



**PATCHES OF  
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## GET WET, GET WISE!

Did you know that the United Nations has designated 2003 as the Year of Fresh Water? There is great concern around the world about this essential resource that so many of us take for granted. The official web site of the International Year of Fresh Water starts off with this introduction to which I have added a few words:

“No matter who we are, and what we do, we are all dependent on water. We need it to stay healthy, we need it for growing food, for transportation, irrigation and industry... for plants and animals [in a healthy ecosystem]. Despite the importance of water resources in our lives..., we are increasingly disrespectful of them. We waste and pollute them, forgetting how essential they are to our very survival.”

What are these human activities? Population growth means increased water consumption. Development of dams, levees and diversions changes the timing and quality of normal flow, changes floodplain fertility, builds sediments and blocks fish migrations. Overuse depletes groundwater supplies, endangers living resources, and biodiversity. Pollution alters water chemistry and water quality for many uses. In the U.S. 40% of water bodies assessed in 1998 were not fit for recreational use because of nutrient, metal and agricultural pollution. Of our total freshwater fish species, 15% (120 spp.) are considered threatened.

On Konza Prairie we try to understand the cycles of rain and drought that are natural events of the prairie. The climate and water research are essential parts of the long-term ecological research. Scientists here are studying water quality in a pristine creek. Our data is a benchmark for comparison with other watersheds, which have not been as fortunate to evade the onslaught of human intervention. Nitrogen addition to Kings Creek is minimal at the top of the watershed but gradually the increases until a spike appears at the first agricultural fields on Konza and again at the mouth of McDowell Creek itself. You can see this graphed on the KEEP web site ([www.ksu.edu/konza/keep](http://www.ksu.edu/konza/keep)) as the last item in the “Tallgrass Prairie Ecology” section. Also scientists here are studying the fish and macro-invertebrates in Kings Creek. The biology of these creatures tells us a lot about how organisms survive in this harsh ecosystem of floods and drought.

What can you do? Go to a neat web site called H<sub>2</sub>Ouse and take a home tour to see how you can save water ([www.h2ouse.org](http://www.h2ouse.org)). There’s a world of water information at [www.wateryear2003.org](http://www.wateryear2003.org) and [www.awwa.org](http://www.awwa.org). On October 4<sup>th</sup> Manhattan will provide an opportunity to learn more about your local watershed. The Rollin’ Down the River Festival, sponsored by the Kaw Valley Heritage Alliance, will have speakers, tours and entertainment, including a morning of activities at Konza Prairie. Watch for local announcements about this and other Kansas River town activities this fall.