



Fundin

It wasn't until the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937 (P-R Act) that real funding for wildlife projects became feasible. The P-R Act levied an excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition, which is allocated back to the states with a 25 percent match requirement. The Kansas Forestry Fish and Game Commission began purchasing land in 1942 when 6,800 acres were acquired and opened to public hunting. Hunting license sales and P-R funds paid for land acquisition, as well as planning and construction of dikes, roads, and inlet canals. No general tax dollars were used.

The Bottoms Survives World War II

The new wildlife area held water and ducks, but because of World War II, no sholgun shells were available for hunting. A B-29 training base was established at Great Bend in 1943 (now the Great Bend Municipal Airport), and the basin was used for bombing training missions for several years. During practice bombing runs, 10-pound sacks of flour were dropped over the wetland while spotters watched from this vantage point. The base was deactivated in the late 1940s.







Wildlife Area Becomes Reality

The Commission continued purchasing land until 1949 when a total of 19,778 acres had been bought for a total of \$750,000. Over the next eight years, \$2 million was spent to build diversion dams and canals to bring in water from the Arkansas River. The basin was divided into five pools to conserve water and allow water to be moved. In the 1950s, a public overlook was built near this site, which included coin-operated viewing scopes. Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area was officially dedicated in 1957.

Managing a large wetland presents challenges, not the least of which is having water when and where it's needed most. However, effort is often aimed at stalling natural succession. Without intensive management, cattails and other emergent vegetation will take over, eliminating open water areas necessary for waterfowl and shorebirds. Maintaining habitat that is so critical to wildlife and accommodating the interests of people who enjoy the Bottoms is a difficult job that often becomes a life's passion. There were only five area managers at the Bottoms during its first 65 years as a wildlife

The photo above left shows construction of the open portion of the canal, which transferred water about 5 miles from the Arkansas River. The top middle photo shows the diversion dam on the Arkansas River. The middle lower photo shows the large concrete conduit that was used for the underground portions of the pipeline.

Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area

The 40,000-acre basin before you has been known as Cheyenne Bottoms for as long as most can remember. In fact, legend has it that the name was taken from a battle between the Cheyenne and Pawnee Indians over hunting territory, won by the Cheyenne. The battle was so firece that the creek ran red with blood – Blood Creek is the name of a drainage that comes in from the northwest.

Throughout its existence, Cheyenne Bottoms has fluctuated between being dry during drought years and being an amazing wetland full of life during wet periods. During the heaviest floods, the water can cover as much as 27,000 acres – a spectacular sight and an area nearly twice as large as Milford Reservoir, Kansas' largest lake.



In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Cheyenne Bottoms was a prime hunting area for market hunters. Thousands of ducks were shipped to eastern markets before the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 banned market hunting. The photo above was taken in 1915.



A Vision For The Bottoms

In the late 1800s, the Koen brothers constructed a canal to divert water from the Arkansas River into the basin to create a lake with consistent water levels for recreation and irrigation. In an amazing feat of engineering for the time, a ditch was completed that carried water for 100 days. However, the first major storm washed out a diversion dam, flooding croplands and the Bottoms with knee deep water. The canal was considered a failure, lawsuits were filed, the venture went bankrupt, and the canal was abandoned. Still, the engineering was sound, and the canal design was eventually copied in the 1950s.

In the early 1900s, especially after the 1927 flood, there was renewed interest to develop the area for recreation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended making the basin a national wildlife refuge. In 1930, Congress legislated \$250,000 for the project, but later reduced the funding to \$50,000, essentially scrapping the idea of a national wildlife refuge.



Today. Cheyenne Bottoms is recognized internationally for its value to migrating birds. Of the 472 species of birds documented in Kansas, 333 have been observed at the Bottoms. Located along the Central Flyway, approximately 45 percent of North America's shorebird population stops at Cheyenne Bottoms during spring migration. In August 1988, it was designated a Hemispheric Reserve in the Western Hemispheric Florebird Reserve Network, and in October 1988, Cheyenne Bottoms was declared a Wetland of International Importance. In May, 2001, the Bottoms was designated as a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy.

Learn More about Wetlands

To learn more about Cheyenne Bottoms and the value of wetlands, visit the Kansas Wetlands Education Center, located on Kansas Highway 156, near the southeast corner of the wildlife area. And, you can travel on the Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway south to Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, another important wetland on the Central Flyway.







Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area provides a significant economic boost to Kansas and especially the communities in Barton County. Each year, Cheyenne Bottoms hosts more than 50,000 visitors — admost half of those come to hunt in the famous waterfowl area. Just as before settlement, Cheyenne Bottoms is a premier hunting area today. The big marsh, which likely would not exist if it werent for hunters and their license dollars, draws waterfowlers from across the U.S. for the outstanding duck and goose hunting. And, almost as many visitors come to birdwatch from around the U.S. When conditions are right, spectacular numbers of waterbirds can be seen and may include threatened and endangered species such as snowy plovers, piping plovers, least terms and whooping cranes.

Improvements Continue

Major renovations began in 1991 to enhance management of the area. Enhancements included subdividing pools, creating a deep-water storage pool, installing three new pump stations, upgrading old water control structures and building a mitigation marsh. Specialized equipment, such as amphibious backhoes, were also purchased. Funding for the \$19 million renovations came from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Kansas Water Plan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and many other contributors such as The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited.