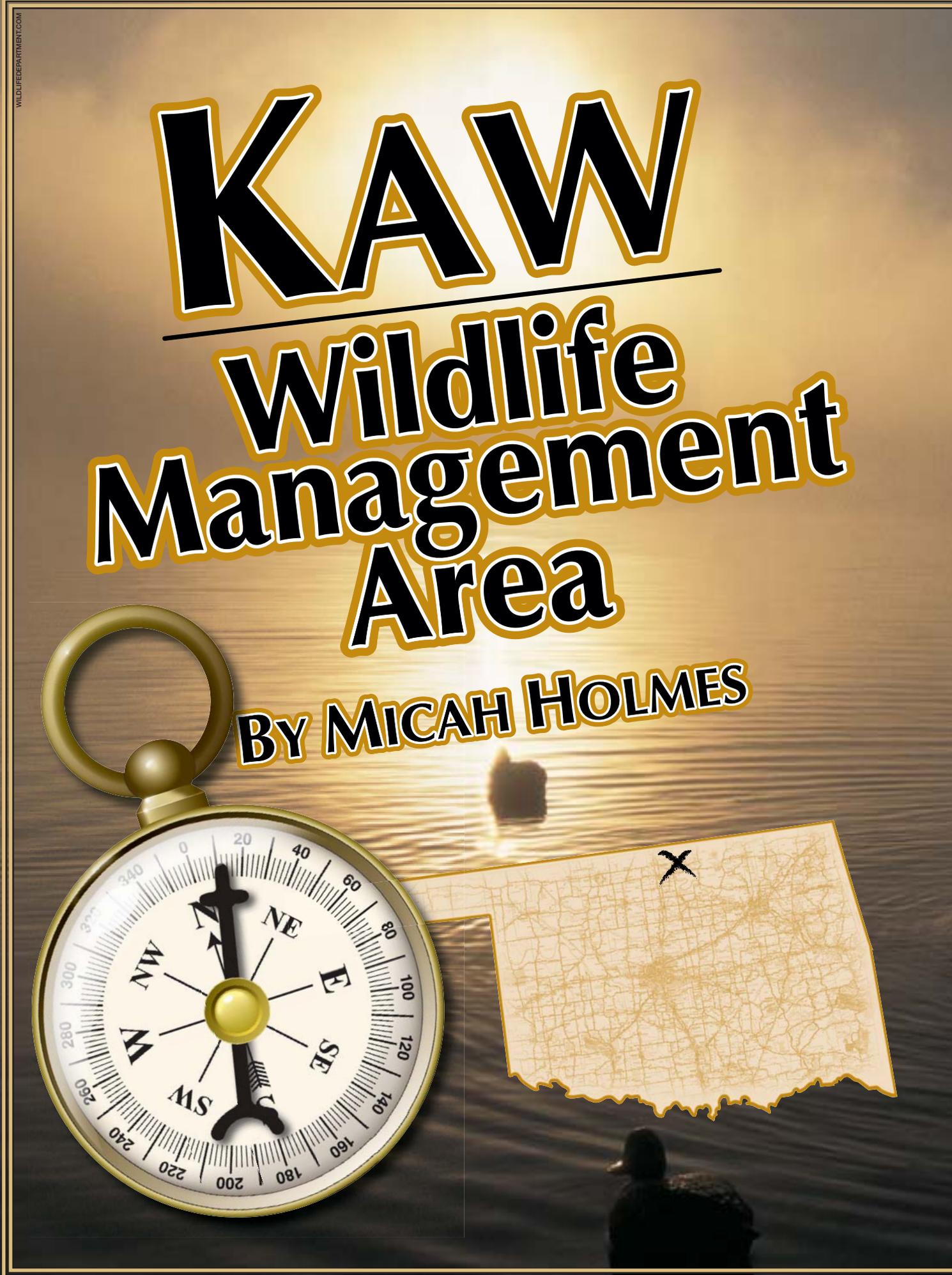
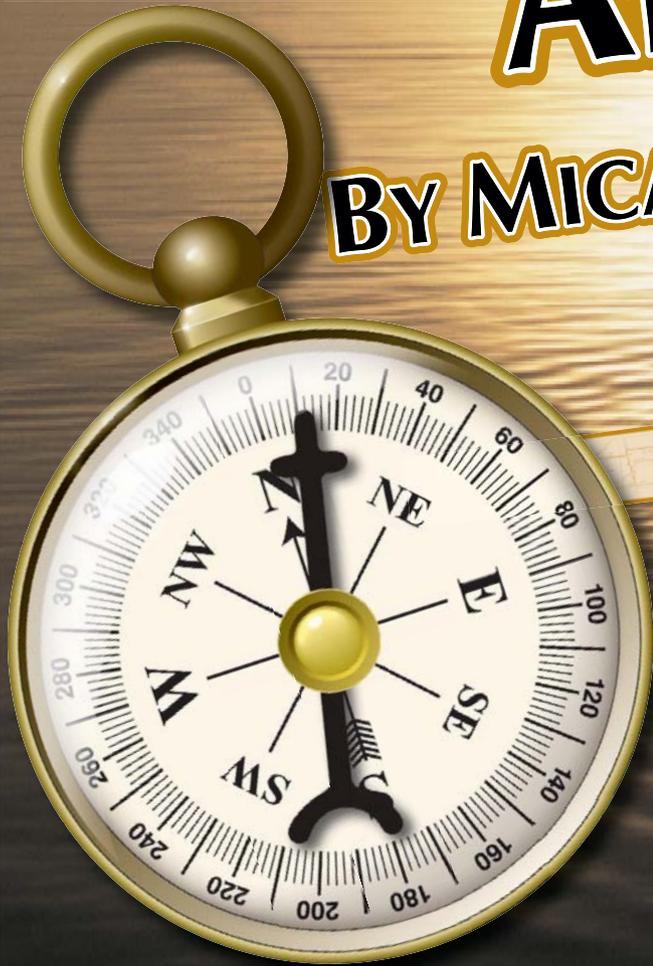


