# Qutdoor Cklahoma



A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



# PANORAMAS



Nathan Erdman

Habitat improvement activities are a vital part of modern wildlife management. Wildlife biologists and technicians spend a great deal of time, effort and money maintaining essential food, water and cover for Oklahoma's diverse wild populations.

But protecting those populations is an element that is just as important for conservation.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation sets aside a sizable part of its annual budget and staff to enforce the laws and regulations that are meant to protect Oklahoma's wildlife resources. In doing this, Game Wardens also protect the state's sportsmen and sportswomen, landowners' properties and the public of Oklahoma at no cost to the general taxpayer of Oklahoma.

But there are those people who contend the wildlife protection segment of this strategy is unnecessarily restrictive. They claim that prime habitat can easily withstand a few unethical hunters. This faulty notion can be addressed by looking at how wildlife has changed in Oklahoma in the past century.

Although habitat was barely a concern 120 years ago, several species were nonetheless reduced to minimal levels by rampant, unregulated hunting for commercial purposes.

In 1895, still years before Oklahoma's state-hood, concern over declining species such as deer, turkey, elk, bear, wood ducks and other species led to the first territorial game and fish laws. In 1909, the second State Legislature recognized the importance of enforcing those laws and appointed a state Game Warden and eight assistants; those nine men were the origin of today's Wildlife Department and the first officers of the oldest state law enforcement agency.

Since then, the deliberate protection of wildlife has become one of a wildlife manager's best tools for improving and sustaining wild populations.

Recent decades have seen record deer harvests, dozens of new record fish, restoration of wild turkeys, and expanding ranges for pheasants, mule deer, black bear and other species. Those accomplishments can be traced in part to resource protection through law enforcement.

Imagine what might happen if Game Wardens didn't exist and Oklahoma relied solely on printed regulations to protect wildlife. The number of game thieves would certainly grow, and some species would surely become scarce, regardless of the habitat's condition.

The Wildlife Department was established to prevent and reverse declines of many wildlife species. Wildlife welfare will always be a never-ending and progressively challenging problem.

Oklahoma's hunting, fishing and trapping activities have become more tightly regulated over the years to support ODWC in fulfilling its mission: We manage and protect fish and wildlife, along with their habitats, while also growing the community of hunters and anglers, partnering with those who love the outdoors, and fostering stewardship with those who care for the land.

Fishing and hunting regulations exist for the long-term best interests of wildlife and society, and those regulations demand enforcement.

Of course, wildlife must have habitat, which must be managed. Sportsmen and sportswomen must have rules, which must be enforced. The state's 118 Game Wardens are vital to wildlife's future and to the Oklahomans who appreciate the natural resources as an important part of life.  $\bigcirc$ 

**Col. Nathan Erdman,**Chief of Law Enforcement

# utdoor

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#### CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Dallas Barber, Jennifer Benge, Kelly Boyer, Mike Chrisman, Jena Donnell, Nathan Erdman, Lydia Gearhart, Matt Hensley, Kurt Kuklinski, Joey McAllister, Lance Meek, Jerry Shaw, Smokey Solis, Amanda Storck, Amanda Thomas.

#### **P**HONE

(405) 521-3856

#### WEBSITE

www.wildlifedepartment.com

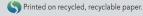
#### E-MAIL

donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov

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OFF THE DEATEN DATH





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#### ON THE COVER:

A big game harvest warrants a big-time celebration! Bowhunter Nolan Vinyard, 8, son of Justin and Kelli Vinyard of Jones, took his first compound bow buck during the 2022-23 archery deer season. His harvest was among the 41,487 taken, which set a new season record for

bowhunters in Oklahoma. Check out all the results from last year's big game hunting seasons in the annual Big Game Harvest Report, starting on Page 10.

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# OFF THE BEATEN PATH

NOTES ON WILDLIFE · OUTDOOR TIPS · READERS' LETTERS · ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS COMPILED BY DON P. BROWN

#### WILDLIFE COMMISSION OF YEAR HONOR GOES TO OKLAHOMA



Accepting WAFWA's Commission of the Year Award are, from left, Wildlife Commission Vice Chairman James V. Barwick, Commission Chairman Leigh Gaddis, and ODWC Director J.D. Strong.

Oklahoma's Wildlife Conservation Commission was recognized as the Wildlife Commission of the Year for 2023 at the summer meeting of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA).

The honor is presented each year to the commission or board that made a significant contribution to the management, protection or enhancement of fish and wildlife resources within the past five years. It is meant to show appreciation for the work that commissioners do day in and day out to support the conservation mission of the wildlife agencies they oversee.

Oklahoma's Commission Chairman Leigh Gaddis accepted the award at the event in Santa Fe, N.M.

"It's truly an honor for Oklahoma's Wildlife Commission to be recognized, and it

serves as a testament for all the hard work our eight commissioners put in all year long," Gaddis said.

"Serving as commissioners and working with such an outstanding state agency for the benefit of our wildlife and our sportsmen and sportswomen is actually a labor of love."

Some of the Commission's accomplishments cited

in the award recognition included:

Beginning an aggressive campaign to bring public target shooting ranges to nearly 20 wildlife management areas statewide.

Helping to create the Oklahoma Land Access Program to open private leased land for hunting and fishing access.

Acquiring three new management areas, opening thousands of acres for public use.

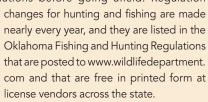
Supported formation of the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation as a private nonprofit fundraising organization.

Overseeing a complete renovation of the Wildlife Department's headquarters building, a rebranding effort to solidify the agency's values and image (which included a new logo), and the implementation of new, modern, customer-focused license sales system and mobile app.

Created in 1922, WAFWA now represents 24 states and Canadian provinces, an area covering nearly 3.7 million square miles of some of North America's most wild and scenic country, inhabited by over 1,500 wildlife species. WAFWA's goal has been to support sound resource management and build partnerships to conserve wildlife for the use and benefit of all citizens, now and in the future.  $\nabla$ 

#### HUNTERS SHOULD BE AWARE OF 2023-24 REGULATION CHANGES

Hunters are encouraged to read and understand all regulations before going afield. Regulation



Here are brief descriptions of hunting regulation changes for 2023-24:

- Extend squirrel season through Feb. 28 annually.
- Decrease the state hunter education course from eight hours to six hours.

- Extend the closing time on shooting ranges at ODWC-managed properties to one-half hour after official sunset.
- Establish archery range rules for ODWC shooting ranges that offer archery facilities.
- Open holiday antlerless gun season on Broken Bow Wildlife Management Area, Honobia WMA, Gains Creek WMA, Ouachita WMA-McCurtain and Tiak units, and Three Rivers WMA.

This summary of regulation changes is intended to be used as a reference only. You are required to be familiar with all the changes to regulations that apply to each of these items.  $\nabla$ 



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#### **NEED SOME IDEAS FOR SOME GREAT HOLIDAY GIFTS?**

It's not too early to start thinking about the out-door enthusiasts on your holiday gift-giving list. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has various gift-giving options for sportsmen and sportswomen of all ages, abilities and interests. These gifts include subscriptions to Outdoor Oklahoma magazine, Outdoor Store items, and lifetime hunting and fishing licenses.

#### OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA MAGAZINE

Our official bimonthly magazine is packed with beautiful photography and compelling stories about the Sooner State's outdoors, making a subscription the ideal gift for hunters, anglers, and nature lovers. Recipients can receive a one-, two- or three-year subscription to the magazine. Gift buyers who call (800) 777-0019 will receive attractive postcards announcing the subscription — great stocking stuffers! Subscriptions are also sold through ODWC's online Outdoor Store; go to www.tinyurl.com/GetOutdoorOklahoma.

### LIFETIME HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSES

Give a gift that truly lasts a lifetime: a lifetime hunting or fishing license! Licenses are available for residents of any age, for disabled veterans, and for seniors. Lifetime license applications can be completed online, by mail, or in person at ODWC headquarters, 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd. in Oklahoma

City, and at several field offices. Costs vary depending on license type, and processing takes about a week (or as fast as 15 minutes when done in-person). For more information, go to the lifetime license webpage at www. wildlifedepartment.com/licensing/lifetime-license.

#### **OUTDOOR STORE**

The Wildlife Department's online Outdoor Store has an assortment of giftable items, including hats, field guides, window decals, ODWC-logo drinkware, Yukon outfitters' gear, and much more. Head to the ODWC Outdoor Store at https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Shop/Inventory.  $\heartsuit$ 



### **GAME BAG**

# A COLLECTION OF LETTERS TO THE WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

We'd like to hear from you! Send your letters to Outdoor Oklahoma Letters, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152, or send e-mail to donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov.

Dear Weston Storer, Wildlife Biologist,

Thank you for the quality presentation on Skins and Skulls at the Woods County Wildlife Day. The youths really enjoyed your presentation, and the information was very educational. Great job educating over 65 youths and adults on wildlife biology and Oklahoma's outdoors.

I got great feedback that everyone enjoyed the day.



Weston Storer

Thank you again for being a quality ODWC professional. **Greg Highfill,** Woods County OSU Extension Service

Dear Mr. **Dru Polk**, Game Warden based in Le Flore County,

Just wanted to thank you for the great week you gave me in the great outdoors. (At the annual ODWC Wildlife Youth Camp,) I was able to learn a lot about wildlife biology and life skills, catch my first striper, shoot my first shotgun, and experience so many new things.



Dru Polk

I can't imagine how much time and effort went into everything, getting up the fishing trip and the ropes course, letting us use your boats, all the ammunition, keeping us in line. I really appreciate it. Thanks for giving me this opportunity; I had a blast. Y'all are great folks, and I hope we'll meet again.

Nadia Michener, youth camper

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

#### NATIONAL JUNIOR DUCK STAMP CONTEST SEEKS ART ENTRIES FROM STUDENTS K-12



The Best of Show winner in Oklahoma's 2023 Junior Duck Stamp Contest was created by Catelyn Tortolini from Newcastle. The entry placed among the Top 25 in the national contest.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is inviting young artists to enter the 2024 Junior Duck Stamp Program's national art competition.

Judging for Oklahoma's contest will occur in March 2024, and winners at the state level will then compete in the nationwide contest.

The contest uses art and science to engage students in environmental conservation and stewardship. Conservation principles along with art and design help teach students in kindergarten through 12th grade about wetland habitat and waterfowl biology.

Artwork of nearly any native North American duck, swan, or goose is eligible. Entries are judged on original design, anatomical accuracy, artistic composition, and suitability for reproduction on a 1-by-1.5-inch stamp. Entries are judged in four groups according to the artist's grade level: K-3, 4–6, 7–9, and 10–12.

In Oklahoma's contest, first-, second-, and third-place winners, along with honorable mentions, are selected from each group. Judges also select Best of Show and Best Conservation Message winners from the top-placing entries, which will be submitted to the Federal Duck Stamp Office and entered into the National Junior Duck Stamp Contest held in April.

The top three winners in Best of Show and Best Conservation Message in the National Junior Duck Stamp Contest will receive scholarships. Also, the first-place art from the national contest is used to create the National Junior Duck Stamp.

The Junior Duck Stamp is available for \$5 from the U.S. Postal Service and from national wildlife refuges. Proceeds from the sale of the stamps support conservation education and provide awards and scholarships for participating students, teachers and schools.

A downloadable entry form, education guides, and information on contest rules and regulations for teachers and supervising adults can be found at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Junior Duck Stamp Conservation Program website at https://www.fws.gov/program/junior-duck-stamp.

For more information on student or school participation in the Junior Duck Stamp contest, email Oklahoma's Junior Duck Stamp State Coordinator Catherine Bell at catherine\_bell@fws.gov.  $\nabla$ 

#### **OUTDOOR CALENDAR**

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES, GO ONLINE TO LICENSE.
GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/EVENT/EVENTS.ASPX

NOTICE: Events were scheduled at press time; they are subject to change.

#### SEPTEMBER 2023

- 2 Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 2-3 Oklahoma Free Hunting Days.
- "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 4 Labor Day holiday; state offices closed.
- ¶ The Fish Bowl Big Bass Tournament, Eufaula Cove Pavilion. Info: development@tobykeithfoundation.org or (405) 271-6552.
- "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **16** Packsaddle WMA Open House. Register: https://license. gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- 17 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 23 Oklahoma Delta Waterfowl annual banquet, The Progress Room, Yukon. (405) 437-8049.
  - Oklahoma Waterfowl Festival, benefiting Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation, 9 a.m., G&H Decoys Inc., Henryetta.
- 24 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **29** Call of the Wild/Hall of Fame Gala, benefiting Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation. Info and tickets: rgrundman@ okwildlifefoundation.com or (918) 323-5566.
- Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- Hunter Education Classes set in Shawnee, Sept.9; Okmulgee, Sept.9;
   Norman, Sept.16; Sulphur, Sept.16; McAlester, Sept.16; Guymon, Sept.16;
   Woodward, Sept.16; Enid, Sept.16; Antlers, Sept.16; Poteau, Sept.16;
   Porum, Sept.16; Tahlequah, Sept.23; Granite, Sept.23; Fort Gibson, Sept.30; Foss, Sept.30; Wayne, Sept.30. Register: https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- Ducks Unlimited events set in Shawnee, Sept. 5; Tulsa, Sept. 12; Edmond, Sept. 14; Stillwater, Sept. 15; Claremore, Sept. 21; Guthrie, Sept. 23; Roland, Sept. 23; Muskogee, Sept. 28. Info: www.ducks.org/events.
- National Wild Turkey Federation event info: https://your.nwtf.org/members/events/.
- Friends of NRA events set in El Reno, Sept. 14; Tahlequah, Sept. 28. Info: www.FriendsOfNRA.org.

