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A Year In Review with Missouri Conservation Jan - June 2014

JANUARY 02ND 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Nature lovers found much to celebrate in 2014 and continued to expand the frontiers of conservation in the Show-Me State. Here is a brief summary of the first six month's of 2014's outdoor news stories.

JANUARY

The second-largest archery deer harvest in Missouri history (50,507) pushed the final tally for the 2013-2014 hunting season to 252,574.

Hunters donated 227,358 pounds of venison to needy Missourians during the 2013-2014 hunting season. That is enough for more than 600,000 meals. Get more information on Share the Harvest at mdc.mo.gov/node/2544.

MDC researchers started a five-year study in northeast Missouri to better manage our valuable wild turkey population. Staff captured 260 turkeys in Putnam, Schuyler, Monroe, and Marion counties to radio track the birds throughout the year to determine survival rates and nesting success.

FEBRUARY

The National Wild Turkey Federation named Conservation Agent Jeff Berti its 2013

National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. Berti, who has served 19 years in Grundy County, also won the NWTF's Missouri State Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award. In 2013, he documented 248 resource violations, made more than 112 arrests, and 31 assisted arrests. His efforts resulted in the detection of 42 violations and 30 arrests for illegally killing wild turkeys in a single five-month period.

Working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, conservation groups, agriculture organizations and landowners, the Department continued to lead the battle against feral hogs. Last year more than 1,400 feral hogs were removed from Missouri's landscape.

MARCH

The four trout parks were stocked with more than 30,000 keeper-size trout for opening day. A late snow storm kept some anglers away, but those that came enjoyed an excellent opening weekend.

Paddlefish snaggers found a bumper crop of big "spoonbills" in the Osage River, Lake of the Ozarks, Truman Lake, and Lake Taneycomo thanks to a record stocking of more than a quarter of a million paddlefish from MDC's Blind Pony Hatchery in 2008 and an additional 145,000 stocked in 2007. These two strong year classes will continue to provide superb fishing over the next few years.

Missouri hosted the first-ever white-tailed deer summit meeting March 3-6 at Big Cedar Lodge near Branson. The meeting brought more than 200 hunters, landowners, wildlife managers, and hunting-industry representatives from the U.S. and Canada. Deer hunters from 20 states, representatives of state and provincial wildlife agencies, citizen conservation groups, universities, and deer-research institutes heard reports from some of North America's top deer experts. Afterwards, MDC staff facilitated the process of identifying the most pressing issues facing those who love white-tailed deer.

MDC received calls from all over the state about fish kills in large and small lakes and ponds. After looking into the reports, biologists concluded that the widespread problem was the result of an unusually cold winter.

Missouri Stream Team celebrated 25 years of a citizen movement that now has more than 85,000 volunteers working to protect and improve Missouri streams. Sponsored by MDC, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and the Conservation Federation of Missouri, the program focuses on education, stewardship, and advocacy for Missouri stream resources.

The sixth annual Missouri National Archery in the Schools Program tournament at Tan-Tar-A Resort March 28-29 turned into a record-fest in which the state record score fell and fell again, and again. The tournament brought together nearly 1,267 contestants in grades 4-12 from 81 schools to test their skills with bow and arrow. Eighth-grader Joe Wilder of St. Peters set a new tournament record by scoring 295 points out of 300 possible. The next day Hunter Berry, a 12th-grader from Sarcoxie, nudged it up another notch to 296. Lee's Summit High School Freshman Shelby Winslow had the last word when she raised the bar to 297 points, just two points shy of the world record.

APRIL

Young hunters checked 4,332 turkeys during Missouri's youth turkey hunting season, topping the 4,000 mark for the second time in the youth season's 14-year history.

The Conservation Commission voted to reduce the number of firearms antlerless deer permits that a hunter may fill in all or part of 59 counties. It also reduced the availability of antlerless permits to two in all or part of another 19 counties. In previous years, hunters could buy any number of antlerless permits in most of the affected counties. Although the regulation changes reduce the number of antlerless tags that can be filled in many counties, hunters still can fill multiple firearms antlerless tags as long as they do not fill more than is allowed in a particular county. The change addressed hunter and landowner concerns about recent declines in deer numbers in some counties.

Working with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and The Nature Conservancy, greater prairie chickens were trapped in Nebraska and released at The Nature Conservancy's Dunn Ranch and Department's Pawnee Prairie in Harrison County. Biologists reported good numbers of booming prairie chickens at the Wah Kon Tah Prairie release site in St. Clair and Cedar counties. In recent years, the Department worked with private landowners and The Nature Conservancy to restock prairie chickens to this open grassland landscape in west-central Missouri.

Eighty-six Missouri communities achieved recognition through the Arbor Day Foundation TREE CITY USA program. These communities meet national standards showing they care for their city trees and help their residents take care of their own trees.

MAY

Missouri turkey hunters enjoyed another successful season and checked 43,273 turkeys during the regular spring turkey season, the third annual increase in a row.

The Conservation Department continued trapping black bears for the fourth year, placing radio tracking collars on dozens of bears to learn more about their habits and population dynamics. Resource Scientist Jeff Beringer estimates the Show-Me State's bear population at 300. Learn more about the Missouri Black Bear Project at fwrc.msstate.edu/carnivore/mo_bear/

The Missouri Black Bear Foundation was formed to sponsor educational programs, conduct public outreach, and coordinate field research in partnership with conservation agencies. Get more information at moblackbears.org.

The Columbia Bottom Conservation Area's Howard and Joyce Wood Education Center celebrated its 10th anniversary. The Department and citizens celebrated the anniversary with a series of special events and programs. The area is a popular designation for hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers in the greater St. Louis area.

JUNE

The Conservation Commission approved regulation changes regarding the regulation of hunting preserves and deer-breeding facilities in an effort to reduce the risk of fatal diseases to the state's free-ranging deer herd and captive deer.

MDC invited hunters and other Missouri residents with an interest in white-tailed deer to express their opinions about deer management at 14 open house meetings around the state in June and July. Information from the meetings and online comments are being used to develop future deer hunting regulations and the statewide deer management plan. MDC is still seeking input at mdc.mo.gov/node/28079.

Free Fishing Days on June 7-8 encouraged Missourians to enjoy the Show-Me State's fishing resources by allowing anyone to fish without having to buy a fishing permit, trout stamp, or daily trout park tag.

The Cape Girardeau Conservation Nature Center received a TripAdvisor award for providing excellent public service.

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