# **KAW**

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# **Wildlife Management Area**

**BY MICAH HOLMES**



For many hunters Kaw is synonymous with ducks, and plenty of them. Each fall, tens of thousands of ducks make their first stop in Oklahoma on Kaw Lake. A wide variety of ducks, including teal, gadwalls, widgeon, pintails and mallards, arrive in mid to late October and often stay until early spring.

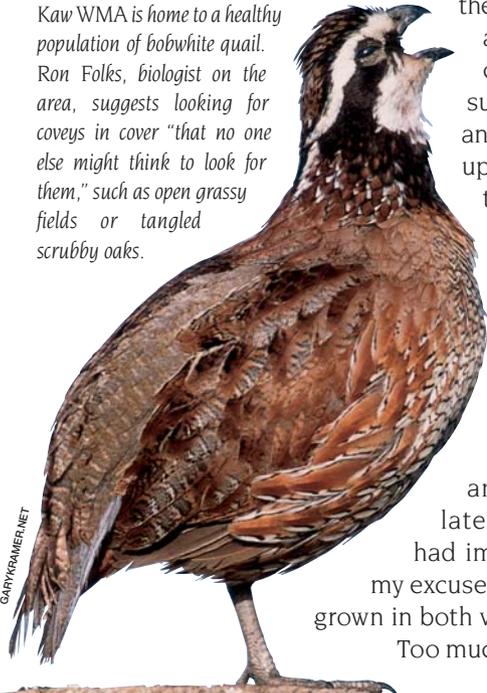




While mallards may be the prize in many waterfowler's bags, it's hard to beat the subtle beauty of a drake gadwall.