#### OCTOBER 2023

- 1 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 2 Commission Meeting, Time TBA, Bartlesville.
- 7 Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- **8** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 15 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 22 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 29 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- Hunter Education Classes set in Sallisaw, Oct.7; Cheyenne, Oct.11; Jenks, Oct.14; Blanchard, Oct.14; Arcadia, Oct.19. Register: https://license. gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- Ducks Unlimited events set in Enid, Oct. 5; Guthrie, Oct. 13; Oklahoma City, Oct. 16; Shawnee, Oct. 26; Seminole, Oct. 28. Info: www.ducks.org/events.
- National Wild Turkey Federation event info: https://your.nwtf.org/members/events/.
- Friends of NRA event set in Dewey. Oct. 7. Info: www.FriendsOfNRA.org.
  - \*\* FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons \*\*

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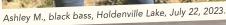
# **WELCOME TO THE DOCK!**

#### ARE THE FISH BITING? YOU BET!

Are the fish biting? You bet! Step onto The Dock and take a gander at some great catches made recently by Oklahoma anglers. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To see more or submit a photo of your catch, go to www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the\_dock or scan the code:









Jason Suflita, black bass, 7/12/2023, Cleveland County



Gary Groves, black crappie, Tenkiller, July 2, 2023.



Tyler Flock, gar, 6/19/2023, Grand Lake



Walter Hinds, black bass, 5/25/2023,



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### WILD ABOUT COOKING

#### **DOVE EMPANADAS**

These days, there are as many versions of the empanada around the world as there are grandmothers. This version is associated with Buenos Aires, the capital and largest city of Argentina. This recipe makes 15-18 empanadas.

—Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley







#### INGREDIENTS

½ pound of ground dove breasts

½ pound fatty ground pork

- 2 packages of empanada dough (20 discs, thawed overnight before preparing meal)
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tbs. sweet paprika
- 1½ tsp. dried oregano
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt, plus extra
- 34 cup low-sodium chicken or game stock

1/3 cup golden raisins

5 green olives, rinsed and coarsely chopped

Black pepper, freshly cracked

Pinch of cayenne pepper

Vegetable oil for deep frying

#### DIRECTIONS

- Heat oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add ground dove and pork
  to the skillet, allow the bottom to form a crust before stirring and continue to
  cook. Transfer meat to plate or bowl with a slotted spoon, and set aside. Lower
  heat to medium.
- In the same pan, add an additional tablespoon of oil, onion, bell pepper and a pinch of salt. Sauté until softened, but do not brown. Stir in cumin, paprika, oregano and garlic for 30 seconds.
- Next, return ground meat to the skillet and season with about 1½ tsp. kosher
  salt, freshly cracked black pepper and cayenne pepper to taste. Add chicken
  stock and simmer until mixture is no longer watery, but still moist, stirring
  occasionally. Take off heat.
- Stir in coarsely chopped olives (about ¼ cup) and raisins. Allow mixture to cool before filling empanadas. Mixture could be made a couple days in advance.
- Add the remaining butter to the hot pan and baste the fish. Increase amount of butter as desired.
- Brush the edge with water and fold over to form half circles. Crimp with a fork.
- Heat frying oil to 325-350° Fahrenheit. Fry empanadas in batches until golden on both sides and drain. Keep warm in an oven and serve hot.

Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley, who immigrated to the United States from Vietnam, was first introduced to hunting in college and started a cooking website, Food for Hunters. She has written for numerous hunting and outdoor magazines, and co-authored the book "Hunting for Food: Guide to Harvesting, Field Dressing and Cooking Wild Game."

This publication was funded by the Multistate Conservation Grant Program, a program supported with funds from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program and jointly managed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

G OFF THE BEATEN PATH

### GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

# ACCOUNTS FROM THE FIELD BY THE PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO ENFORCE THE FISH AND WILDLIFE LAWS OF OKLAHOMA





Game Wardens helped out young sharpshooters on the shotgun range on the final day of 2023 Wild-

life Youth Camp. The youths learned the importance of firearms safety and handling. And they honed their marksmanship skills on the rifle range until a champion was crowned. Thanks to the Oklahoma State Game Warden Association for helping financially support this youth camp for many years.

•••••



Game Wardens were glad to help at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Kids Fishing Day at Copan Lake on June 25 in northeastern Oklahoma. Area families enjoyed a fun morning of fishing. The young anglers landed everything from a turtle to a nice bass! Game Wardens Hank Jenks, based in Delaware County, and Lt. Joe Alexander, based in Washington Co., were on hand to ensure all of the kids had a blast!



Game Wardens helped with the Tenkiller State Park Day Camp in late June. The youths learned about fish identification, knot tying, and casting. The young anglers caught catfish, sunfish and bass with help from Game Wardens Lt. Patrick Matlock, based in Okmulgee County, Brek Henry and Jerry Henry, both based in Sequoyah County.

Oklahoma Game Wardens Max Crocker, based in Texas County, and Mike Baker, based in Beaver County, respond-



ed to the Perryton, Texas, area to assist local authorities and other first responders with search and rescue efforts as well as secu-

rity details after a tornado devastated that town on June 15.

Several Game Wardens participated in Safety Day activities at Checotah Schools. Game Wardens Matt Farris, based in Cherokee County, Logan Shimp, based in Haskell County, David deMontigny, based in McIntosh County, and Lt. Patrick Matlock, based in Okmulgee County, enjoyed meeting all the students and teaching them the importance of firearms and hunting safety.



(Reports from the Oklahoma Game Wardens Face-book page.)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please help make a difference! When violators break the law, they steal fish and wildlife from you! Report violations anonymously by calling Operation Game Thief at (800) 522-8039. You could earn a cash reward.

#### IT'S THE LAW:

There are unfortunate times when vehicles and deer collide. And at times, a deer carcass along a roadway might be in good, salvageable condition. But according to statutes, you aren't legally able to take possession of the deer. As a game species, harvest of deer is regulated. A person must have appropriate licenses (unless exempt) and must take deer during an open hunting season by the allowed methods. However, a Game Warden can issue a permit allowing someone to harvest a road-killed deer. If you ever find yourself in this situation, be sure to contact a Game Warden before removing any road-killed deer.  $\heartsuit$ 

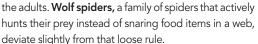
## THESE SPECIES PUT THE EEK! IN ECOLOGY

BY JENA DONNELL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Ecology — a branch of science that focuses on how organisms interact with each other and fit in their environment — shapes much of the Wildlife Department's studies and management decisions. As Halloween season nears, we thought it appropriate to share ecological stories of a few eek-worthy species found in

Outdoor Oklahoma.

Invertebrates aren't well-known for their extensive parenting skills; most employ a strategy that involves producing large numbers of offspring but providing little to no care. The expectation is that the fittest young will survive the odds without any additional investment of



Instead of using their spinnerets to spin webs, female wolf spiders use the structures to attach their egg sacs to their bodies. When the spiderlings are ready to hatch, the female makes a tear in the egg sac and dozens of young spiders emerge. They scramble onto the female's back, layer upon layer, where they stay for at least a week. After that brief brooding period, spiderlings will move away from the female and begin hunting on their own.

Your sightings of spiders — of the non-plastic variety — can be shared on free nature website such as **iNaturalist**.

The eastern red bat may be Oklahoma's most common bat, but its ability to disguise itself as a curled or

dead leaf has presented undeniable challenges for ecologists who want to describe this species' winter habitat use. This "tree bat" roosts among the leaves, with its furred tail wrapped around the body, making it virtually undetectable. To study their habits, researchers have captured flying bats in specialized nets, attached small radio transmitters, and tracked the bats back to their roosts.

During colder periods, red bats may retreat to leaf piles that are 2.5-inches deep to better avoid the elements. While this tactic can be risky — a prescribed or natural fire may burn through the litter while the bats are in torpor — a study found the bats stirred at least two times faster with smoke and sounds of fire than they did without the fire cues.

Learn more about Oklahoma's bat community in the Wildlife Department's **Bats of Oklahoma Field Guide**, available at wildlifedepartment.com.

Decomposers such as turkey vultures may not have the most glamorous ecological story, but these scav-



Turkey vulture — EEK!

enging birds do have several traits that make them well-adapted to their eek-worthy role. They feed largely on wild or domestic carrion, with a slant toward dead mammals. The bald head helps keep feathers from fouling while the birds feed on decaying carcasses, and the

open sinuses may also help with post-meal cleanup.

Turkey vultures rely on their highly developed sense of smell to find food; once a carcass is found, the birds may gorge and then go days without feeding. The birds' strong stomach acid helps with digestion and may lead to a resistance to bacteria and viruses that may be present in the carcasses these birds feed upon.

Hear the turkey vulture's formidable "hiss" and learn more about the birds with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online guide.  $\nabla$ 



Wolf spider — EEK!

Western Big-eared Bat

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OFF THE BEATEN PATH



# OKLAHOMA

DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

# FALL 2023 - SPRING 2024 HUNTING SEASONS

BIG GAME	DEER & ELK*	BEAR*	ANTELOPE
ARCHERY	OCT. 1 - JAN. 15	OCT. 1 - 15	OCT. 1 - 14
YOUTH GUN	OCT. 20 - 22		
MUZZLELOADER	OCT. 28 - Nov. 5	OCT. 28 - Nov. 5	
GUN	NOV. 18 - DEC. 3		DRAWING ONLY
HOLIDAY ANTLERLESS	DEC. 18 - 31		

DUCKS	PANHANDLE	ZONE 1 & 2
(REGULAR SEASON)	OCT. 7 - JAN. 3	NOV. 11 - 26 & DEC. 2 - JAN. 28
(YOUTH, VETERAN, ACTIVE MILITARY)	SEPT. 30 & FEB. 3	NOV. 4 & FEB. 3

TURKEY YOUTH SPRING SE	RING
------------------------	------

APRIL 13 - 14

APRIL 16 - MAY 16

FALL ARCHERY FALL GUN

OCT. 1 - JAN. 15

NOV. 4 - 17

QUAIL	NOV. 11 - FEB. 15
PHEASANT	DEC. 1 - JAN. 31
DOVE	SEPT. 1 - OCT. 31 &
	DEC. 1 - 29

SOUIRREL MAY 15 - FEB. 28

RABBIT OCT. 1 - MARCH 15

FURBEARER DEC. 1 - FEB. 29

\* Bear Muzzleloader and all statewide elk seasons are quota hunts. Check quotas at wildlifedepartment.com before hunting. The Special Southwest Zone for elk has season dates that vary from the regular statewide season dates listed above. Consult the most current Oklahoma Hunting Regulations Guidebook for the Special Southwest Zone dates.

**DISCLAIMER:** This poster is not a legal document. This poster is an interpretive summary of the Titles 29 and 800 of Oklahoma Statutes governing fish and wildlife laws as established by the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission. For a complete listing of official regulations, you can obtain copies of current Oklahoma Statutes through your local library.

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# LAST YEAR'S DEER TALLY LEAPS TO NEW RECORD

By Dallas Barber, Wildlife Biologist

It's easy to imagine this scenario: A couple of old hunters are sitting around the fireplace, telling tales of grand trips afield, remembering the years in the early-2020s and saying, "Those were the good ol' days of big game hunting in Oklahoma."

It's easy to imagine because this past season, Oklahoma's big game hunters set several harvest records — again!

A new mark was set for overall deer harvest in the state; hunters reported taking 134,158 combined in all 2022-23 deer seasons. This total blew away the previous high total of 126,290 set just two years ago.

Oklahoma's deer populations enjoyed growing numbers and good habitat conditions across

much of the state last year, factors contributing to the record harvest. But also contributing was the willingness of Oklahoma hunters to help the state's deer management plan by taking more antlerless deer.

Antlerless harvest made up 45 percent of the total harvest, falling right in line with the statewide management goals that are resulting in healthier populations overall.

See Figure 1 for the total deer harvest from 2004 to this past season.

Gun seasons (the 16-day modern firearms season, youth gun season, and holiday ant-lerless deer gun season) continue to lead the harvest numbers. A total of 80,956 deer were taken in gun seasons last year.

Muzzleloader hunters took 11,715 deer during the nine-day season.

Archery hunters continued their string of consecutive-year record harvests, with 41,487 deer with bowhunting equipment.

See Figure 2 for a look at the success rates among the various hunting methods. Figure 3

Figure 2: Success by Method from 2004-Current

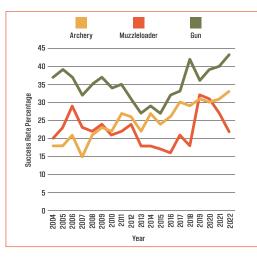


Figure 3: 2022-23 Harvest by Method

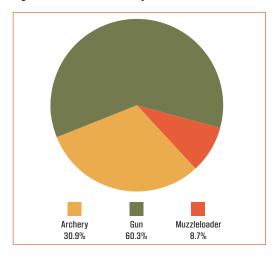
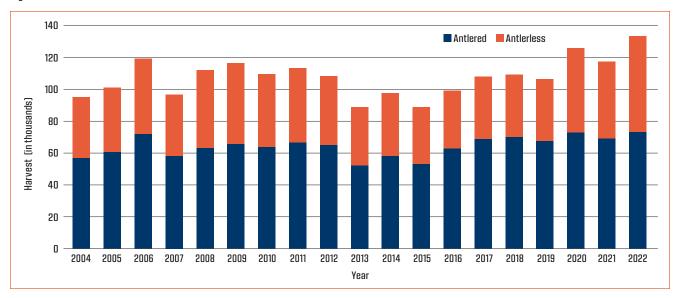


Figure 1: Total Harvest from 2004 to Current



shows each individual method and that method's percentage of the 2022-23 total harvest.

