

MARCH 2021  
DIRECTOR'S REPORT



**CALENDAR ITEMS:**

Feb 25 Legislative committee deadline in chamber of origin  
Mar 2 SEAFWA Spring Directors' Meeting (virtual)  
Mar 8-12 The 86<sup>th</sup> North American Wildlife & Natural Resources Conference (virtual)  
Apr 5 Next Commission meeting

**AGENCY UPDATE**

- **LEGISLATURE:**
  - See packet for updates on Title 29/wildlife-related bills.
  - ODWC presented to the Veterans Caucus on 2/11 about our Stars and Stripes Project. The Game Warden Association sponsored the food for the meeting.
- **HUMAN DIMENSIONS**
  - Recruitment for the second phase of a project looking at how to better engage with universities began. Invitation emails were circulated to natural resource students at university colleges to sign-up for forthcoming focus groups.
  - The 2020 Game Harvest Survey telephone surveyors began work. Calls are going very well, and we seem to be completing more surveys than previous years, presumably due to people being home and able to answer their phone due to the pandemic. Data entry will finish up in late February/early March.
  - Survey calls were made to residents in the proposed area of a prospective elk reintroduction. Data analysis is ongoing and will help to determine if the reintroduction should move forward.

**FISHERIES DIVISION**

January Statewide Fish Stockings

<u>Species</u>	<u>Number Fish</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>Number Locations</u>
Brown Trout	15,000	7"	1
Rainbow trout	35,902	11"	2
Rainbow trout	10,158	9-14"	6
Rainbow trout	646	>14"	6

Activities

- A pre-bid meeting was held with potential contractors for the Watonga dam renovation project.
- A pre-bid meeting was held with potential contractors for the Manning Hatchery renovation project, which includes a new pump station.
- Angler access at Lake Elmer was improved by adding rock to 1.5 miles of road.
- The Crows Roost boat ramp area at Fort Cobb Lake was improved by removing an old dock, hauling away trash, and clearing tree limbs.
- Fish attractor sites on six reservoirs statewide were refurbished with 130 large cedar trees.
- The Lower Mountain Fork River trout stream was monitored during and after USACE initiated maintenance flows from the spillway. No immediate impacts were noted.
- Informational kiosks and updated regulation signage at the Lower Mountain Fork River trout area were refurbished.
- Paddlefish netting and tagging surveys were conducted Eufaula and Fort Gibson reservoirs.
- Alligator Gar surveys are ongoing when weather permits.
- Sauger brood stock collections were conducted on the Arkansas River.

- Fish remains from past gillnet surveys were donated to Sequoia State Park Nature Center to provide food for otters and bald eagles.
- A hatchery booth was prepared and manned for the Lake Texoma Catmaster Fishing Tournament EXPO held at the Choctaw Events Center.
- Survey data collected during 2020 continues to be entered, verified, summarized, and included in reports and 5-year management plans.
- Species management committees continue to meet and make recommendations regarding the development of species management plans, stocking recommendations, future research proposals, and possible regulation change proposals.
- Preparation for the upcoming hatchery production and sampling season is ongoing and includes maintenance of equipment and facilities.