I should have known better. We were knee-deep in very birdy cover and the dog was on a rock solid, if not stylish, point. But when a dozen bobwhites exploded out of the tusssock of grasses, I had

*Kaw WMA is home to a healthy population of bobwhite quail. Ron Folks, biologist on the area, suggests looking for coveys in cover "that no one else might think to look for them," such as open grassy fields or tangled scrubby oaks.*



the same reaction as always when the covey flushes. I was surprised, confused and finally distraught upon whiffing with three consecutive shots. The whirring of wings faded out in every direction and it was over as fast as it had begun.

A few coveys and a few hours later, my shooting had improved little, but my excuse making skills had grown in both variety and speed.

Too much wind, too much brush, sun in my eyes... once I even claimed I was trying to pick out the bobs rather than hens.

but coveys are still flushing and hunters are still missing the fast flying birds.

"We have quite a few hunters come and enjoy a day or two of quail hunting," Folks said. "One of the things that I like so much about the area is that there is a little something for every hunter. You could camp out for a week and never hunt the same game species twice and then you'd have to come back to go fishing in the spring."

Kaw Wildlife Management Area covers 16,254 acres around the upper reaches of Kaw Lake in eastern Kay

**R**on Folks first brought Japanese millet into the state in the mid 1970's. He saw an ad for the exotic plant in the back of a seed catalog. He purchased a bag and spread it along a muddy bank, and the rest is history. Today, thousands of acres of the non-invasive Japanese millet, which is a close relative of a native plant, are seeded on lakes across the state such as lakes Keystone, Oologah, Eufaula, and Texoma. The millet seeding is funded entirely through Oklahoma's Duck Stamp Program.

During my college years, the same scene repeated itself many times when a few friends made other quail hunting trips to Kaw Wildlife Management Area. My shooting skills never got much better and my legs were often sore after traipsing up and down the rolling hills, but it always seemed like the perfect way to spend an afternoon away from the library and classroom.

I haven't quail hunted at Kaw in years, but Ron Folks, the wildlife biologist on the area, tells me there are still plenty of quail to be found for the resourceful hunter. Ron admits that the 16,000-acre WMA may be better known for ducks and deer,

## Kaw at a Glance

### Area Description:

Kaw WMA covers 16,254 acres adjoining the upper two thirds of Kaw Lake in eastern Kay County in northcentral Oklahoma. Located just four and one half miles east of Newkirk, Kaw WMA is a mixture of upland and bottomland forest, tallgrass prairie, old fields, and cropland. Bluestem grasses and post oak-blackjack forests are predominate on upland sites, which are interspersed with sand plum thickets and agricultural fields. Bottom land forests consist of burr oak, hackberry, sycamore, sand plum and other species. The average annual precipitation for the area is 30 inches per year.

### Description of Fish and Wildlife

#### Management Practices:

Approximately 4,000 acres of wheat, milo, soybeans, and corn are planted annually through an agricultural lease program. About 2,400 acres of Japanese millet are planted annually on mud flats, which are scheduled to be flooded as the millet matures. The intent of this practice is to increase waterfowl habitat. Approximately 4,500 trees and shrubs are planted annually to provide cover for upland species and break up large agricultural fields.

#### Camping and Facilities:

Several free primitive camping sites are available on the WMA. These sites are mowed in the early fall. Nine public use areas are available around the lake. Campers can select from over 250 campsites, many of which are equipped with water and electric hookups. Reservations for these campsites can be obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Ten boat ramps provide boaters with easy access to Kaw Lake. Once on the water, boaters can find two full service marinas located at Pioneer Park and McFadden Cove. Swimmers are invited to enjoy designated swimming areas at Pioneer Park and Sandy Park.

County in northcentral Oklahoma. Located just four-and-a-half miles east of Newkirk, Kaw Wildlife Management Area is a mixture of upland and bottomland forest, tallgrass prairie, and cropland.