One challenge that deer hunters face in Oklahoma is the diversity in habitat. Oklahoma's greatly variable landscapes offer different levels of quality deer populations and deer habitat. While some counties offer vast amounts of public property, other counties offer no public areas in which to hunt.

To represent the hunting access variables, Table 1 shows deer harvest by county with all wildlife management areas and other public lands removed.

The top three deer-harvest counties were Osage County, where hunters bagged 5,409 deer; Pittsburg County, with a harvest of 4,662 deer, and Creek County, at 3,390 deer harvested.

WMAs and other public lands managed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation make up only about 3 percent of Oklahoma's land mass. But it's important to

> note that this small percentage of public land actually accounts for 7.5 percent of the state's total deer harvest. For details on those public land harvests, see Table 2.

> Oklahoma hunters also have the opportunity to take a mule deer in western portions of the state. These deer frequent the Panhandle and are slowly rebounding from poor habitat conditions that have affected the western one-third of the main body of Oklahoma.

Fragmented populations and habitat conditions make bagging this species a difficult task. But still, Oklahoma deer hunters managed to harvest 209 mule deer during the 2022-23 seasons. See Table 3 to learn about the mule deer harvest by county, sex and method.

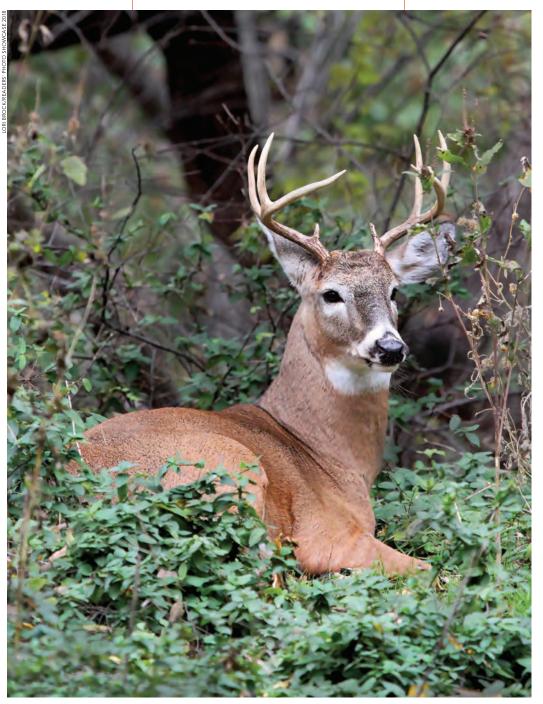


Table 1: Harvest by County, Sex, and Method

	Muzzl	eloader	Gı	ın	Arcl	Archery		
County	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Total	
dair	73	162	336	444	163	169	1,347	
lfalfa	50	35	383	474	142	175	1,259	
toka	121	242 19	849 90	946 259	539 15	494 43	3,191 432	
eaver eckham	6 33	38	449	605	96	158	1,379	
laine	25	20	207	391	55	95	793	
ryan	55	64	436	550	344	328	1,777	
addo	60	95	626	907	195	275	2,158	
anadian	29	45	303	409	136	173	1,095	
Carter	42	56	408	613	198	269	1,586	
herokee	85	171	591	728	421	404	2,400	
hoctaw	104	121	442	550	286	308	1,811	
imarron		8	6	84	4	3	105	
leveland	46	70	296	354	250	259	1,275	
oal	73 29	86 31	510	574	324	309	1,876	
omanche otton	13	18	220 186	313 235	92 57	134 83	819 592	
raig	52	64	499	622	263	244	1,744	
ireek	104	139	973	1,068	548	558	3,390	
uster	22	28	236	411	54	72	823	
elaware	67	123	433	582	331	371	1,907	
ewey	38	28	315	519	76	116	1,092	
llis	21	24	217	436	69	89	856	
arfield	36	30	318	467	93	145	1,089	
arvin	43	77	465	654	194	253	1,686	
irady	75	62	642	801	269	318	2,167	
rant	76	56	737	649	175	220	1,913	
reer	14	24	203	337	58	89	725	
armon	14	16	162	208	63	53	516	
arper	7	23	127	302	21	46	526	
askell	105	102	446	568	274	318	1,813	
ughes	85	111	588	746	350	321	2,201	
ackson	21 24	20	232	307	132	149	861 995	
efferson	30	34 53	271 357	347 479	142 169	177 219	1,307	
ohnston	50 57	41	423	507	123	152	1,307	
ay ingfisher	33	34	378	458	110	142	1,155	
iowa	23	21	242	353	69	107	815	
atimer	72	128	333	445	257	280	1,515	
e Flore	159	232	717	736	434	379	2,657	
incoln	92	112	722	989	347	411	2,673	
ogan	65	71	542	691	252	358	1,979	
ove	22	18	169	287	160	201	857	
1ajor	38	41	384	557	96	133	1,249	
1arshall	12	19	107	174	67	82	461	
layes	82	106	480	584	362	321	1,935	
1cClain	36	43	276	373	145	166	1,039	
lcCurtain .	211	230	1,049	917	528	418	3,353	
lcIntosh	52	55	346	491	199	245	1,388	
lurray	22	34	168	300	92	127	743	
luskogee	71 53	66 42	396	579 545	275	292	1,679	
oble owata	35	42 57	442 521	545 653	131 173	159 192	1,372 1,631	
owata Ikfuskee	35 69	57 73	379	653 578		218	1,631	
iktuskee Iklahoma	30	73 52	283	385	166 301	416	1,483	
kmulgee	64	80	438	567	239	269	1,467	
sage	175	208	1,539	1,967	732	788	5,409	
ttawa	66	73	423	499	222	254	1,537	
awnee	76	51	648	736	299	260	2,070	
ayne	60	76	767	760	255	344	2,262	
ttsburg	170	362	1,123	1,312	870	825	4,662	
ontotoc	56	98	506	681	262	392	1,995	
ottawatomie	100	115	591	817	350	429	2,402	
ushmataha	157	240	774	877	573	503	3,124	
oger Mills	16	60	363	626	59	102	1,226	
ogers	99	99	885	832	607	659	3,181	
eminole	79	103	477	616	221	257	1,753	
equoyah	119	184	649	720	393	393	2,458	
ephens	57 0	70 10	502	613 90	238	270	1,750	
exas Ilman	0 12	10 16	8 245		15 101	7 11 <i>4</i>	130 759	
illman ulsa	31	16 28	245 261	271 313	101 257	114 284	759 1,174	
Jisa /agoner	61	28 70	509	530	374	298	1,174	
ragoner Fashington	36	70 41	461	537	218	243	1,842	
/ashita	8	20	160	244	46	68	546	
loods	21	66	317	541	101	197	1,243	
loodward	23	35	304	505	74	168	1,109	
ounty Total	4,398	5,875	33,866	43,195	17,391	19,360	124,085	
LAP Total	0	0	0	0	709	644	1,353	
/MA Total	897	545	1,863	2,032	1,906	1,477	8,720	
	5,295	6,420	35,729	45,227	20,006	21,481	134,158	

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

Table 2: WMA Harvest by,Sex and Method

	Muzzle	loader	Gı	ın	Archery		
WMA Name	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlered	Antlered	Total
Arcadia CEA/Edmond	0	0	0	0	31	12	43
Altus-Lugert WMA	2	2	1	6	22	20	53
Arbuckle Springs WMA Atoka PHA	0	0	10	2	12	11	35
	3 1	5 3	11 10	10 10	6 31	3 18	38 73
Atoka WMA Bamberger WMA	0	0	0	10	1	1	3
Barren Fork WMA	0	1	2	1	2	2	8
Beaver River (McFarland Unit)	0	1	2	5	3	6	17
Beaver River (MCFariand Onit)	3	1 12	2	10	2	4	33
Beavers Bend SP (Golf Course)	0	0	3	0	2	1	33 6
Beavers Bend SP (River Bend)	0	1	1	4	2	1	9
Black Kettle WMA	42	20	121	153	27	20	383
Blue River PHFA	0	0	4	8	4	7	23
Broken Bow WMA	1	1	5	5	7	3	22
urtschi PFA	0	0	0	0	1	4	5
Candy Creek WMA	1	1	4	Ö	10	10	26
Canton WMA	25	8	14	50	41	15	153
Cherokee WMA (GMA Portion)	1	0	24	30	29	27	111
Cherokee WMA (PHA Portion)	32	14	5	58	32	20	161
hickasaw National Recreation Area	8	1	17	18	24	12	80
imarron Bluff WMA	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
imarron Hills WMA	0	0	0	0	2	3	5
Cookson WMA	4	0	7	5	22	27	65
Cooper WMA	2	2	0	45	3	1	53
ooper WMA opan COE (Parks)	0	0	4	45 5	3 4	3	16
1 ' '							
Copan WMA	12	5	53	51	44	25	190
Cross Timbers WMA	0	0	36	9	45 10	46	136
Deep Fork NWR	12	6	0	4	19	23	64
Deep Fork WMA	8	5	38	27	4	21	103
ewey County WMA	2	0	1	0	0	1	4
Prummond Flats WMA	0	0	1	0	7	5	13
llis County WMA	6	8	6	25	1	3	49
ufaula WMA	18	20	59	56	51	46	250
obb Bottoms WMA	11	0	6	15	10	4	36
ort Cobb State Park	10	0	1	4	3	3	21
ort Cobb WMA	5	3	12	9	28	9	66
ort Gibson Waterfowl Refuge	27	6	0	7	8	6	54
ort Gibson WMA	44	27	26	77	101	82	357
ort Sill	25	20	57	63	47	35	247
ort Supply WMA	6	3	0	16	17	13	55
our Canyon Preserve	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
ort Gibson WRP	3	0	12	13	8	9	45
ary Sherrer WMA (Bolen Hollow)	5	1	1	0	0	1	8
ist WMA	0	1	0	1	1	3	6
irady Co. WMA	0	1	0	1	2	2	6
irassy Slough WMA	0	0	0	0	2	1	3
Great Salt Plains State Park	3	1	9	4	2	2	21
iruber (CGTC)	56	27	12	77	12	10	194
ackberry Flat WMA	4	10	0	0	1	3	18
leyburn COE	0	0	2	3	2	3	10
leyburn WMA	9	1	23	12	15	5	65
lickory Creek WMA	0	2	4	16	7	4	33
lonobia WMA	17	21	47	37	21	23	166
lugo Lake COE	5	5	15	11	30	11	77
lugo WMA	14	17	44	32	42	34	183
Iulah WMA	42	16	82	87	55	37	319
ames Collins WMA	0	0	13	5	85	69	172
ap Beaver PFA	0	Ö	0	0	1	1	2
ohn Dahl WMA (Osage)	0	0	12	3	0	1	16
aw Lake COE	3	2	15	23	16	15	74
aw WMA	68	23	126	101	64	50	432
eystone COE	2	0	24	11	17	14	68
eystone SP	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
eystone SMA	21	7	67	55	74	46	270
ake Thunderbird State Park	1	0	1	55 1	37	25	65
exington WMA	18	21	67	25	24	27	182
ittle River NWR	0	0	12	23	4	5	44
			12 19			5 7	
ove Valley WMA	2	2		26	0		56 10
ower Illinois River WMA	0	1	5 1	1	2	1	10
lajor County WMA	0	0	1	3	0	1	5
IcAlester Army Ammunition Plant	0	0	16	0	98	74	188
IcClellan-Kerr WMA	11	4	31	29	27	24	126
IcCurtain Co. WA	6	2	17	12	4	6	47
IcGee Creek WMA	4	3	3	7	22	16	55
Iountain Park WMA	8	2	0	0	7	3	20
eosho WMA	0	2	2	1	8	6	19
kmulgee WMA (GMA Portion)	0	0	8	9	5	6	28
kmulgee WMA (PHA Portion)	2	5	4	9	6	2	28
ologah Lake COE	8	3	23	35	19	11	99
Oologah WMA	20	9	77	86	60	30	282
ptima National Wildlife Refuge	0	0	0	1	1	2	4

Table 2: WMA Harvest by, Sex and Method (continued)