## **C&E DIVISION**

- The name of the Division has changed to the Communication and Education Division. This move was proposed, and the decision made by consensus with employees for several reasons:
  - We are confident that Communication is a much better description of what the section does day in and day out.
  - It denotes a two-way street, where we are both listening and communicating back with constituents and employees. Information is static, but communication is active.
  - Communication is a more modern term in the workplace. When we are working to attract the best and brightest talent, we want it to be crystal clear from the very job title what we are looking for.
  - The moniker Information can sometimes be confused with our friends in Information Technology.
- Kelly Boyer completed entering qualifying scores submitted by schools for the OKNASP state shoot. Schools were notified and the top 20 High School, top 20 Middle School and top 20 Elementary teams are scheduled to compete in the Grand State Shoot February 23 & 24 at the OKC Fairgrounds. All other schools that submitted scores will compete in an on-line tier 2 virtual State Shoot. NASP nationals recently announced that their National shoots will be virtual and the qualification requirements were removed so any team that implemented the program during this school year is now eligible to participate. This is the second year that NASP has had to cancel their in-person National shoot due to COVID.
- Michael Bergin and Whitney Jenkins worked with Brandt to develop a series of “onboarding” emails. These emails are automatically sent to a customer when they purchase a license or abandon their cart. They will include helpful information to keep customers informed and engaged throughout the year.
- With the help of Brandt, Michael secured video from country singer Megan Patrick to use as influencer content for our social media platforms.
- Damon Springer and Jason Smith prepared for the OKSSSP Regional shoots that will be taking place from the first of March through the end of March. There will be four regional shoots and the State Shoot will take place April 7 at the OTA in El Reno.
- Michael Bergin worked to submit a \$50,000 grant application to the Association of Conservation Information’s R3 grant program. This grant would provide funds to continue the work being done on the previously awarded grant which focuses on digital ads, text messaging and influencer marketing.
- Kasie Harriet, Colin Berg and Lance Meek met with administrators and Darrell Noblitt regarding potential support of the Oklahoma Youth Hunting Program. Lance will be overseeing the development of an all-encompassing Hunter Education/R3 grant which

would go into effect in FY23. Support for the OYHP and other mentored hunting programs will be included in the new grant.

- Blake Podhajsky shot and edited video. One show will feature Cedar Lake and how to catch crappie using livescope. It features Game Wardens Shane Fields and Mike Virgin. The other video will feature Wildlife Biologist Chris Parker as he discusses how to scout public lands for deer hunting. Blake also edited a show that aired on February 14 and tells the story behind Keystone Lake's record paddlefish and the guide service who lands them all.
- Kasie Harriet and Colin Berg met several times with NWTf members who are coordinating a Deer Convention at the end of July. This will be an event for beginning and intermediate level deer hunters. The NWTf signed on to sponsor the event, and they have reached out to other NGO conservation groups to solicit their involvement. The NWTf is not just involved with turkeys, they are heavily involved in the National R3 initiatives to grow hunter numbers and provide many different opportunities for beginning hunters.
- Lance Meek, Shawn Gee and Colin Berg met with wildlife division staff and administrators to go over current and FY 21 planned range renovation and construction activities. James Collins and Okmulgee WMA gun ranges are open and only lack hydro seeding to complete the projects. Ft. Gibson has gone through additional lead testing and the results should be available soon. Other range projects to be completed in FY 2021 are Environmental Assessment for a new range at Waurika, engineering for a renovation of Texoma Washita Arm and construction of a new range at Packsaddle WMA.
- Smokey Solis worked on several graphics including Outdoor Oklahoma Adventure (raffle) graphics, Rack Madness graphics, a legislative infographic for Corey Jager and others.
- Jennifer Benge received notification that a grant application that she assisted OKC Latina in applying for from the RBFF was funded. It was one of 8 grants funded by the George H.W. Bush Vamos A Pescar™ grant program.
- Darrin Hill worked on a show that highlights ODWC's hybrid striped bass production. Darrin is also working on a story that features a falconer as part of our diversity initiative.
- Skylar St.Yves, Colin Berg and administrators met with Rick Grundman with the OWCF and Donnie Jones with OG&E about some potential partnership opportunities.
- Jena Donnell finished working on content for National Bird Feeding Month. Jena also worked on a new photography contest specifically focused on wildlife diversity called the Shutter Slam, which will begin in April after RPS. Jena also helped promote the OKC Zoo's Living Classroom grant to 75 eligible schools that participate in ODWC Outdoor Education programs. This grant, provided by the OKC Zoo and Botanical Garden, helps increase habitat for monarchs and other pollinators by creating gardens at their schools.
- Skylar St.Yves and Kasie Harriet continued to offer virtual hunting and fishing courses. These courses continue to grow in popularity and previous courses can be viewed on the Outdoor Oklahoma YouTube channel.
- Sarah Southerland hosted a social media meeting for IE social media administrators to discuss social media goals for 2021. More emphasis will be placed on Instagram's "Reels" feature.
- Todd Craighead finished an episode of Outdoor Oklahoma that highlights the special history of Spavinaw WMA and its current technician, Tony Crawford. It aired on February 21, 2021.
- Colin Berg conducted two live interviews with Channel 8 Good Day Tulsa. Topics covered included how to get involved in the Departments Outdoor Education Programs, the OKNASP state shoot in OKC and virtual tier 2 state shoot, the Great Backyard Bird Count, February and March time to catch record Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass, Wintertime Crappie fishing and the newly launched The Dock (An opportunity for anglers to submit photos of themselves with fish they have caught in Oklahoma for inclusion on our website).

