



GREAT PLAINS
REGION

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STATE CONSERVATION REPORT 2020

////// **Kansas** //////////////////////////////////////

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Together we can do more!

By Matt Hough, Manager of Conservation Programs, KS

We had another strong year in Kansas as we conserve habitat for migratory birds. With early setbacks due to high water, drying conditions later in the year allowed us to catch up on public and private land projects.

Our diverse work across the state included adding new pumping infrastructure, installing levees, building water-control structures, removing sediment,



Matt Hough

recontouring wetland topography, improving grazing management capabilities and repair work. We also assisted our partners on multiple projects to improve habitat and public access through leases and acquisitions.

We have a new focus we call People Projects, where we work with nontraditional partners on wetland projects in more populated areas than we have historically worked. With this strategy, we hope to create awareness of the multiple benefits wetlands provide, including groundwater recharge, improving water quality and reducing flood impacts. We are focusing our playa conservation efforts on specific communities where groundwater recharge is essential for long-term sustainability of local drinking water supplies. With robust partnerships, we have submitted multiple grants to focus these conservation efforts where they can benefit communities in Greeley and Wichita counties. We anticipate seeing new opportunities for People Projects in eastern Kansas where wetlands can help improve communities.

We continue to expand our private lands work to areas where landowners are requesting our assistance. This work includes Farm Bill program delivery in the playa region and large-scale engineering contracts around Quivira, Cheyenne Bottoms and the Ninnescah River. Through work with our partners, we closed on three donated conservation easements on private lands, permanently protecting the habitat.

In partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition, we have a new grant to assist landowners with wetland management, program opportunities and to collaborate on educational workshops. So far, we completed workshops at Gardner and Garden City with planned workshops in Syracuse, Lawrence and Abbyville. We have connected with dozens of landowners whom we anticipate will enroll in various conservation practices.

DU's work in Kansas strengthens as we diversify our efforts, funding sources and those who support our program and our mission.



DU helps KDWPT Bring Back the Bottoms

One year ago, Ducks Unlimited embarked on a two-year, \$300,000 fundraising campaign to support the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's (KDWPT) restorations at Cheyenne Bottoms. Contributors to Bring Back the Bottoms have so far provided \$457,000 in private pledges toward a multi-year renovation project. These funds will be leveraged with public dollars to increase the impact of this successful fundraising effort.

"Many donors have a personal connection to Cheyenne Bottoms and due to overwhelming local support, we surpassed our fundraising goal in the first year of this campaign," said Josh Williams, regional director for Kansas. "We aren't done yet! We will continue fundraising through February 2021 to continue to support our wetland habitat partner, the KDWPT."

Last year, Bring Back the Bottoms tribute events were held in Barton County and Kansas City. These events were the foundation to a successful campaign and were made possible by the support of the local communities and DU volunteers. By raising \$80,000 in unrestricted revenue for DU, the participants at these events supported work at Cheyenne Bottoms, throughout Kansas and across the continent for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

"Cheyenne Bottoms supports about 350 bird species. Half of North America's shorebirds and rare whooping cranes visit every year, but over time the wetland's ability to attract birds has declined," said Matt Hough, DU's manager of conservation programs for Kansas.

The KDWPT's plan for Cheyenne Bottoms includes replacing infrastructure, removing silt and other improvements. To contribute to Bring Back the Bottoms, contact Sean Stone, Josh Williams or Chris Young. [Front page >>](#)

Grazing animals working for conservation

Ducks Unlimited Biologist Abe Lollar is building connections with private landowners and helping them learn the value of grazing as a wetland management tool. In cooperation with the Kansas Grazing Land Coalition, Lollar is presenting at workshops on how integrating grazing operations with wetland conservation can benefit wildlife and people.

"We are working with ranchers to establish wetland management goals that provide grass for livestock and keep playa wetlands in good health," said Lollar. "The majority of playa wetlands occur on private lands, so it is important to connect with landowners and ranchers to include them in our efforts to conserve these important habitats."

Establishing a grass buffer around playas protects the wetland and keeps it healthy. Every few years the grass needs to be set back,

and grazing is one of many tools to do that. Letting animals graze grassland buffers around playas prevents overgrowth of vegetation and encourages nutrient cycling to keep the vegetation productive and the soil and wetlands healthy.

Lollar is also educating people about the significant role playa wetlands play in recharging the Ogallala Aquifer by reaching out to youth, agriculture producers and the public.

"We are teaching people about the connection between protecting and managing playa lakes and the sustainability of the Ogallala Aquifer. They know where the water they pump for irrigation comes from, we also want them to know how to get water back into the ground through healthy functioning playas and to keep their operations productive," Lollar said. [Front page >>](#)



Brittany Smith



The Link Family: Allison (left), Kristi, Mike and Emma with their dog Sam.

Mike Link comes from a family of DU supporters

With a passion for the outdoors and finance, Mike Link makes the perfect Ducks Unlimited supporter. For six years he has served as the state treasurer, and since 2006 has been the district chair for the Harvey County, Hutchinson, Smokey Valley and McPherson DU chapters. Mike comes from a family of DU supporters. His grandfather took him to DU banquets when he was young, and his father, Mark, and uncle took him hunting at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area (WA).

Mike grew up in Great Bend, Kansas, south of Cheyenne Bottoms WA, where DU is currently partnering with KDWPT on a campaign titled Bring Back the Bottoms.

“When DU announced the Bring Back the Bottoms effort, I jumped on board. I became a Diamond Life Sponsor to support restoration of an area that means a lot to me and my family,” Mike said.