	Muzzle	loader	Gı	ın	Arcl	nery	
WMA Name	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlered	Antlered	Total
Osage WMA - Rock Creek	3	1	6	9	5	1	25
Osage WMA - Western Wall	1	1	3	4	34	31	74
Ouachita WMA (Cucumber Creek)	0	1	2	5	0	0	8
Ouachita WMA (McCurtain Unit)	15	24	32	25	18	13	127
Ouachita WMA Le Flore	28	21	36	41	14	12	152
Ozark Plateau WMA	0	0	2	3	0	0	5
Packsaddle WMA	9	4	4	39	3	4	63
Pine Creek COE	0	1	2	3	0	1	7
Pine Creek WMA	5	4	8	12	7	2	38
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve	Ö	Ö	10	2	0	0	12
Pushmataha WMA	14	11	18	14	34	22	113
Red Slough WMA	1	0	0	1	20	16	38
Rita Blanca WMA	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Robbers Cave WMA	0	1	1	0	0	Ó	2
Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge	19	3	44	17	0	2	85
Salt Plains NWR Wilderness Area	0	0	9	4	0	0	13
San Bois WMA	1	2	1	1	5	4	14
Sandhills WMA	0	2	0	0	7	8	17
Sandy Sanders WMA	2	1	1	4	4	9	21
Schultz WMA	0	1	0	2	0	ó	3
Sequoyah NWR	22	4	2	0	6	7	41
Sequoyan NWR (Refuge Island)	21	1	0	0	2	1	25
Sequoyan NVVK (Keruge Island)	10	4	0	0	5	1	20
Shorb WMA	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Skiatook COE	0	0	5	8	2	0	15
Skiatook WMA		1	24		5	5	57
	6			16			
Sparrow Hawk WMA	0 1	1 6	1 9	2 15	0 17	2 28	6 76
Spavinaw WMA (GMA Portion)	4		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	5		0	
Spavinaw WMA (PHA Portion)	•	3	11		0	-	23
Stringtown WMA	2	2	1	4	3	4	16
Fenkiller COE	1	3	8	15	6	2	35
Tenkiller-Big Cabin WMA	0	0	3	8	1	1	13
Texoma COE	5	1	17	24	27	16	90
Texoma COE (Burns Run)	0	0	4	1	7	9	21
Texoma COE (Lakeside)	0	0	7	3	15	9	34
Texoma/Washita Arm WMA	2	5	9	19	7	12	54
Three Rivers WMA	47	41	132	97	65	32	414
Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge	1	0	24	7	1	1	34
Fishomingo WMA	0	0	3	4	5	8	20
JSDA Grazinglands RL	0	0	20	12	0	0	32
/anderwork PFA	0	0	1	1	1	1	4
Washita County WMA	1	0	1	4	1	1	8
Washita NWR	0	0	16	3	0	0	19
Vaurika Lake COE	3	0	1	0	11	10	25
Vaurika WMA	11	5	2	1	51	32	102
Webbers Fall WMA	5	0	4	1	2	1	13
Vhitegrass Flats WMA	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Vichita Mts NWR	0	1	2	3	0	0	6
Vister WMA	20	18	33	25	26	17	139
Vister WRP	2	3	3	1	0	1	10
ourman WMA	0	0	3	2	1	1	7
WMA Total	895	544	1,863	2,032	1,908	1,478	8,720
County Total	4,398	5,875	33,866	43,195	17,391	19,360	124,085
OLAP Total	0	0	0	0	709	644	1,353
Grand Total	5,293	6,419	35,729	45,227	20,008	21,482	134,158

Table 3: Mule Deer Harvest by County, Sex, and Method

	Arch	Archery		ın	Muzzle	loader	
County	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Total
Alfalfa					1	0	1
Beaver	2	6	0	40	0	7	55
Beckham			0	1			1
Cimarron	3	2	0	55	0	7	67
Dewey			1	1			2
Ellis	0	4	0	8	0	3	15
Grant					0	1	1
Greer	1	0					1
Harper	0	1	0	12			13
Roger Mills			0	2	0	1	3
Texas	0	4	0	35	0	7	46
Woods	0	1					1
Woodward			0	3			3
Grand Total	6	18	1	157	1	26	209

#### **Archery Season**

Again archery hunters set another harvest record during the 2022-23 season. Harvest totaled 41,487 deer, making up almost 31 percent of the total harvest.

More impressive: Of the total harvest, 48 percent were antlerless deer.

The annual Game Harvest Survey (GHS), a scientific survey conducted by ODWC, has

been tasked with tracking hunter participation metrics for decades. The GHS estimated that 102,116 hunters went afield with archery gear in hand. This is lower than in some years past, but this year's estimate does not include the tribal compact licenses issued in previous years. That is now the case for each method's estimate of hunter numbers.

Figure 4: 2022-23 Archery Harvest by Week

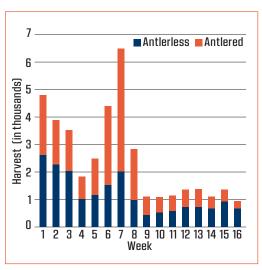
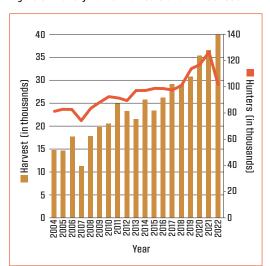


Figure 5: Archery Hunter Numbers and Harvest Count



Archery season in 2022-23 remained unchanged, running uninterrupted from Oct. 1 to Jan. 15. Hunters could choose to harvest a total of six deer, with no more than two being antlered deer. See Figure 4 for the archery deer harvest by week. Figure 5 shows harvest and hunter trends over the years.



#### Muzzleloader Season

Muzzleloader hunters had a nine-day season from Oct. 22-30. Bag limits remained unchanged; hunters could take four deer, with only one of those being antlered.

Continued encouragement of antlerless harvest was represented by liberal antlerless bag limits in various antlerless deer zones, which can be seen in Figure 11.

The GHS estimated 11,578 hunters went afield for this very underused method of harvest. A total of 11,715 deer were taken, with 45 percent of those being antlerless. Figure 6 shows muzzleloader season harvest on each

day of the season. Figure 7 shows muzzleloader harvest trends since 2004.

#### **Gun Season**

Oklahoma's traditional 16-day gun season ran from Nov. 19 through Dec. 4, and bag limits were unchanged from previous years. Hunters could take four deer, with no more than one being antlered.

A record harvest of 80,956 deer fell during the combined gun seasons of youth, regular, and holiday antlerless seasons, 44 percent of which was antlerless. That harvest was achieved by a GHS-estimated 136,768 hunters. Youth deer gun season accounted for 4,058, while holiday antlerless gun sea-



Figure 6: 2022 Muzzleloader Season by Day

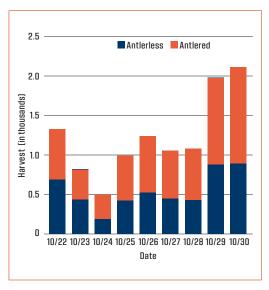


Figure 8: 2022 Gun Season by Day

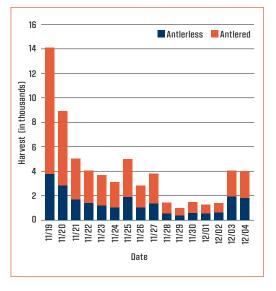


Figure 7: Muzzleloader Season Harvest and Hunter Numbers

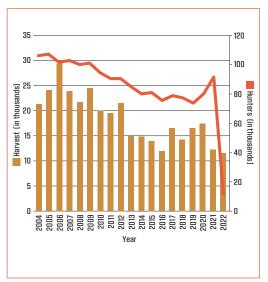


Figure 9: Gun Seasons Harvest and Hunter Numbers

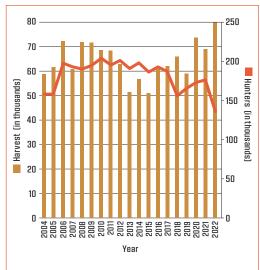
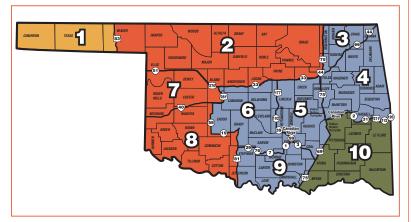


Figure 11: Deer Antlerless Zones



#### DEER, ELK HUNTERS: EXPECT MORE CWD INFO

The upcoming 2023-24 deer and elk hunting seasons will be the first since **chronic wasting disease** has been confirmed among wild deer within the physical borders of Oklahoma.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is an always-fatal neurological disease that affects the brains of deer, elk, moose, and other members of the cervid family, creating holes resembling those in sponges. It was first discovered in the 1960s in Colorado.

In June 2023, Oklahoma's first case of CWD was confirmed in a free-ranging wild deer in **Texas County**, prompting the activation of the second stage of the state's CWD Response Strategy jointly produced by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

About a month later, a second wild white-tailed deer located east of Mooreland in **Woodward County** was confirmed infected with CWD.

In last year's deer hunting season, a CWD Special Surveillance Area (SSA) was put in place in the far southwestern corner of the Oklahoma Panhandle after ODWC was notified by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department of a road-killed deer positive for CWD that was found 2.5 miles south of the Oklahoma-Texas border near Felt, Okla., in southwestern **Cimarron County.** 

"We will be working through our response plan, implementing surveillance efforts and steps to monitor and slow the potential spread of this disease. Our ultimate goal is to ensure healthy and well-managed deer with as little impact to either the resource or our constitu-

ents as possible," said Jerry Shaw, Wildlife Programs Supervisor with ODWC.

CWD transmission from wild animals to people or to livestock has never been documented.

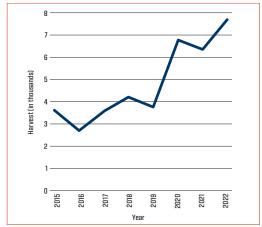
The Wildlife Department will continue monitoring for evidence of CWD within Oklahoma's borders and will release additional information, including ways deer and elk hunters can help with detection and mitigation, as hunting seasons approach.

For more information, scan the code:



son shows continued participation and success. Those participating in the holiday season managed to harvest 7,705 deer, an increase from last year's total of 6,362. Figures 8 and 9 break down gun harvest, both by day during the 16-day season, and trends over the years. Figure 10 shows holiday antlerless season harvest since 2015.

Figure 10: Holiday Antlerless







#### Elk

Elk populations continue to expand across much of the state. Some areas boast well-established herds, while other parts of the state are seeing more transient individuals. Private-land hunting with written permission during statewide elk seasons offer hunters an opportunity to harvest an elk, along with controlled elk hunt drawings

conducted by ODWC.

Hunters took 549 elk during the 2022-23 season. Most of those elk were taken in the Special Southwest Zone consisting of Kiowa, Comanche, and Caddo counties.

Of the 549 elk harvested, 322 were antlerless. A breakdown of harvest by county, sex, and method can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Elk Harvest by County, Sex, and Method

	Arcl	Archery		un	Muzzleloader		
County	Cow	Bull	Cow	Bull	Cow	Bull	Total
Beckham	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Caddo	1	6	29	15	0	0	51
Carter	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Cherokee	1		1	1	0	0	3
Cimarron	0	7	4	10	1	3	25
Coal	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Comanche	25	28	214	105	6	4	382
Dewey	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Garfield		0	0	1	0	0	1
Johnston	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Kingfisher	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Kiowa	0	3	29	24	0	0	56
Muskogee	0	0	4	3	0	0	7
Pushmataha	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Roger Mills	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Texas	1	1	2	2		1	7
Tillman	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Washita	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	29	54	286	163	7	10	549

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023



#### Pronghorn

Found amid the rolling shortgrass prairies of Oklahoma's Panhandle is one of the state's most unusual big game animals: the pronghorn antelope.

While Oklahoma lies on the easternmost fringes of this creature's suitable habitat, hunters still have opportunities to harvest North America's fastest land animal. These opportunities present themselves in the form of ODWC controlled hunt permits, landowner permits,

and over-the-counter archery permits.

Total harvest in 2022 amounted to 150 pronghorn. Cimarron County yielded 107, and the remaining 43 came from Texas County. See Table 5 for a closer look at pronghorn harvest by county, method and sex.

(P.S.: Pronghorns are not true antelopes. It is the only example of its species left on Earth, and is more closely related to giraffes and camels.)

Table 5: Pronghorn Harvest by County, Method, and Sex

	Arch	iery	Gu		
County	Female	Male	Female	Male	Total
Cimarron	1	14	52	40	107
Texas	0	3	24	16	43
Grand Total	1	17	76	56	150

#### Age Structure

ODWC works with multiple sources each year to obtain age data from the state's deer harvest. Those sources include cooperators enrolled in ODWC's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), local meat processors, taxidermists,

ODWC's controlled hunts participants, and ODWC's online "Age My Deer" portal.

All of this age data provide biologists with information pertaining to age structure and overall health within Oklahoma's deer herd. Figure 12 and Figure 13 represent age at harvest for both antlered and antlerless deer.

The drum will continue to beat for healthy deer herds, which is achieved through adequate antlerless harvest and letting younger age-class bucks walk.

I have full faith that our hunters have heard

Figure 12: 2022-23 Antlered Age at Harvest

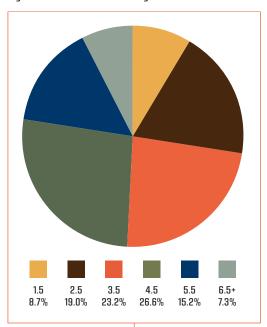
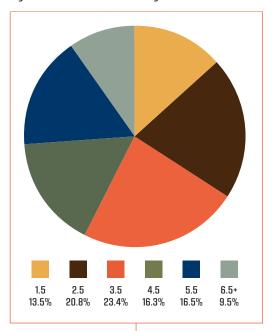


Figure 13: 2022-23 Antlerless Age at Harvest



#### Conclusions

It was a record-setting big game season for 2022-23 in many ways! Records were set for total harvest, archery harvest, and gun harvest.

It is encouraging that Oklahoma deer hunters continue to act as deer managers by making efforts to manage statewide deer herds through adequate antlerless harvest, and selecting for age instead of antlers when it comes to antlered deer.

This can be seen in age at harvest data which has been collected for going on four decades now. In 1989, 1.5-year-old bucks made up 66 percent of overall harvest. Fastforward to the 2022-23 season, and those yearlings are making up only 8 percent of total harvest.

That change merits huge kudos to the state's deer hunters. The effort continues to provide trophy potential in every part of the state, all while allowing for hunters to have a quality hunt.

that message over the past few seasons and will continue to say, "The proof is in the pudding."

