

Outdoor Oklahoma

MARCH / APRIL 2024 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR



ANGLERS' GUIDE 2024

'Fish On'line! Hook
Up With ODWC's
Web Resources

INSIDE

Snakes Make Skin
Crawl for Students

Opportunities Often
Missed on WMAs

A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



PANORAMAS



Here's to an enjoyable and successful 2024! After turning the calendar to another January, I wondered what this year was going to bring. Exciting fishing trips, heart-racing hunts, and making memories with my family came to mind. Well, we here at the Wildlife Department also have some things on the Outdoor Oklahoma radar that we want to share with you.

We're working with legislators to modernize, consolidate, and update **hunting and fishing licenses**. Currently, there are more than 100 offerings, and we want to simplify that by consolidating 51 of the licenses into 14. As an example, we're proposing a "youth super license" for anyone younger than 18 that would cost \$25 for residents and \$150 for nonresidents. This license would replace all other hunting licenses for them; they could hunt any species or season that's open.

We will look closely at **nonresident deer hunting and management**, especially as it relates to our public hunting areas. Our **wild turkey research** will continue, and we've implemented another tool to track local turkey populations.

We will also be assessing the economic value of our two year-round **trout fisheries** on the Lower Mountain Fork and Lower Illinois rivers in an effort to better manage these important fisheries.

Several years ago, we began an aggressive effort that aims to renovate a dozen existing **public shooting ranges** and build additional ones. The next new build will likely start this spring at Atoka Wildlife Management Area (just down the road from the campgrounds).

As part of our continued effort to expand and improve **boating and fishing access** for our constituents, we have 12 boating and fishing access projects that will be completed, started, or awarded in 2024.

We continue to monitor and **manage the fisheries** at our amazing lakes, rivers, and streams, and will again stock about 15 million fish statewide.

Oklahoma again will host the **Bassmaster Classic** on March 22-24 at Grand Lake, with weigh-ins at the BOK Center in Tulsa.

Our **Game Wardens** are often a first point of contact with the public. Here's a handy link to their phone numbers: wildlifedepartment.com/law/game-warden-directory. Please help them help all of us by letting them know if you see anything that doesn't look right out there in the woods or on the water.

And lastly, please check out our **Wildlife Conservation Foundation** (okwildlifefoundation.org). Its sole purpose is to provide financial support for the Wildlife Department, and you can see a list of projects it has funded online: okwildlifefoundation.org/projects.

I look forward to working with our amazing staff to provide the very best fish and wildlife resources our state can offer, and I wish you a great 2024! ♥

Wade Free

Wade Free,
Interim Director

Outdoor Oklahoma

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Micah Holmes, Managing Editor
Kelly Adams, Managing Editor
Don P. Brown, Associate Editor

CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Catherine Appling-Pooler, Michael Bergin, Jena Donnell,
Heather Del Moral, Colby Farquhar, Wade Free, Heather
Gaylord, Matt Hensley, Darrin Hill, Joey McAllister, Lance
Meek, Marshall Reigh, Smoky Solis, Weston Storer, Marcus
Thibodeau, Maggie Wood.

PHONE
(405) 521-3856


WEBSITE
www.wildlifedepartment.com

E-MAIL
donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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ON THE COVER:

The latest durable, waterproof collectors' license cards from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation are now available! These cards allow you carry up to seven licenses on one credit-card style license. This painting of a sunfish by Stratford artist Shea Meyer is featured on one card, while a depiction of a pair of ring-necked pheasants, also created by Meyer, serves as the design for a second card. To order, log on to license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com.

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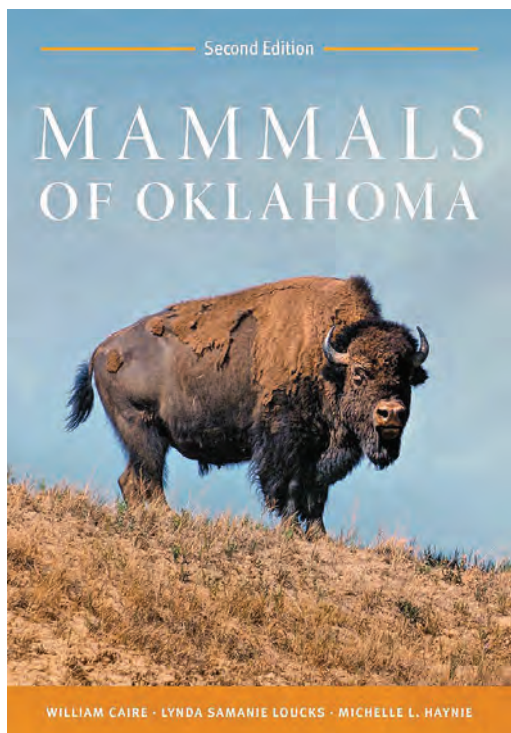
OKLAHOMA



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

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

DEFINITIVE "MAMMALS OF OKLAHOMA" 2ND EDITION COMING SOON



A significantly updated and expanded second edition of the authoritative book "Mammals of Oklahoma" is due for release in July and available now for pre-order from the University of Oklahoma Press.