For many hunters Kaw is synonymous with ducks, and plenty of them. Each fall, tens of thousands of ducks make their first stop in Oklahoma on Kaw Lake. A wide variety of ducks, including teal, gadwalls, widgeon, pintails and mallards, arrive in mid to late October and often stay until early spring.

The masses of waterfowl don't come for the scenery—they come for the food. Every summer, Wildlife Department biologists contract with pilots to aerially seed Japanese millet along Kaw Lake's expansive mud flats.

The Arkansas River brings fresh loads of silt with every big rain and deposits it on the upper end of the lake. The shallow, soupy silt is perfect for growing Japanese mil-



BILL LEA



STEVE BURGE

**Top:** Wildlife biologists work year-round at Kaw WMA to improve the habitat for deer and other wildlife species.

**Above:** An afternoon of small game hunting is the perfect way to introduce a youngster into a lifetime of hunting.

let. About 2,400 acres of millet were grown successfully around Kaw Lake last year. The heavy seed heads provide important nutrition for wintering ducks. In fact, each acre can feed 1,500 mallards a day.

"The good thing about Japanese millet is that it grows quickly and it grows in conditions that other plants could not survive in," said Alan Stacey, wetland development biologist for the Wildlife Department. "In many cases if it weren't for the millet, these flats would



*Anglers who brave the cold winter winds on Kaw Lake, might just be rewarded with a stringer full of crappie.*

either remain barren or grow up in undesirable plants such as cockleburrs.”

The seeding requires careful coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to make sure the young plants do not drown in high lake levels or bake in the hot sun. Successful seedings also require a little luck from Mother Nature, a timely rain or two can make the difference between tall healthy plants in October or shriveled up plants with few seeds.

After a seed crop is established, rising lake levels in the fall

and winter allow waterfowl to access the millet. If the lake receives adequate inflow from the river and other tributaries, millet can sometimes be flooded in stages to ensure food availability over a longer, extended period.

“The normal elevation of Kaw Lake is 1,010 feet above sea level, if we are below that it is hard for hunters in a regular boat to access the millet, but when it gets above that hunters can get to more areas a little easier,” Folks said.

Duck hunters aren’t the only ones who prowl around Kaw Wildlife Management Area. Deer hunters harvest about 250 deer each year off the area, including the occasional wall-hanger buck. Antlerless deer comprise about 40 percent of the total deer harvest, which Folks said is “just about right” to maintain a healthy buck to doe ratio on the area.