The 2023-24 season is right around the corner, and habitat conditions are looking up across much of the state. Areas that were plagued with historical droughts have received much-needed rainfall, and at a perfect time for nursing fawns and growing antlers.

This coming season, make it a goal to take someone new in order to pass on this great tradition. And remember that every time you

release an arrow or squeeze the trigger, you are making a deer herd management decision on the piece of property where you hunt.

Good hunting to all.  $\nabla$ 

For more about Oklahoma's deer and deer hunting, scan the code:



### Hunters Take 60 Black Bears During 2022 Seasons

Black bear hunters had a decent hunting season in 2022, taking a total of 60 bears, which was 10 fewer than the year before.

Archery hunters took 57 black bears, while muzzleloader hunters managed three bears this past year in the black bear hunting zone that includes all or portions of 12 counties in southeastern Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's record black bear harvest was in 2018, when 85 bears were taken.

The 2022 season was the first time that Choctaw Nation authorities handled bear check-in for tribal members only. They checked eight of the 60 bears harvested. Three bears in 2022's harvest carried research tags. And the average age of a harvested bear was 4 years.

In a testament to Oklahoma being regarded as a hunting destination, hunters from seven states bagged a black bear last year, hailing from Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Based on weather conditions, bear hunters should expect this fall's season to be similar to last year's.

them gain the most weight. Acorns, especially from white oaks, are preferred by bears in non-bait areas.

• Start scouting for hunting spots in September.

All hunters wanting to pursue a black bear must buy either an archery or muzzleloader bear license before the opening dates of each season. Archery bear season dates are defined in statute, running from Oct. 1 until the third Sunday in October. In 2022, archery bear season will close Oct. 15. Archery bear season has no harvest quota.



2022 Black Bear Harvest

County	Arc	hery	Muzzleloader			
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total	
Le Flore	12	13	0	2	27	
Latimer	5	4	0	0	9	
Pushmataha	10	4	0	0	14	
McCurtain	4	5	0	1	10	
Grand Total	31	26	0	3	60	

Wildlife biologists offer these tips for increasing your chances of taking a black bear:

- Locate an area with fresh bear sign and stay there; you might have to sit all day or hunt multiple days.
- Start hunting as early in the season as possible.
- Stay weather-aware. Cold and wet conditions make bears less active.
- If the weather is hot, consider hunting near a water source.
- Bears will return to whatever food source is helping

Muzzleloader bear season will be Oct. 28-Nov. 5, but the season will close as soon as a quota of 20 bears has been reached. Before they hunt, muzzleloader hunters must call for the latest bear quota information at (888) 901-3256.

For more on black bear hunting, consult the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations at www.wildlifedepartment.com, in the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app for Apple and Android, or in print free at license dealers statewide.

# In-person Hunter Education Classes Set Statewide

Make sure you are ready to go when this year's hunting seasons arrive. Hunter education certification is required for any 10 and older who wishes to buy a regular (instead of an apprentice-designated) Oklahoma hunting license and other hunting licenses as required by season.

To become certified, a person must take a hunter education class, which is available in two ways: as a free, self-paced, online course attending and testing in-person in a classroom session. Youths 9 and younger may attend but are not allowed to test; instead, these youths are permitted to hunt using an apprentice-designated license.

Listed here is the most recent schedule of

through www.wildlifedepartment.com, or by

Listed here is the most recent schedule of upcoming classes, sorted alphabetically by location, at the time this magazine issue was printed:

#### **ANTLERS**

Sept. 16, 2023

Wildlife Heritage Center Museum, 610 SW D St.

#### **EDMOND**

Oct. 19, 2023

Arcadia Conservation Education Area, 7201 E 33rd St.

#### **ENID**

Sept. 16, 2023

Autry Technology Center, 1201 W Willow Road.

#### **FORT GIBSON**

Sept. 30, 2023

Fort Gibson High School Cafeteria, 500 S Ross St.

#### **FOSS**

Sept. 30, 2023

Foss State Park Pavilion, 10252 State Highway 44.

#### **GRANITE**

Sept. 23, 2023

Granite Senior Center, 407 N Main.

#### **JENKS**

Oct. 14, 2023

Jenks High School Auditorium Building #6, 205 E B St.

Nov. 11, 2023

Jenks High School Auditorium Building #6, 205 E B St.

#### **GUYMON**

Sept. 16, 2023

Guymon Police Department, 906 NW 5th St.

#### **MCALESTER**

Sept. 16, 2023

Life Church, 1300 S George Nigh Expressway.

#### **NORMAN**

Sept. 16, 2023

Tri City Gun Club, 450 Jerry Black Lane.

#### **OKMULGEE**

Sept. 9, 2023

Green Country Technology Center, 1100 OK Loop 56.

#### **OMEGA**

Nov. 11, 2023

Chisholm Trail Technology Center, 283 State Highway 33.

#### **POTEAU**

Sept. 16, 2023

Kiamichi Technology Center, 1509 S McKenna St.

#### **SALLISAW**

Oct. 7, 2023

Central High School Cafeteria, 108089 4670 Road.

#### **SHAWNEE**

Sept. 9, 2023

Gordon Cooper Technology Center, 1 John C Bruton Blvd.

#### **TAHLEQUAH**

Sept. 23, 2023

Cornerstone Fellowship Church, 718 Pendleton St.

#### WAYNE

Sept. 30, 2023

Mid-America Technology Center, 27438 State Highway 59.

#### WOODWARD

Sept. 16, 2023

High Plains Technology Center, 3921 34th St.

To learn all about hunter education requirements and classes, scan the QR code.



#### Anyone Can Take Online Hunter Ed for Free

The NRA online hunter education course for Oklahoma is free to everyone. Upon completion,, students 10 and older will be issued a hunter education certification card. Students younger than 10 are not eligible for a hunter education certification, however they will be issued a "certificate of completion" that can be used as proof of passing the course. This certificate will only be used to meet the requirement of certain shooting sports organizations. Students who are issued this certificate, upon turning 10, will be required to complete the entire hunter education course again.

**IMPORTANT** — Students will need an Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Customer ID number to complete the online course. Go to https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com to locate your existing Customer ID number or create a new one. You will be asked for this number at the end of the online class, and it is required to receive your certificate.

Youths 10 and younger can hunt any game species in Oklahoma using an apprentice-designated hunting license. For more information, go to https://www.wildlifedepartment.com/content/how-do-i-hunt-without-hunter-education \( \bar{\cup} \)

# Conservation

#### Fun Outdoors!

Similar to bird watching, bat watching is a favorite thing to do in the late summer and early fall. Pick a dry evening and sit outdoors around a garden or streetlight. It's never long before bats come out and start circling, swooping and diving to catch insects. Bats are not just cave dwellers or in the country; they live in cities and suburbs, too.

#### Hunting Tip

Youth hunters have a chance to get into the woods earlier than other deer gun season hunters. Take advantage of the special youth hunting season for anyone 17 or younger from Oct. 20-22, 2023. The bag limit is two deer, only one of which can be antlered. All youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult 18 or older.

#### Fishing Tip

Fishing success in fall can depend on water temperature throughout the day. They aren't biting much from sunup into early morning because the water is cool. The bite is better from late morning into early afternoon as the sun warms shallow waters. Fall afternoons and early evenings are considered some of the best fishing times of the year. The sun is overhead for several hours, and the water gets warmer near the surface.

# for Hids

# Word Search: Archery Terms

			0	,											
D	G	R	I	Р	0	Q	J	Q	Z	В	Z	5	Z	L	C
N	R	I	Е	0	٧	У	X	W	0	Е	A	M	У	0	L
L	X	Т	M	٧	A	X	Z	K	A	٧	D	K	U	U	Z
C	0	E	У	Е	5	L	L	U	В	R	Z	G	D	R	G
V	C	N	Т	K	0	Z	Е	D	K	U	D	Н	Z	N	C
R	У	U	G	Z	Н	X	Q	K	W	C	У	Α	٧	D	В
Q	L	K	٧	В	R	0	A	D	Н	Е	Α	D	Т	I	J
F	L	Р	J	0	0	В	Р	0	Р	R	C	0	K	X	Α
C	У	N	D	Т	D	W	J	Α	У	D	Ε	X	Е	U	Т
P	X	A	0	Н	G	٧	I	D	D	N	Α	٧	S	I	Q
K	I	R	5	Н	Α	F	Т	R	M	U	N	N	I	В	C
X	C	R	0	У	I	F	Α	L	R	0	Q	Н	J	U	W
G	٧	0	Q	M	W	N	Q	X	L	Р	C	C	Т	Q	Q
E	M	W	N	Н	У	M	Z	W	5	M	Е	T	A	В	Н
R	I	٧	0	Z	R	٧	M	В	A	0	Α	R	У	C	R
L	Q	T	M	X	Н	F	L	Е	T	C	Н	I	N	G	Е

# Find and circle these words that are commonly heard in the archery community.

Longbow Nock Draw
Compound Arrow Shaft
Broadhead Bullseye Fletching
Grip Recurve Quiver

#### COOL FACTS About the Canada Goose:

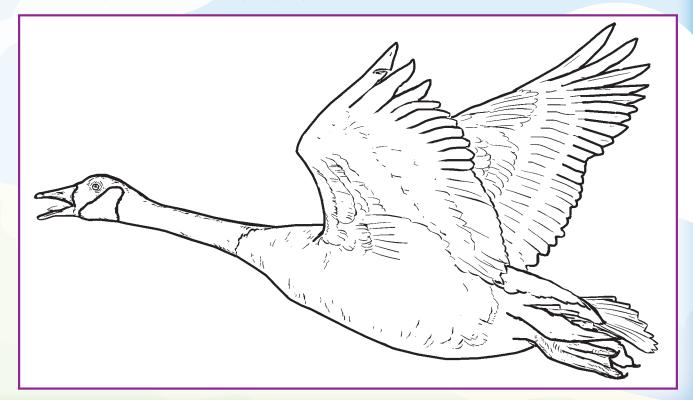
- They mate for life, which is from 10 to 25 years. If a partner dies, the remaining bird will try to find a new mate.
- The giant Canada geese and are the largest geese in the world. Adults weigh 5 to 14 pounds, with some weighing up to 20 pounds.
- They molt their feathers once a year, usually in summer. For this six-week period, they are unable to fly.
- They eat aquatic plants, grass, small aquatic animals, and grains.
- Canada geese migrate in large flocks flying in a V-formation. They fly south for winter and north for summer.
- There are seven subspecies of Canada geese, including the giant and the lesser.



- The female is called a goose and the male is a gander. The young are called goslings.
- The giant Canada goose subspecies was believed to be extinct in the 1950s. In 1962, a small flock was discovered wintering in Minnesota.
- Hunters took about 35,000
   Canada geese in Oklahoma during 2020-21, and 1.7 million across the U.S.
- Canada geese have established breeding colonies in urban and cultivated habitats, which provide food and few natural predators.



#### Color a Critter: Canada Goose





# Standing the Test of Time

#### **Hunter Education Proves Relevant for Life**

By Kyle Wright

did much in the way of homework, but I still scored well enough on the tests I took to keep my grades up and my momma happy. Because it came so easy for me, I never had to suffer through the sweaty-palmed anxiety that so many students experience when taking tests. While my classmates were squirming in their seats and chewing their fingernails down to the quick, I'd be sitting slouched at my desk, as cool as a cucumber.

But that cool-as-a-cucumber composure was absolutely pickled in anxiety one

School always came easy for me. I never really had to study, and I certainly never

But that cool-as-a-cucumber composure was absolutely pickled in anxiety one Saturday afternoon in September 1986 when I sat down to take the only test that's ever cost me a good night's sleep: the test that would determine whether I passed my hunter education course.

I was 10 years old and wanted nothing more in life than to become a deer hunter, just like my dad. While other boys my age dreamed of batting cleanup for the Yankees or soaring into space, all I could think about was chasing big bucks.

My dream of becoming a deer hunter couldn't be realized without a passing grade on the hunter education test, so I was under a lot of pressure. Considerably more pressure than any math class I'd ever sat in, that's for sure.

But the pressure I already felt was ratcheted up a notch by the fact that my dad worked for Oklahoma's Department of Wildlife Conservation. What would my friends say if I failed my hunter education test? Every one of them believed that I had a built-in advantage simply because there was a Wildlife Department pickup parked in front of my house every night. Never mind that dad was a fisheries supervisor and that there wouldn't be a single question related to fisheries biology on that test! All my friends expected me to post a

perfect score, and I'd never felt so much pressure in my young life.

Back then, the hunter education course was tougher. Yeah, yeah, I realize that makes me sound like an old fogey, but hear me out. I may not have had to walk miles to school, in the snow, uphill both ways — nothing as cliche as that. But I did grow up in an age when teachers didn't have the educational resources they do now.

Not to mention, the ODWC has redesigned the manual and test, making the course more focused on hunting safety, as opposed to spending more time on the other subjects.

I'm sure the class I sat through only lasted eight hours, but to a 10-year-old full of nervous energy, eight hours of lecture on a Saturday might as well have been an eternity. That's probably why all I really remember about the hunter education course is droning lecture followed by frantic memorization.

Today, Oklahoma's Wildlife Department provides potential hunters with all kinds of edu-

cational advantages, making the hunter education course that much easier. A quick search of the Department's website turns up tons of useful information, including this synopsis of the hunter education course: "Hunter education covers a variety of topics including firearms safety, wildlife identification, wildlife conservation and management, survival, archery, muzzleloading and hunter responsibility."

