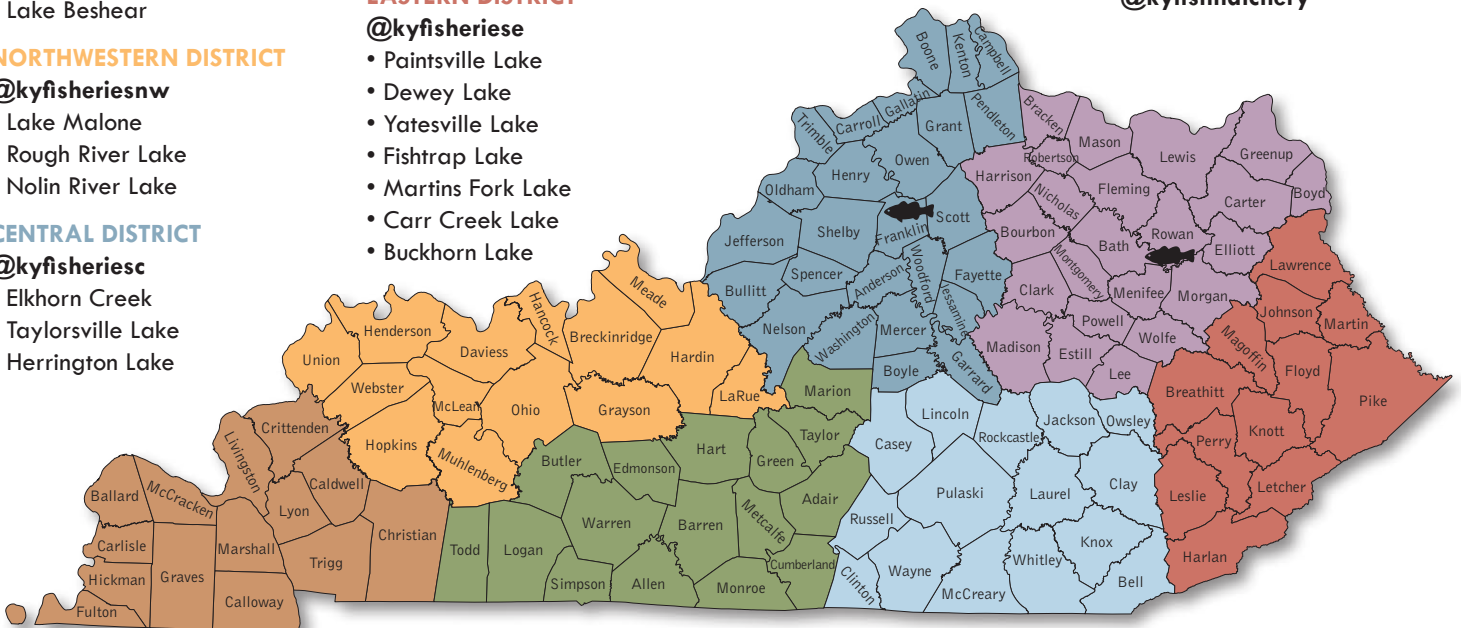
SOUTHWESTERN DISTRICT

@kyfisheriessw

- Green River Lake
- Barren River Lake

HATCHERIES

@kyfishhatchery





INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds trout filets
- 1 tablespoon salt-free seasoning blend
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 4 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons parsley, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Sprinkle seasoning and salt on top of fish filets. In a large skillet, heat olive oil on medium heat until hot, but not smoking. Add fish to skillet. Cook 3-5 minutes, or until lightly browned on bottom. Flip fish and cook for an additional 2 minutes. Remove filets from skillet and place in a covered dish. Place in oven, then make sauce.

Add garlic powder and lemon juice to the oil already in the pan. Stir and cook over medium heat for 2 minutes. Remove from heat, then stir in butter and parsley. Stir until butter is melted and sauce is creamy. Remove fish from oven. Check for doneness.

It should flake easily with a fork; internal temperature should be at least 145 degrees. Put fish on plates and pour sauce over filets.

Nutrition per 4 oz serving: 450 calories; 28g total fat; 7g saturated fat; 0g transfat; 145mg cholesterol; 310mg sodium; 1g total carbohydrate; 0g dietary fiber; 0g sugars; 47g protein; 45% DV vitamin D; 8% DV calcium; 20% DV iron; 20% DV potassium.