## **WILDLIFE DIVISION**

- We had unprecedented and prolonged winter weather and extreme low temperatures in mid-February. Data and observations are being gathered to anecdotally evaluate the impact on bobwhite quail and other species.
- Elk hunts at the Wichita Mountains were completed with a 72% success rate. (369 hunters harvested 268 elk). The experimental “walk-in” hunts were very successful, and these hunts will be offered again next year.
- Winter disking (February and March) is underway on many WMAs. This is done primarily to enhance sunflowers for dove feeding fields.
- Staff are conducting turkey winter flock surveys.
- Began drawing down water in wetland units to manage food resources for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, and for summer habitat management.
- Numerous prescribed burns have been accomplished, and dormant season burning will continue throughout March as conditions permit.
- McCurtain County Wilderness Red Cockaded Woodpecker update: For the past many years, we have had 12-14 active clusters. In 2020, active clusters increased from 14 to 17 and fledging success was highest in years. 2020: 27 chicks successfully fledged; 2019: 16; 2018: 11; 2017: 14; 2016: 16; 2015: 13. Staff continues to work with USFS on prescribed burning to maximize acres.
- Quail hunting season ended with poor success and fewer than normal hunters.
- Preparations (fence repairs and watering infrastructure development / maintenance) for the upcoming grazing season continues.
- The Conservation Order Light Goose Season (COLGS) opened on Feb 15. MWS numbers are above the long-term average for light geese in the state and predict a fair to good harvest and satisfaction among those that hunt and target this species and season.
- Collaborative effort with the Northern Prairie Research Center and other academic universities to capture white-fronted geese is ongoing. ODWC is helping with locations and trapping efforts. USGS is currently in the process of updating permits to allow the effort to be conducted. Updates on this effort will be given when permits are issued, and the work has been completed.
- Neosho Bottoms project is in final stages of approving ODWC's project description and anticipate the Tar Creek Trustee Council to vote on it soon.
- Herd Health Evaluations were halted mid-February due to unsafe road conditions and extreme low temperatures making collection unsafe. Collections will wrap up the end of February or, if needed, the first week of March.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION**

- We have opened four Warden spots to be filled in the coming months. These openings just closed on Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>. Those four counties are:
  - a. Delaware (D1)
  - b. Muskogee (D2)
  - c. Cimarron (D8)
  - d. Adair (D2)
- We will be having another Game Warden Academy to train these four new officers. Most likely at Camp Gruber again. We will bring in our Game Warden instructors from all over the state to help pass knowledge to the new hires during the 5 weeks of instruction.
- Law has had several officers off on Covid leave lately. Most have had light cases luckily.
- We are also working on getting a large group of Wardens to be vaccinated together instead of trying to get into local health departments around the state. Most of the smaller communities are no problem, it is the larger metro areas that pose the biggest problems with getting scheduled. This would let them come to get their vaccinations all at once and by-pass the scheduling problems with the Department of Health.