To that end, prospective students are offered valuable resources to prepare themselves for the course. The 80-page Hunter Education Manual is chock full of colorful graphics and bullet-pointed sidebars that both summarize and simplify pertinent topics.

I've been wandering the woods for better than 35 years, and a recent scroll through that document was every bit as educational for an experienced hunter like me as it is for those that are new to the sport.

Available, too, is a Hunter Education Study Guide that's designed to accompany the manual. The Study Guide is eight pages' worth of fill-in-the-blank questions, giving students the opportunity to make sure they've learned key concepts. Both documents can be viewed or downloaded with a click of the mouse. And when used together, they help a hunter learn all that he or she needs to know not just to pass the hunter education course, but to be safe in the deer woods or the duck blind.

The Wildlife Department has offered a free, home-study option since 1998, and an online course since 2013. Now, thanks to a partnership with the National Rifle Association, the ODWC Is able to not only offer a free online hunter education, but also provide funds for other conservation projects. Each time a student takes the course, It counts as \$25 towards the ODWC's federal match. When matched at the Federal rate of 25%/75% It provides \$75 worth of conservation funding for the ODWC. This frees up license dollars to be used for other projects.

But I didn't have access to any of that when I sat down to take that test. My head was still swimming with information when the course's instructor abruptly ended his lecture, placed a piece of paper upside down on the table in front of me and handed me a No. 2 pencil. At the instructors' cue, every student in the class turned over that piece of paper and went to work. Every student except for me. I took one look at the first question and instantly forgot everything I'd just been taught.

For the first five minutes of the time we were given for the test, I did nothing but sit there and panic. I sweated and I shook. I did everything in my power to hold back a flood of tears that were threatening to fall. Failing the test would be embarrassment enough, but crying in front of my friends would be the death of me. The very thought of such a meltdown only served to swell the lump in my throat. It wasn't long before the dam of my resolve broke, and I only just managed to pass off a choked sob as a cough.

Somehow, that break in my composure relieved some of the pressure I was under, and I took another look at the test in front of me. When I did, the hamster wheel in my head started spinning again. I remembered some of what I'd just been taught and answered a few of the test's questions. I relied on the things my dad had taught me and answered a few others, things like "treat every gun as if it's loaded" and "always cut away from yourself." Common sense answered a few more questions. As it turned out, there wasn't a single subject on the test that I didn't already have at least a basic understanding of.

My confidence grew with every question I answered, and I wound up breezing my way through the very test that only minutes before had threatened to break me. By the time I'd answered the last question, I was no longer worried about failing the test or being embarrassed in front of my friends. I knew I'd passed, and I had deer to hunt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: The son of a retired fisheries biologist, Kyle Wright was raised in Holdenville, where he spent his springs and summers baiting hooks and falls and winters waiting on whitetails. Now, he's an avid hunter and lazy fisherman, and writing about his hunts allows him to relive his times in the field.







LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT ENDANGERED OKLAHOMA CAVE CRAYFISH

BY SAVANNAH HOPKINS

# Earth has more than 57.3 million square miles of land area, but the Oklahoma cave crayfish is known within an area only 1.3 miles in size.

"Just like all the other crayfish in the state, the Oklahoma cave crayfish is a small invertebrate," said Jena Donnell, a communication specialist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Wildlife Diversity Program. "But what makes it unique is that it is only found in Oklahoma."

The species grows to about 3 inches long, is white or colorless, and has reduced eyes. Two populations have been found in hydrologically connected subterranean waters in Delaware County in northeastern Oklahoma. (Various experts have indicated the crayfish can be found in as many as five cave systems in that area.)

"The area the species is known in only about 1.3 miles of cave," Donnell said. "When you think about all of Oklahoma and its cave systems, it's really kind of baffling to think about."

Fish and wildlife biologist Richard Stark with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the cave systems are in an ecoregion known as the Ozark Highlands. Only about 150 total individual Oklahoma cave crayfish have been accounted for in those caves, he said.

"The caves are just really hard to get in and survey because you just can't walk into one of them," Donnell said. "You have to know how to snorkel before you can even get into the habitat, on top of having to know what to look for."



The Oklahoma cave crayfish is known to exist in only a handful of cave systems in Delaware County.

"The crayfish are small, and they live in dark environments. So while it may just be a naturally rare species, it's also just very hard to find." "The population, based on what we currently know and currently believe, is pretty low," Stark said. "We need to do additional studies in the future to better our understanding of how many there are and their distribution."

The Oklahoma cave crayfish is a state endangered species as designated by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Donnell said the crayfish is classified as state-endangered, and the caves where it has been found also host multiple rare cave species and have conservation protection. The caves are on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service land, or in an area owned by a private organization called The Nature Conservancy.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has plans to evaluate the conservation status of the Oklahoma cave crayfish in the near future. "This species is on the radar screen for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," Stark said.

The Oklahoma cave crayfish's underground cave habitat adds challenges for biologists who want to gather data on the species, Donnell said. "The caves are just really hard to get in and survey because you just can't walk into one of them," Donnell said. "You have to know how to snorkel before you can even get into the habitat, on top of having to know what to look for."



The Oklahoma cave crayfish is considered an endangered species by the Oklahoma Wildlife Department.

Even though the species is considered endangered, little is known about it and how endangered it actually is. Donnell said it's difficult for most people to realize that a species can just be naturally rare, but that might be the case for the Oklahoma cave crayfish.

"The crayfish are small, and they live in dark environments. So while it may just be a naturally rare species, it's also just very hard to find," Donnell said. "They may be doing better than we know, since we aren't able to get in and survey all the places they may be."

The difficulty in accessing the crayfish's habitat probably helps eliminate some potential threats to the species, she said.

"While the caves are in are protected habitats, that doesn't take the large-scale risk of pollution away, but it helps," Donnell said. "And

the risk of direct human threat is low, because most people aren't going to find the access points into the caves. Someone trying to access the caves could face trespassing charges on the state or federal levels."

Stark said the most important conservation actions to benefit the Oklahoma cave crayfish are to find out the full extent of the species' range and what caves it inhabits. He said the biggest threat to the species would be anything that could adversely affect the cave environment or the groundwater quality, such as a major spill of a toxic substance.

Donnell said it's simply human nature for people to want to help conserve this rare species.

"It is something hard to hear ... but we don't have a lot of influence here. It is really hard to move the needle on some-

thing like this. And that is never fun to hear, because we want to help. But sometimes we just have to leave it up to nature."

Donnell said she doesn't want to see anything go extinct or be a part of any problems leading to declines or extinctions.

"Building awareness is a great first step as well as just being aware of what goes down the drains is a really good step at a statewide and regional level," Donnell said.

"The hopeful part is that this species was discovered 50 years ago, and it has probably been here way longer than that, so something is going right," Donnell said.  $\nabla$ 

Savannah Hopkins is a communications student at Oklahoma State University.

"Building awareness is a great first step as well as just being aware of what goes down the drains is a really good step at a statewide and regional level."

#### **ABOUT THE SPECIES**

The small Oklahoma cave crayfish (Cambarus tartarus) averages no more than 3 inches long. It has a white or colorless appearance, no external eyes, and thin pinchers and legs.

It is found only in the shallow groundwater aquifers in limestone caves underneath portions of the Spavinaw and Saline Creek watersheds in southern Delaware County. Considered a state endemic species, it has never been found outside of Oklahoma. This species co-exists with the federally threatened Ozark cavefish.

It is likely an opportunistic feeder, consuming both plant and animal matter that has come to lie on the floor of underground streams. Like many other cave organisms, it has adapted to areas with no light and uses other sensory organs to survive and locate prey. The reproductive habits of this crayfish are unknown.

The species is most at risk from groundwater pollution, which causes habitat degradation by reducing water quality. Direct disturbance of cave habitats by people is also a threat.  $\nabla$ 

— Oklahoma Field Guide, wildlifedepartment.com

# RANGE-FINDING

ODWC Program to Construct, Renovate Shooting Ranges On-Target Statewide

By Don P. Brown, Communication and Education Specialist And Amanda Thomas, Shooting Range Coordinator



It was like Christmas in July for the hunters and recreational shooters of western Oklahoma as the Wildlife Department officially cut the ribbon opening a new shooting range at Packsaddle Wildlife Management Area in Ellis County.

The new public shooting range features a 100-yard rifle range with five covered shooting benches and earthen berms, target stands, a shotgun range, new signage, paved sidewalks, and parking area including ADA accessibility.

Representatives from the Oklahoma Legislature, Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission, Oklahoma

Wildlife Conservation Foundation and ODWC gathered July 18, 2023, to celebrate the opening.

The Packsaddle WMA project is the latest shooting range to be built or renovated since 2015, when ODWC began a long-term campaign to renovate shooting ranges on the 12 existing shooting ranges on wildlife management areas.



Gathered to open the Packsaddle WMA shooting range on July 18, 2023, are, from left, ODWC Shooting Range Coordinator Amanda Thomas, Wildlife Biologist Marcus Thibodeaux, Communication and Education Supervisor Colin Berg, ODWC Director J.D. Strong, Wildlife Supervisor Ron Smith, Wildlife Commissioner Rick Holder, ODWC Assistant Director Wade Free, State Rep. Kenton Patzkowsky, Wildlife Chief Bill Dinkines, Communication and Education Chief Nels Rodefeld, Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation board member John D. Groendyke, Wildlife Commissioner D. Chad Dillingham, and Senior Communication and Education Specialist Lance Meek.

This month, another new shooting range at **Kaw Wildlife Management Area** is expected to be ready to welcome people who want to target practice, sight-in their rifles and handguns, or fling some arrows on the archery range.

The Wildlife Department is committed to shooting ranges and shooting sports activities, whether conducted



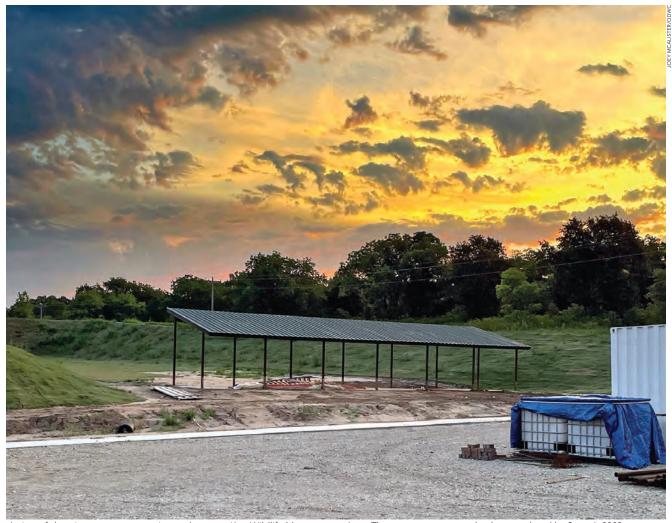
Members of the Beckham County 4H shotgun team officially open the new shotgun range at Packsaddle Wildlife Management Area.



Forms are in place in preparation for pouring a sidewalk during construction of the Beaver River WMA shooting range.



Renovations are complete at James Collins WMA east of McAlester.



A view of shooting range construction underway at Kaw Wildlife Management Area. The range was expected to be completed by Sept. 1, 2023.



Apparent in this photo is the degradation of the backstop berm at Cherokee WMA's shooting range. Berm replacement is part of the renovation process for existing shooting ranges.

by hunters or not, because all people who participate in shooting sports are part of the Department's core constituency, said Nels Rodefeld, chief of the Communication and Education Division at ODWC.

"A big portion of our funding through the Wildlife Restoration grant program comes from sporting arms and ammunition sales."

Recreational shooters are proving to be major contributors to wildlife conservation. When recreational shooters and hunters purchase sporting arms and ammunition, manufacturers then pay an excise tax to the federal government that must be distributed to the states for wildlife conservation efforts.

The excise taxes go to the federal **Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program,** which distributes the money back to individual states. That money is matched with state or third-party funds in a cost-sharing framework.

It's a user-pay, user-benefit system, and recreational shooters along with hunters and anglers are top players in ensuring conservation happens and that wildlife abounds for those who love the outdoors.

With recreational shooting on the rise, the Wildlife Department is working to help meet the demand for places to shoot.

Each time an Oklahoman buys a license or outdoors-related merchandise, he or she is supporting conservation efforts such as building a new shooting range, installing boat ramps, improving habitat, and increasing hunting access. Anyone with a hunting or combination license may use the ranges. Archery equipment, rifles, handguns, and shotguns are permitted.

The cost-share percentage for public target range projects was recently changed to 90/10, meaning that states can be reimbursed for 90 percent of the cost of activities including activities for acquiring land for, expanding, or constructing public shooting ranges.

Providing a safe, clean environment with minimal maintenance are among the goals in planning new ranges and renovations. Range features include covered shooting benches, target stands, new and reconditioned shooting berms and backstops, ADA access and more.

Progress continues on a multi-year program to renovate or construct shooting ranges on wildlife management areas statewide. Renovation and or new ranges have been completed at Cherokee, Lexington, Pushmataha, Beaver River, James Collins, Okmulgee, and Packsaddle WMAs.

ODWC's shooting range planning and construction budget for Fiscal Year 2024 includes \$3.26 million for various shooting range projects

Upcoming renovation and new construction projects include Kaw, Atoka, and Optima WMAs.

At least seven ranges or potential sites on WMAs are in the planning stages for renovation or construction includ-



Contractors and an ODWC employee discuss the progress of dirt work taking place during the renovation of the shooting range at Okmulgee Wildlife Management Area.



A dump truck has just delivered another load of dirt for building one of the berms during the renovation of the Cherokee WMA shooting range.