Trout with Herb Sauce



PHOTO © UK COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Cook Wild Kentucky is a collaboration of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Nutrition Education Program and its partners, Hunters for the Hungry, Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Feeding Kentucky, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other local county collaborators. Together, we are helping to remove food insecurity barriers through wild game. This institution is an equal opportunity provider. This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP.



University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service





Old Trace Creek WMA

OLD TRACE CREEK derives its name from the stream's proximity to a prong of Athiamiowee, a Shawnee term meaning "Path of the Armed Ones." Pioneers also called it the "Warrior's Path." The path was a "trace," or trail, carved by migrating buffalo, elk and deer. Native Americans used it as well.

The Shawnee traveled south on the trace while the Cherokee traveled north on it through Kentucky. Enemies for generations, these rivals regularly used this route to attack one another.

The area's history inspired the name of Old Trace Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Lewis County. This area recently doubled in size with the addition of the 400-acre Staggs Branch tract.

"It is almost identical to what you'll find on the original Old Trace Creek WMA," said Nathan Gregory, coordinator for the Northeast Wildlife Region of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. "The Staggs Branch property is just down the road from Old Trace Creek."

The Staggs Branch tract is roughly 95 percent forested with stands of oak and hickory. It features moderately steep slopes and flat ridges covered in hardwoods.

Staggs Branch is small tributary to Grassy Fork. Downstream, it flows into Laurel Fork, which then joins Kinniconick Creek. The main stem of Kinniconick Creek is one of Kentucky's historic muskellunge streams.

"The area holds good deer, wild turkey and squirrels," Gregory said. "There is a possibility for some upland birds such as



ruffed grouse."

The Staggs Branch tract, like the original section of Old Trace Creek WMA, is open under statewide regulations for hunting.

Monies from the Kentucky Stream and Wetland Mitigation Fees-In-Lieu Of (FILO) program paid for the acquisition. The FILO program restores sections of streams as mitigation from impacts to other streams in a particular river drainage.

Jessie Boles, Stream Team Engineer for the FILO program, said the department purchased the property as part of its ongoing effort to restore Staggs Branch and its tributaries.

Boles said the design process for the Staggs Branch restoration is underway; actual digging probably will not take place for several more years. The Staggs Branch restoration is mitigation for impacts to another stream in the Big Sandy River Service Area.

Meanwhile the department has been working to control invasive plant species there. "We started treating the property for invasive species to get a head start before the property opened to the public,"

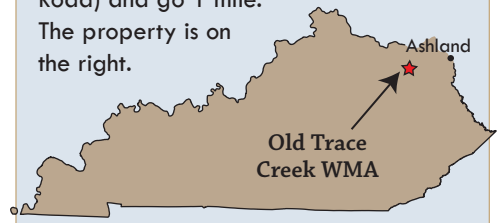
Boles explained.

Plans call for a gravel parking lot on the new section to provide better public access. One section of the WMA will remain closed until a public right-of-way is obtained. For more information on the area, go online to fw.ky.gov, then search under the keywords, "Old Trace Creek." ■

HOW TO GET THERE

From I-64, take Exit 156. Turn left, then take another left almost immediately onto KY 59. Travel approximately 6 miles; the parking area for the first tract is on the right. For the second tract, continue on KY 59, then turn left onto Old Trace Creek Road (Old Trace Hill Road) and go 1 mile.

The property is on the right.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Q Is this an immature timber rattlesnake?

A This is a young Eastern hog-nosed snake. The colors in adult hog-nosed snakes are variable; some are completely black, brown or khaki green, while others may have dark squares or crossbands on a bright yellow, orange, brown or reddish background color.

Oddly enough, juveniles are grayish to tan or cream-colored with brown saddles and all look pretty much alike; the adult colors slowly develop as they grow larger.

Eastern hog-nosed snakes mostly feed on toads, but they will also eat frogs, salamanders, young mice and even moles. While these snakes have saliva that will paralyze their amphibian prey, they are completely harmless to humans and pets.

The Eastern hognose even has a pair of enlarged rear teeth or “fangs.” It uses these to puncture and deflate any toad or frog that has puffed itself up with air to avoid being swallowed (kind of like letting some air out of an over-inflated tire).

Eastern hog-nosed snakes are found statewide in Kentucky. They spend most of their time hiding and are not often seen. I usually find them in open fields.