Mike’s mom, Janis, also wanted to support the Cheyenne Bottoms restoration because Mike’s dad had a passion for the outdoors and had many duck hunting adventures on the wildlife area. Janis donated \$10,000 to the effort in Mark’s memory and he will be included on the dedication cairn when the restoration is complete.

“I’ve grown up with DU and my reasons for supporting the organization have evolved over the years,” Mike said. “When I was young, it was going to a banquet with my grandfather in hopes of winning a gun. Now I can appreciate the investment DU makes to leaving a conservation legacy and putting 80 percent of the donations it receives into conservation.”

Mike’s two daughters are Legacy Greenwings. He understands the significance of supporting migration projects like those in Kansas, and conservation on the prairie breeding grounds where the ducks that come to Kansas originate. [Front page >>](#)

Public land projects featuring Jamestown Wildlife Area

Ducks Unlimited, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) and partners restored 730 acres at Jamestown Wildlife Area’s (WA) Gamekeeper Marsh. The work raised the marsh dam and installed a dike, splitting the marsh in half to improve management capabilities and offer more hunting opportunities.

“The marsh will benefit local water users,” said Rob Unruh, wildlife area manager at Jamestown WA. “We can hold the water when we need it for migration habitat and then release it into the river in the summer when irrigators and communities need it.”

This restoration involved a large partnership including DU, KDWPT, The Nature Conservancy, Kansas Alliance for Wetland and Streams, Jewell County Board of Commissioners, Kansas Wildlife Federation, Cloud County Tourism, Republic County Board of Commissioners and Westar Energy.

Several other projects on public lands restored and protected migration habitat for waterfowl. DU completed projects at McPherson WA’s Shirk Marsh, Clinton WA, Byron Walker WA, Gurley Marsh WA, the Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita, and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Progress continues at Cheyenne Bottoms, Neosho WA’s Pool 9, Talmo WA, Melvern WA, Perry WA, Kanopolis WA, Reservoir NWR and Kirwin NWR.

Future projects are planned for Clinton WA’s Elk Creek, Cherokee Lowlands WA, Perry WA, John Redmond WA, Melvern Reservoir, Byron Walker WA, McPherson WA, Cheyenne Bottoms, Cottonwood Flats WA, and work with the cities of Newton and Manhattan. [Front page >>](#)



Waterfowl using restored wetland at Jamestown Wildlife Area

Wetland is an oasis in Wichita city limits

The Great Plains Nature Center (GPNC) in Wichita has 25 acres of newly restored habitat, thanks to a partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, the City of Wichita, Every's Green Team, the Kansas Division of Conservation and the Whooping Crane Mitigation Fund. Funded in part by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the restoration will educate GPNC visitors on the value of wetlands.



“For the restoration, we installed a low berm to impound water, similar to a beaver dam,” said Matt Hough, DU conservation programs manager for Kansas. “We installed a water-control structure, removed invasive trees and excavated sediment to restore the natural depth of the wetlands.”

“The Great Plains Nature Center and surrounding Chisholm Creek Park is a wildlife oasis in the city limits of Wichita,” said GPNC Director Marc Murrell. “The restored wetland demonstrates this habitat’s importance to wildlife and for flood storage, reducing nutrient runoff in urban areas and improving water quality.” [Front page >>](#)

DU welcomes back Sean Stone

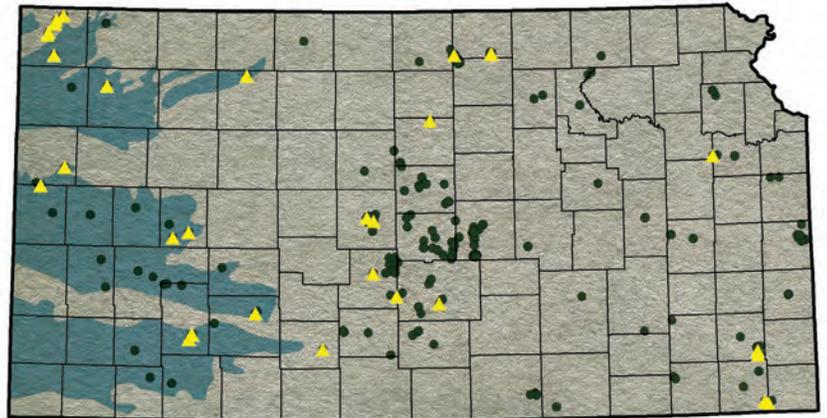


Sean Stone rejoined the Development Team as the senior director of development for Colorado and Kansas. Sean has a solid history with DU. Previously, he held positions as a California regional director and Texas

director of development and senior director of development. Sean has a strong understanding of DU’s mission, organizational structure, and volunteer and supporter base. Recently, Sean was the executive director for the Coastal Conservation Association Habitat Program in Houston where he helped expand their development and fundraising operations. Sean, his wife, Kathleen, and their children Caden, Cameron and Colby have relocated to Denver. [Front page >>](#)

Kansas Projects

1988 through the end of Fiscal Year 2019



Fiscal Year 2019

- Impacted acres* - 5,540
- Dollars invested - \$1,607,158

1988 to 2019

- Impacted acres* - 45,491
- Dollars invested - \$18,900,000

*Impacted acres combine unique conservation acres with acres where DU has multiple project objectives.

[Visit the KS interactive project map >>](#)

- Completed projects: 1988-2018
- ▲ 2019 Completed projects
- Playa Lakes Region - Playa lakes are small, depressional wetlands in western Kansas that provide critical migration habitat for waterfowl. These wetlands also filter and recharge the water supply in the Ogallala Aquifer.

State contacts:

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