### SHOOTING RANGE RULES

On all Wildlife Department-owned or -managed lands, the discharge of firearms for purposes other than when hunting is restricted to the target/shooting ranges provided for public use.

- Shooting ranges are open year-round, unless otherwise specified in the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations (public hunting lands special area regulations, controlled hunt closures) or signs at the range.
- 2. Shooting hours are official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset, daily.
- Any person younger than 16 using the shooting range must be immediately supervised by an adult 18 or older.
- 4. All firearms shooting single projectiles or any pellets larger than conventional BB (0.18 of an inch in diameter) must be shot at approved berms and target areas only. Airborne clay targets may be shot using pellets no larger than conventional BB.
- 5. All rifle, pistol, shotgun, and muzzleloader targets will consist of paper or clay targets only.
- 6. All paper targets must be removed before leaving the shooting area.
- 7. Centerfire rifles and pistols .50-caliber and larger are prohibited.
- 8. Fully automatic firearms are prohibited.
- 9. Fireworks, explosive devices, exploding targets, tracer and incendiary rounds are prohibited.

- 10. Eye and ear protection shall be worn while shooting.
- 11. Shooters, and accompanying adult, must possess a valid Oklahoma hunting license or Oklahoma combination hunting/fishing license, unless exempt.
- 12. Do not shoot while another shooter is down range.
- 13. Beer and other alcoholic beverages are prohibited on shooting range and in shooting range parking lot.

### **ARCHERY RANGE RULES**

For Department shooting ranges that include an archery area, the following shall apply:

- Archery range is open year-round, unless specified otherwise in the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations or signs at the range.
- 2. Shooting hours are official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset, daily.
- 3. Any person younger than 16 using the shooting range must be immediately supervised by an adult 18 or older.
- 4. Archers using the elevated platform must wear a safety harness meeting the standards of the Treestand Manufacturers
  Association and be attached to the platform at all times.
- 5. Archers may only shoot at stationary targets.
- 6. Archers must draw and release arrows from the tower or directly below the tower ONLY.
- 7. All nocked arrows must point down range at all times.
- 8. The archery tower is limited to four shooters at a time; no spectators are allowed on the archery tower.
  - 9. Do not shoot while another archer is down range.
  - 10. Broadheads may only be used in designated lanes.
  - 11. Shooters, and accompanying adult, must possess a valid Oklahoma hunting license or Oklahoma combination hunting/fishing license, unless exempt.
  - 12. Archery targets designed specifically for archery are allowed on the archery range. Archery targets must be removed after use.
  - 13. No firearms allowed on archery range.



Breaking in the new rifle range at Packsaddle Wildlife Management Area after the July 18, 2023, ribbon cutting ceremony are Reed Tucker, 12, and Mason Tucker, 18, of Sweetwater, Okla.

ing **Atoka, Optima, Arcadia CEA** (archery only), Canton, Fort Supply, Fort Gibson, and Copan.

The Wildlife Department is also committed to partnering in third-party shooting range projects, which involves passing through federal grant funds to entities wanting to enhance or create shooting opportunities for new and existing hunters, and both recreational and competitive shooters. In the past, ODWC cooperated in building a new public shooting sports complex at Oklahoma Panhandle State University in Goodwell and helped upgrade clay target equipment at Silverleaf Shotgun Sports near Guthrie. The current third-party project in the planning stages is with the City of Altus and

will potentially result in a world-class shooting sports complex. For more information visit altusok.gov.

### SHOOTING RANGE PROJECTS

(As of September 2023)

### KAW WMA

Anticipating to be open by mid-September. The site features two 100-yard rifle ranges with 12 covered shooting benches, a 25-yard pistol range with six covered shooting benches, and an archery range including an elevated platform and four shooting lanes.

### ARCADIA CEA

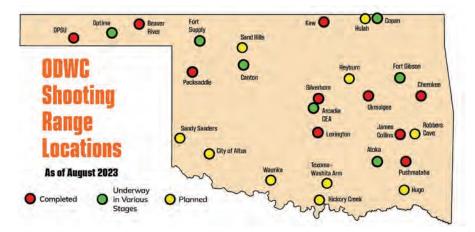
Planning phase for environmental assessment and engineering are underway for an archery park.

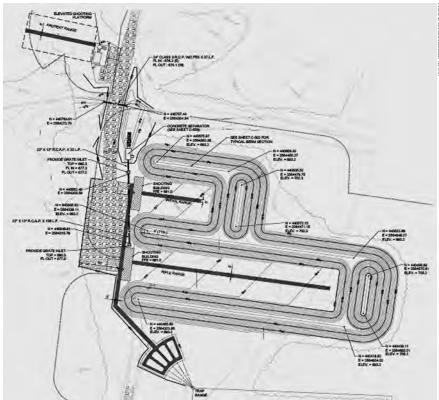
### **ATOKA**

Engineering underway. Plans include construction of archery, pistol, rifle, and shotgun ranges with ADA accessibility. Anticipated completion in spring of 2024.

### **OPTIMA**

Planning phase for engineering is underway. Plans include renovation of the rifle and pistol ranges, along with new covered shooting benches with ADA accessibility. Anticipated completion in summer 2024.





This overview schematic shows the design plan for the public shooting area at Atoka WMA. It will include rifle and pistol ranges, an archery range with elevated shooting platform, and a trapshooting pad. Also shown are the location of the parking lot, sidewalks, the two shelter buildings, and earthen berms.

### **FORT GIBSON**

Planning phase for environmental assessment is underway.

#### FORT SUPPLY

Planning phase for environmental assessment is underway.

### **CANTON**

Planning phase for environmental assessment and engineering are underway.

### COPAN

Planning phase for engineering is underway.

### **CITY OF ALTUS**

Planning phase for environmental assessment and engineering are underway.

### SHOOTING RANGES NOW OPEN

(as of September 2023)

- Beaver River WMA
- Canton WMA
- Cherokee PHA
- Fort Gibson PHA
- Fort Supply WMA

- Hickory Creek WMA
- James Collins WMA
- Lexington WMA
- Okmulgee GMA
- Optima WMA
- Packsaddle WMA
- Pushmataha WMA
- Texoma-Washita Arm WMA

Detailed rules are posted at each range, or for more information contact the wildlife biologist at that area. Target shooting is not allowed on areas where shooting ranges are not provided. Exemptions may only be granted by the ODWC Director upon prior submission of a written application setting forth the location, date, nature, and purpose of such activity.

All persons using shooting ranges must possess a valid Oklahoma hunting or combination license, unless otherwise exempt.  $\nabla$ 

For details about what is offered at each ODWC shooting range, scan the code:





This is an architect's conception of the proposed Bitter Creek Shooting Sports Complex, which is set to be built with ODWC's help through the City of Altus.



A view of construction underway on several features of the Kaw WMA shooting facility, including a pistol range, two rifle ranges and an elevated archery platform.



An aerial view of the renovated rifle and pistol ranges at Lexington WMA.



### Flat Revenues, Inflation Take Toll On Wildlife Conservation Budget

By Don P. Brown, Communication and Education Specialist

Most state government agencies are funded primarily with taxes paid by citizens. In Oklahoma, think the Department of Human Services, Department of Public Safety, Health Department, Department of Education, and so on. Primary funding to operate these agencies is appropriated each year by the state Legislature.

Not so for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Few citizens realize that the Wildlife Department receives zero funding by way of state tax revenues. ODWC is a non-appropriated state agency, meaning that it pays its own way. It does so mostly by selling hunting and fishing licenses, and leveraging federal grant funds. And since state taxes are not used to fund ODWC, the agency has no fall-back options to ask the State Legislature for more funding.

There are about 45 non-appropriated Oklahoma government entities, most of them smaller boards or commissions with fewer than 15 employees.

ODWC, with about 360 employees and an annual budget for Fiscal Year 2024 of \$75 million, is the second-largest non-appropriated state agency, behind the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission with 650 employees.

Founded in 1909, and approved as a constitutional agency by a vote of the people in 1956, the Department's employees:

- Manage more than 80 Wildlife Management Areas totaling more than 1.6 million acres in the state for public use.
- Oversee four state fish hatcheries that help produce the majority of fish stocked in Oklahoma public waters annually.
- Facilitate ODWC's educational programs, including shooting sports, archery in the schools, aquatic education, and hunter education courses, reaching 50,000-plus students each year from more than 550 schools across the state.
- Serve as guardians of fish, wildlife, and public safety for the state with 120 Game Wardens including at least one in each of the state's 77 counties.

It takes months of gathering data, assessing plans and needs, and number-crunching by CFO and Chief of Administration Amanda Storck and key staff to cobble together a yearly revenue-and-spending plan for the Wildlife Department.



License sales directly or indirectly determine about 80 percent of ODWC's revenues each year. Buying a hunting or fishing license is one of the best ways to help wildlife conservation and habitat management in Oklahoma.

### **CURRENT BUDGET**

This past April, administrators and staff began work to create a budget proposal for the 2024 fiscal year, which started June 1, 2023. It's sort of like peering into a crystal ball. They must analyze budget and spending trends in prior years and anticipate expenses and revenues for the coming year, then submit the complete proposal to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation

FISHING & HUNTING
2023-2024

FREE
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Producing and distributing regulations is a vital annual expense for ODWC's Communication and Education Division.

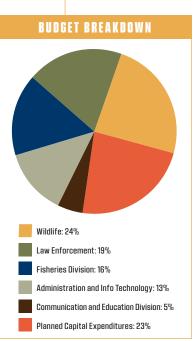
Commission (the eight-member body that governs ODWC operations) for approval.

Commissioners in June approved the FY 2024 budget totaling \$78.2 million, which is a 21 percent decrease from the FY 2023 budget. Expenditures are spread across the Department's five divisions. Here's a closer look at ODWC's FY 2024 budget.

### TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENDITURES FY 2024: \$75 MILLION

The greatest portion of the total budget is earmarked for the Wildlife Division, with \$17.6 million or 24 percent. This includes expenses for division operations, salaries and benefits. Following Wildlife Division in order of allocation size is Law Enforcement, \$14 million or 19 percent; Fisheries Division, \$12 million or 16 percent; Administration (which includes Information Technology expenses for the entire agency) at \$9.7 million or 13 percent; and Communication and Education Division, \$3.8 million or 5 percent.

Planned capital expenditures amount to \$16.9 million, or 23 percent of the budget.





Prescribed fire is among the most beneficial management tools that biologists have to enhance habitat on ODWC lands. Funding for this important work is part of the operations budget for the Wildlife Division.

### TOTAL REVENUES FY 2024: \$75 MILLION

Of total revenues for this year, \$37.3 will be generated and \$37.7 will be grant revenue. Federal grants are the largest portion of

> the funding pie for ODWC, followed by annual license sales. Together, those funding sources account for almost 80 percent of the Department's annual revenues.

> While annual license sales contribute directly to the yearly budget, lifetime license sales do not.

> The revenue from lifetime license sales goes to the Lifetime License Trust Fund, whose corpus cannot be spent. Investment interest income generated from the Trust Fund can be used for annual ODWC operations. More than 250,000

lifetime licenses have been sold since the first one in 1969. Today, more than half of all ODWC licensed hunters and anglers hold lifetime licenses and no longer buy annual licenses.

ODWC's annual revenues since 2015 have remained relatively flat. This year's estimated revenue of \$58.64 million is lower than the revenue generated in 2020 (\$63.84 million) and in 2015 (\$59.66 million).

A look at license sales revenue over the past decade shows how ODWC's local revenue has



Employee salaries and benefits make up about 42 percent of ODWC's annual budget, with the rest going toward capital improvements and operations.

remained relatively flat, even while the agency has had to deal with rising costs and inflation in the same time frame.

License sales generated \$19.08 million in 2015, \$22.12 million in 2020, and \$21.59 in 2023. Estimated license sales in the 2024 budget is \$21 million.

ODWC's general license fees have been unchanged for about 20 years.

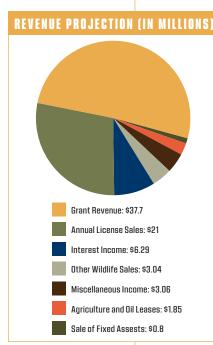
An increasingly important source of revenue over the past several years falls into the Miscellaneous Income category, which includes wildlife license plate sales, the generous donations large and small from conservation partner groups, individual supporters, and the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation.

Several non-governmental organizations have been longtime supporters of ODWC with consistent donations totaling more than \$5,000 for the benefit of wildlife and habitat management and law enforcement.

Donors of \$5,000 or more since 2020 are:

- Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation.
- National Wild Turkey Federation.
- City of Grove.
- Comanche Pool Prairie Research Foundation.







Donations of any size from conservation partners like Quail Forever and other nongovernmental organizations and individuals are able to be leveraged with federal grants to multiply their financial impact on ODWC conservation efforts.

- OnX Maps.
- Quail Forever Oklahoma Chapters.
- Corrigan-Goddard Foundation.
- Blue River Fly Fishers.
- BancFirst.
- Rockey Mountain Elk Foundation.
- National Rifle Association.
- Orange Bison Co.
- Southstone Operating.

### CHALLENGES AHEAD

Overall, budgets have remained flat for ODWC in the past 20 years, largely due to stagnant revenue sources.

ODWC looks for all opportunities to garner federal matching funds in order to stretch its own dollars, but it's a Catch 22 of sorts because the federal rules require the Department to spend the money up-front to be reimbursed later.