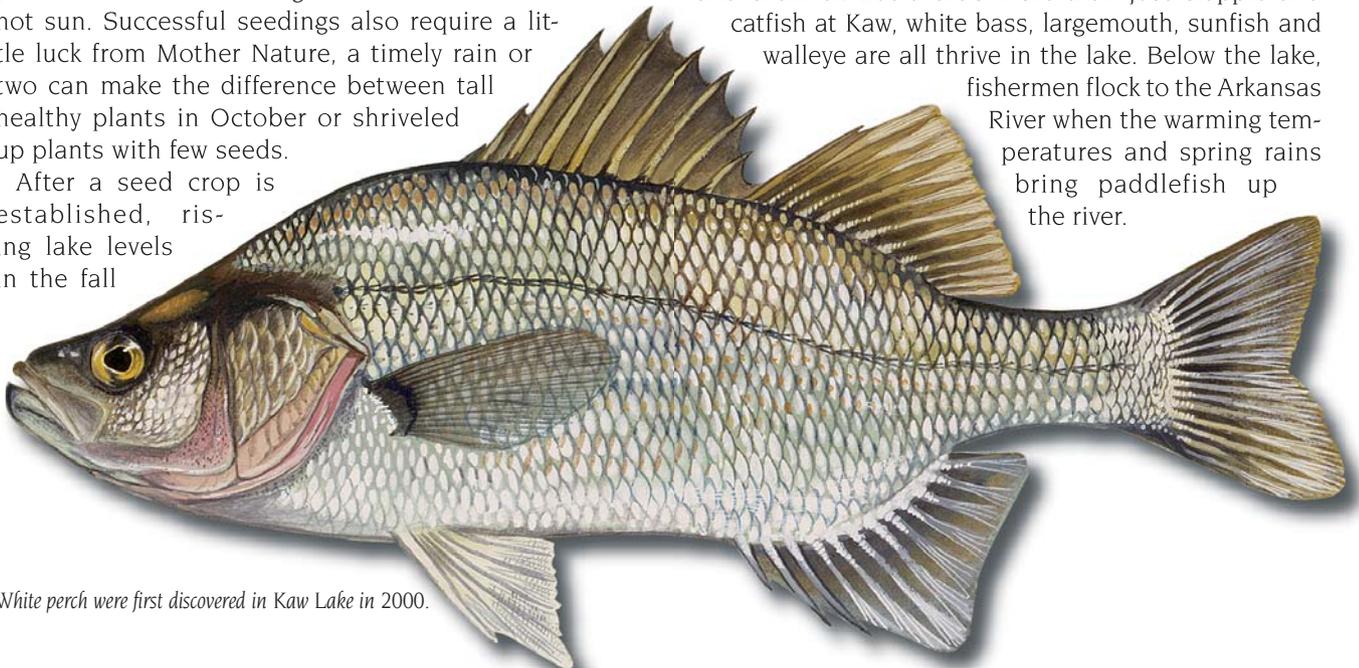
The Wildlife Department plants approximately 4,500 trees each year on the area to divide large fields and create more edge habitat for deer, turkey, furbearers - and non-game species as well. Rabbit and squirrel hunters can find good populations of their favorite quarry all across the area.

“It’s a shame more small game hunters don’t take advantage of the hunting opportunities, because there are lots of rabbits around the lake and quite a few squirrels in the wooded areas,” Folks said. “In my opinion, it’s a great way to spend a fall or winter afternoon and it offers a great chance to introduce a new hunter to the sport.”

One cannot talk about Kaw Wildlife Management Area without discussing the lake itself. Built in 1976 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kaw Lake was designed with three purposes in mind: flood control, water supply and recreation. The lake covers 17,000 surface acres and has 168 miles of shoreline.

A wide variety of game fish can be found in Kaw Lake, but the area is perhaps best known for good numbers of large crappie. Anglers also have a chance to hook all three of the most popular catfish species, blue, flathead and channel. But there’s more than just crappie and catfish at Kaw, white bass, largemouth, sunfish and walleye are all thrive in the lake. Below the lake,

fishermen flock to the Arkansas River when the warming temperatures and spring rains bring paddlefish up the river.



*White perch were first discovered in Kaw Lake in 2000.*

## For Additional Information and Area Attractions:

### Kaw Wildlife Management Area

Ron Folks, Wildlife Biologist at Kaw WMA  
(405) 823-7936  
folksrok@pcwan.net

### Kaw Lake Association

(877) 671-6985  
www.kawlake.com  
kawlake@cablone.net

### Oklahoma Tourism & Recreation Department

(800) 652-6552  
www.travelok.com

### Ponca City Tourism

(866) 762-8092  
www.poncacitytourism.com

### Ponca City Chamber of Commerce

www.poncacitychamber.com

### U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kaw Lake Office

(800) 652-6552  
www.swt.usace.army.mil

### Kaw Lake Eagle Watch:

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation  
(405) 521-4616  
Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority  
(405) 340-5047

However, not every fish in the lake is welcome by biologists and anglers. The non-indigenous white perch (*Morone americana*) was first discovered in Kaw Lake in 2000. The diminutive fish has not caused any noticeable conflicts with native fish, at least not yet.

White perch are native to Atlantic coastal regions, but being a creature of opportunity, the white perch invaded the Great Lakes when the Erie and Welland canals were built in the 1950's. Like striped bass, white perch can live in both fresh and saltwater environments. It is commonly believed that a few white perch hitched a ride with a load of striped bass headed for a Nebraska lake several years ago. Since that time white perch have been expanding their range southward along the Arkansas River basin. White perch now range from Nova Scotia to South Carolina, but are most abundant from the Hudson River to Chesapeake Bay.