An Eastern hognose usually puts on a good show when you first run across it. The snake flattens its head and neck like a cobra and produces a loud hissing sound. Sometimes it opens his mouth very wide and lunges at you.

If this doesn't scare you away, it might



Eastern hog-nosed snake hatchling

JOHN MACGREGOR PHOTOS

suddenly go into convulsions, writhe around on its back and pretend to die a horrible and painful death. While all this is just a bluff, it usually gets it killed by a human.

Some interesting and colorful names used for the Eastern hognose around Kentucky include blowing viper, spread-head and puff adder.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife is interested in adding any records of hog-nosed snakes to its database. If you see a hog-nosed snake, send an email to John.MacGregor@ky.gov and include the date, county and exact location where you found the snake. This can include GPS coordinates, address or road directions. All personal information will be kept confidential – and no salesman will call!



Upper “fangs” puncture and deflate frogs



Adults inflate their necks to look fearsome

JOHN MACGREGOR

Herpetologist - Nongame Program



DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR OUR BIOLOGISTS OR STAFF?

Just e-mail us at ky.afield@ky.gov or write to: Ask the Experts, c/o Kentucky Afield Magazine, 1 Sportsman's Lane, Frankfort, Ky. 40601. You'll receive a free one-year subscription or renewal if we use your question. You cannot win more than one free subscription a year.



PHOTOS COURTESY RICK HILL

Artist Rick Hill (wearing glasses), shown with son Clinton, honored his family by turkey hunting with his heirloom shotguns.

Family Tradition

THE ARTWORK OF Kentucky Fish and Wildlife staff artist Rick Hill graces the cover of each issue of Kentucky Afield magazine. His extraordinarily detailed depictions have included images of a smallmouth bass in a stream about to attack a lure and snow geese gliding against a grey winter sky in western Kentucky.

Hill also owns three incredible vintage shotguns: a 1939 L.C. Smith 16-gauge side-by-side, a 1958 Fox-Savage 16-gauge and a 1956 Browning A5 Sweet Sixteen semi-auto.

“They belonged to my uncles,” Hill said. “They first took me fishing when I was 7 or 8 years old. I continued hunting and fishing with them for the rest of their lives. My uncles, especially my mother’s brothers – Thomas and James Gootee – were big sportsmen.”

Hill remembers listening to his uncles as they told hunting stories while cleaning their guns at Thanksgiving and Christmas. “I would hang on every word,” he recalled. “I remember the sweet smell of Hoppe’s #9

solvent. It smelled like hunting.”

That the Browning survives to this day is somewhat of a miracle. That’s because two of Hill’s uncles were duck hunting on the flooded Nolin River when their boat struck a tree limb and capsized. Both of their guns, including the Browning, sank to the bottom.

Hill’s father had a friend who was a diver. Once the river dropped low, the friend managed to retrieve both shotguns.

In 2020, Hill decided to honor his uncles by taking a wild turkey with each of the family shotguns. “I had used them for dove

hunting, but not turkey,” he said. “I wanted to do this as a tribute to my uncles since they introduced me to hunting.”

These venerable shotguns had no modern choke tubes, red dots or camo paint. “It is neat to hunt turkeys like they used to do,” he said. “There were no magnums back then, just 2¾-inch shells. I took three turkeys with these old shells.”

His first score was a large gobbler taken with the Fox-Savage while hunting with his son, Clinton, during the 2020 spring turkey season. In the fall of 2021, a jake succumbed to the Browning Sweet Sixteen. The third fell to the L.C. Smith during the 2022 spring turkey season.

“I took a big gobbler with the L.C. Smith while hunting with my son, Clinton,” Hill said. “After I got mine, I handed the gun to Clinton. He got a jake with it a few minutes later.”

Time has flown since Hill’s uncles passed away. But for Hill, time stands still when he shoulders his family heirlooms. ■

WHAT’S YOUR STORY?

Share your favorite story and photo of a good day outdoors with the readers of Kentucky Afield. Email us at ky.afield@ky.gov. If we use your story, you’ll receive a free one-year subscription to Kentucky Afield.

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In the past five years, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife employees and community volunteers have placed approximately 21,000 fish attractors at nearly 900 sites to provide better fishing opportunities for anglers. Your purchase of fishing and hunting licenses helps make this possible.

fw.ky.gov



Support the great outdoors. Buy your license today.