ODWC Director J.D. Strong said dealing with budget constraints happens each year when creating a spending plan. "Coming up with the nonfederal match is the biggest limitation we have to leverage federal funds.

"Budgets were tight this year, and we had to cut back in several areas."

But Strong said it is remarkable that the budget planners were able to earmark \$16.9 million for capital expenditures with only about 10 percent of that total representing ODWC-match dollars.

He praised the work of CFO Storck and the staff involved in creating the proposed budget each year. "There's a lot of work going on in background by staff to do everything possible to stretch those dollars to make the budget."

Wildlife Commissioner D. Chad Dillingham, a member of the Commission's Finance Committee, summed it up in the June 2023 Commission meeting: "We don't have a spending problem in the Department; we have a revenue problem.

"We've been capped for ... in excess of 20 years on our ability to generate additional revenue. And you can imagine what expenses have done over that same 20-year period of time with inflation, and how much less that same dollar will fund each year."

Commission Secretary Rick

Holder commended ODWC leadership and staff for finding ways to control expenditures in the face of runaway inflation.

"Our expenses continue to outpace our revenue, which leads us on an unsustainable path," Holder said. "This shortfall each year has to be taken from our lifetime license (trust) fund just to meet the basic



expenses of the Department. The portion of the expenses covered by the trust fund is increasing each year."

About \$6 million in interest income from the Lifetime License Trust Fund was included in the FY 2024 budget to cover the cost of anticipated expenditures over revenues.

"When this 'rainy day fund' dries up, we will have no choice but to start cutting services to our sportsmen."

As ODWC continues to consider various ways to generate additional revenues to fund its constitutionally mandated mission to conserve wildlife and habitat, there are some things the conscientious sportsman, sportswoman or outdoor enthusiast can do to support the mission:

- Buy a hunting or fishing license.
- Buy a wildlife conservation license plate for your vehicle.
- Take someone hunting or fishing.
- Donate to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation.



### OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT

## **Triple Your Impact in Supporting Youth Shooting Sports**

The Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation has committed \$50,000 to open a Youth Shooting Sports Fund. Anyone donating to this fund from now through November, the donation will be matched 2-to-1!

This lasting impact is made possible through a nearly \$1 million endowment from the MidwayUSA Foundation. Endowments are among the most advantageous sources of funding because they provide a perpetual source of income.

Through November, any contributions dedicated to the OWCF

Youth Shooting Sports Fund will receive a 2-to-1 match from the Midway USA Foundation. This means your \$100 contribution would be matched with a \$200 contribution from Midway USA Foundation, resulting in a \$300 investment into the endowment. Up to 5 percent of the endowment is available annually to provide long-term support for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's youth shooting sports program.

When you contribution to OWCF's Youth Shooting Sports Fund, you're leaving a legacy for generations to come.  $\nabla$ 

2ND ANNUAL

## Waterfowl Festival Proceeds Will Be Donated to Foundation

Support OWCF and the Wildlife Department on Sept. 23, 2023, at the 2nd annual Oklahoma Waterfowl Festival, hosted by G&H Decoys Inc.

One of the event highlights will be the State Duck Calling Contest, which is a qualifier for the national championship contest.

The event will also feature seminars on decoy sets, migration, calling, safety, raffles and more. Dog demonstrations and a State Waterfowler Challenge are planned.

Youth activities will include "paint your own decoy" and a Youth Waterfowler Challenge that includes bird identification and skeet shooting.

A vendor area and food and beverage trucks will be available. Admission is free, and hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Proceeds will be donated to the Foundation. abla



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### OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT



# Call of the Wild Gala/Hall of Fame Tickets Still Available

The Foundation's largest annual fund-raising event will be held at 6 p.m. Friday, Sept. 29, 2023, at the Omni Hotel in Oklahoma City, and tickets are going fast.

The highlight of the evening will be the induction of Sean Trauschke, chairman,

president and CEO of OGE Energy Corp., into the Oklahoma Conservation Hall of Fame.

This memorable evening will feature a wild game-inspired plated dinner, live and silent auctions, and some fun and creative programs about OWCF's mission and conservation in Oklahoma.



Trauschke serves as chairman of The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber and on the boards of the State Chamber of Oklahoma, United Way of Central Oklahoma, Oklahoma State Fair, Myriad Botanical Gardens, and other local community organizations.

Trauschke has been CEO of OG&E since June 2015. He has been president of OG&E since July 2013 and president of OGE Energy since August 2014 and was named as chairman of the board in December 2015. From 2009 until 2013, he held the position of vice president and chief financial officer of OGE Energy and OG&E.

He earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a master of business administration degree from the University of South Carolina and has completed the Advanced Management Program at the Harvard Business School.

To order Gala tickets, call Rick Grundman at (918) 323-5566.



**THE OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION** (OWCF) is engaged in a five-year program to raise \$5.2 million to further the strategic mission of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Since the Wildlife Department has operated on a limited budget for more than 100 years and doesn't receive appropriated state tax dollars, funds raised by the Foundation are among the best methods to more rapidly advance the Department's strategic plan. Because many ODWC projects qualify for a 3-to-1 or 9-to-1 federal dollar match, donations to OWCF can be multiplied and bring more and better projects to Oklahoma more quickly.

Funds raised by OWCF support wildlife research and management, multi-year conservation projects, community outreach programs, and outdoor recreation projects. OWCF's mission cannot be achieved without the support of community partners, philanthropic foundations, and donations from individuals who want to make a difference for future generations.

All donations are tax-deductible. To learn more about OWCF and how to help, go to www.OKwildlifefoundation.org, www.facebook.com/OKWildlifeFoundation, or email Grundman at rgrundman@okwildlifefoundation.org, or call (918) 323-5566.

OUTDOOR STORE

license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com

Sign in or shop online as a guest. Some items also available in person at ODWC headquarters, 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd. in Oklahoma City.

\*\*Prices listed on these pages do not include \$3 online ordering convenience fee.



### NEW ODWC LOGO DRINKWARE

Double-wall high-grade stainless steel
16-oz coffee mugs and 20-oz tumblers
made by Yukon with DuraGrip powder coat finish featuring the
new ODWC arrowhead logo. Tumblers come in navy, white, and
bottomland camo; mugs come in olive drab and navy. They are

vacuum-insulated and BPA-free. (Online sales only.) — \$20

### **Outdoor Gear**



### **YUKON FLOATING GUN CASE**

Welded waterproof construction, thick foam padding for protection, 500d tarpaulin exterior shell, carry strap and handle, universal fit for shotgun or scoped rifle. (Online sales only.) — \$70

### YUKON ODWC BACKPACK COOLER

Double Duty — Works as Cooler or Padded Gear Bag, Keeps Ice For Days, Air Tight Zipper, Rugged Welded Construction, 20 can with Ice capacity. (Ships separate from other Outdoor Store items) — \$140.00





### **NEW OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA CAPS**

These sleek fabric caps sport the latest Outdoor Oklahoma logo design! They are the Richardson 112 model, midpro shape, pro-curved visor, adjustable snap-back, 60% cotton/40% polyester. Various colors and styles will be available (subject to

### **DURABLE COLLECTOR'S CARDS**

availability). (Online sales only.) — \$20

Every hunting and fishing license holder can upgrade to a customized hard plastic card that won't be damaged by water, sun, dirt, or regular wear and tear like paper documents. Cards hold customer and license information on one side; the other side features artwork from Oklahoma artists that changes periodically. Several designs available. (Account sign-in required.) — \$6



### OKLAHOMA HABITAT DONOR WINDOW DECALS

Show your support of the Wildlife Department's Land Acquisition Fund with these striking window decals. All proceeds are earmarked to help provide hunting



and fishing access to the public. — \$10 each

46 OUTDOOR STORE



















### **WILDLIFE LICENSE PLATES**

Dress up your vehicle while showing your support of our great state's wildlife resources by getting a wildlife license plate. Nine Wildlife Conservation Plates are available to serve as your regular, rear-bumper license plate. The plates cost just \$40 (original or replacement) or \$36.55 (renewals) above your regular annual registration fee with proceeds going to Oklahoma's Wildlife Diversity Program. The forms are available at local tag agencies, or online at tinyurl.com/WildTags.

### OKLAHOMA WATERFOWL HUNTING STAMP

Oklahoma "duck stamps" are always popular with collectors and hunters. While each year's stamp features a different handsome design sure to add appeal to any stamp collection, funds from



stamp sales are used for many kinds of waterfowl management projects. Specify year when ordering. — \$10



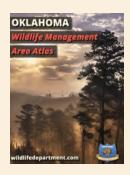
### **DURABLE FIELD TAGS**

A three-pack of plastic field tags with name and customer ID printed on one side, and places to write your harvest date/time and the E-Check confirmation number on the other. Reusable. (Account sign-in required.) — \$6

### HABITAT DONOR CAP

Top-quality, American-made cap displays the Bass Habitat Donor Patch, which designates you as a contributor to the Department's Land Acquisition Fund. Wearing this hat means you care about future generations and the great hunting and fishing tradition. — \$20





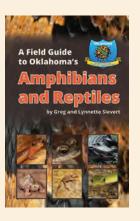
### OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE Management area atlas

The Wildlife Management Area Atlas presents maps of Oklahoma's WMAs and ODWC-owned fishing lakes. At 109 pages, the atlas features lands purchased before 2018. Each map shows special features such as parking sites, camping areas, and food plots. Your atlas purchase comes with a bonus one-year subscription to the award-winning *Outdoor Oklahoma* magazine. — \$25

### LATEST

### A FIELD GUIDE TO OKLAHOMA'S AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Get an introduction to Oklahoma's 140 species of salamanders, frogs, turtles, lizards, snakes and alligator in the 4th edition of our guide to the state's amphibians and reptiles. Six species accounts have been added and range maps have been updated throughout the guide. — \$20





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Start enjoying a full year (six big issues) of hunting, fishing, natural history, camping and much more when you subscribe to "Outdoor Oklahoma" magazine or give as a gift!

1 year — \$10, 2 years — \$18, 3 years — \$25

For bill-me-later orders for the magazine, call (800) 777-0019.

Order online at license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com, then click "Shop."

## THE WHITE-TAILED DEER

### BY OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA STAFF

With a quick flash of white and a burst of speed, the white-tailed deer bounds away on impossibly slender legs, seemingly gliding over the ground toward a curtain of concealing brush.

This popular species (Odocoileus virginianus) can be found in all 77 Oklahoma counties,

The white-tailed deer is the most popular big game animal in Oklahoma, a remarkable fact considering its near extinction at the turn of the century.

1910s. Thanks to reckless overharvest in the late

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and many Oklahomans are discovering what hunters already know: Watching the white-tailed deer can be fascinating and addictive.

A member of the Cervidae family, which also includes moose, elk, and caribou, the white-tailed deer has a thick tan or brown coat in summer that fades to grayish brown in winter. Its name refers to the white underside

of the tail. When the deer is alarmed or running, the tail is held conspicuously erect like a flag. It has white markings around its eyes and nose, as well as on its throat and stomach. Its oversized ears help the skittish creature pick up the sounds of predators, and its small black nose detects even the faintest of scents. While some other hoofed mammals have permanent, hollow horns, male white-tailed deer grow and shed antlers every year once they reach the age of 2.

White-tailed deer are herbivores or plant-eaters. The deer's diet changes with the seasons, from green plants in spring and summer to acorns, corn, and other nuts in the fall. In winter, when food is scarce, it will consume bark, buds, and twigs from woody plants. Not one to pass up a tasty treat, the white-tailed deer will also feast on flower and vegetable gardens if it has the chance.

Another defensive asset is the whitetails' breathtaking speed. Even in dense forest, the deer can reach 40 mph as they bound

over obstacles. They are also good swimmers and can retreat to streams and lakes to avoid predators.

The white-tailed deer is the most popular big game animal in Oklahoma, a remarkable fact considering its near extinction at the turn of the century. 1910s. Thanks to reckless overharvest in the late 1800s, barely 500 whitetails remained in Oklahoma. Thanks to decades of hard work by generations of conservationists, the deer population has been restored to its former glory.

Whitetails inhabit all types of Oklahoma terrain but prefer open woodlands. They follow established paths to and from food sources, and feed in the early morning and late afternoon.

Male deer are called bucks, and females are does. About six months after mating during the fall rutting season, does produce one to three fawns. The white-spotted fawns can walk at birth, and can even forage for food a few days later. While the doe looks for food, she hides the fawns in heavy cover, where they lie well-camouflaged against the ground. Fawns may lie quietly for many hours until the doe returns. When people discover a lone fawn hiding on the ground, it's always best to leave it alone and leave the area.

Deer live in family groups of a doe and her fawns. Bucks live either alone or in small groups of three to four.

Early morning and late afternoon, when the deer are feeding, are the best times to spot white-tailed deer.

During the rut, bucks will fight over does by butting and dashing antlers. Antler size is part of what determines social status in the herd, and a larger rack can increase mating chances. Bucks also use their antlers to strip bark off saplings or lowhanging branches and paw at the ground to create a "scrape," an area of exposed earth that they mark with scent.

Oklahoma has a liberal seasonal bag limit for deer hunters. A combined harvest of six deer is possible during archery, gun, and muzzleloader seasons. Additional antlerless harvest opportunities are also available. 

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Weeks of anticipation are nearing an end with the approach of Oct. 1, opening day of archery hunting seasons for deer, wild turkey, black bear, private-lands elk, and pronghorn. Scout your spots, check the regulations, get your licenses, and get ready to make wonderful memories this fall in Outdoor Oklahoma!

## Qutdoor Klahoma