White perch are bottom-oriented fish and carnivores whose diet consists of insects, crustaceans and small fishes. In fact, due to their preference for dining on fish eggs, some blame the white perch for the decline of wall-eye populations in the Great Lakes. These fish, which seldom reach more than 12 inches in length, are silvery in color and frequently have irregular dusky longitudinal lines along its body.

Kurt Kuklinski, research biologist at the Wildlife Department's Oklahoma Fishery Research Laboratory is monitoring the white perches populations, as well as

their impact on native fish populations. He and his fellow biologists are using gill nets to ascertain the number of white perch in Kaw Lake. He is also aging the fish to find out how fast they are growing and analyzing stomach samples to find out what they are eating. This research is being paid for through Sport Fish Restoration funds. So far, white perch haven't become overpopulated in Kaw Lake, but they have started to spread beyond the reservoir. White perch were found in Lake Keystone fall gill-net samples in 2004.

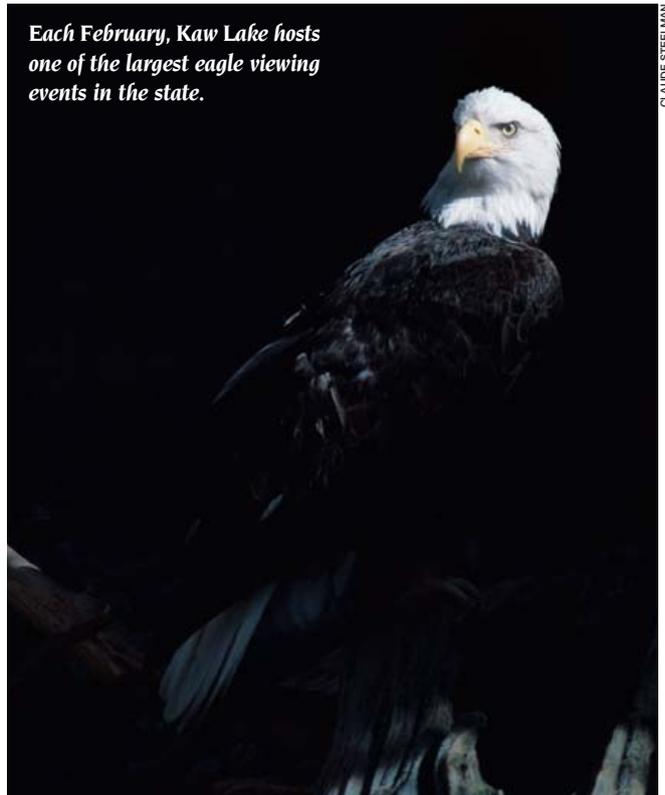
Each year from November through February, Kaw Lake becomes the seasonal home for 60 or more eagles, where they can avoid the frozen waters of the northern states and feed on shad, carp and other fish. Kaw Lake annually hosts one of the largest eagle viewing events in Oklahoma.

"The Kaw Lake Eagle Watch is always a lot of fun. We have people come from miles around and many of them get a chance to see a bald eagle for the first time," Folks said. "It's a great event for families, and visitors have a good chance of seeing between six and 15 eagles in just a few hours."

Biologists from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Sutton Avian Research Center offer a short series of educational presentations related to bald eagles and other birds of prey. Local businesses offer free refreshments while visitors enjoy the eagle displays or wait to board the tour buses.

Whether you're a hunter, angler or just someone who enjoys watching wildlife, Kaw Wildlife Management Area has a little something for everyone. Take a friend or family member and explore the diverse opportunities Kaw has to offer. 🦅

*Each February, Kaw Lake hosts one of the largest eagle viewing events in the state.*



CLAUDE STEELMAN