Oklahoma is currently home to 117 known species of mammals. For the professional mammalogist and amateur naturalist alike, this 672-page book provides a clear, comprehensive, illustrated guide to Oklahoma's diverse native fauna, as well as introduced species and extirpated and unverified mammals cited in the state's records.

Incorporating the latest data, it includes up-to-date descriptions and identification keys; line drawings, full-color photos and distribution maps; life history information; and ecological notes on such things as dens, nests, burrows, food habits, reproduction, pathogens and parasites, and predators.

The book's natural history sections describe habitat and diseases, among other distinguishing characteristics. The Oklahoma Wildlife Department also contributed photos to the new book.

Authored by William Caire, Lynda Samanie Loucks, and Michelle L. Haynie, "Mammals of Oklahoma" (second edition) will be the definitive desk reference and field guide.

A supplemental publication, "Mammals of Oklahoma Records of Occurrence: A Companion to Mammals of Oklahoma, Second Edition," was recently released by Texas Tech Special Publications and is for sale now on that group's website. ♡

OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA ADVENTURES RAFFLE TICKETS ON SALE

Would you like a chance to wet a line with fishing legend Jimmy Houston? Go on a guided two-day turkey hunt? Set your sights on harvesting an elk in Oklahoma? How about winning a lifetime Oklahoma hunting and fishing license?

These prizes are up for grabs during this year's **Outdoor Oklahoma Adventures** fund-raising raffles program. All raffle proceeds go directly to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to fund fish and wildlife conservation, and public hunting and fishing opportunities for everyone to enjoy.

Raffle tickets are on sale now under the "Shop" tab through the Wildlife Department's license website at GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com. Anyone can enter the drawings, whether or not you have a hunting or fishing license.

Tickets are \$10 each, or \$30 for a bundle of five tickets in each of the four raffles plus a \$3 credit card processing and convenience charge. There is no limit to the number of tickets you can buy.

To see all the details of each OO Adventure and buy your raffle tickets, scan the QR code. ♡



NWTF AWARDS CREATE \$1.2M IN ODWC SUPPORT SINCE '17

The Oklahoma Board of Directors for the **National Wild Turkey Federation** recently evaluated proposals for funding through the Hunting Heritage Super Fund in 2024. Board members budgeted \$69,000 for conservation projects and \$41,284 for other projects including outreach-education events, state scholarships, and 4H Shooting Sports support.

NWTF funding will be matched with nearly \$1 million in partner funds for the approved projects in Oklahoma.

Super Fund awards for ODWC conservation projects include:

- \$31,000 in carry-over funds from Fiscal Year 2023 projects, including Canton WMA, Sandhills WMA, Cherokee WMA, and Cimarron Bluff WMA (work is a multi-year effort).
- \$10,000 to support Canton WMA with invasive species removal.
- \$8,000 to support Waurika WMA with invasive species removal.

In addition, ODWC received funding to support education/outreach efforts in Oklahoma, including:

- \$10,000 to support the National Archery in the Schools Program in Oklahoma for 2023-24.
- \$10,000 to support the Scholastic Shooting Sports Program in Oklahoma for 2023-24.

- \$1,500 to support an Wildlife Department Game Warden's travel to convention.
- \$2,000 to conservation field day and R3 event support.

Since Fiscal Year 2017, the NWTF Hunting Heritage Super Fund has provided \$225,969 for ODWC habitat projects and \$108,140 for ODWC Archery in the Schools and Shooting Sports programs. In many cases, federal funds have provided a 75/25 match on these donations, resulting in more than \$1.2 million in funding for habitat conservation activities by ODWC.

"A sincere thanks goes out to all the hard-working members and volunteers who make our mission in Oklahoma possible," said Annie Farrell, NWTF district biologist for Texas, Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma. "Our volunteers in Oklahoma are going above and beyond, tackling conservation issues both in the state and across boundaries for the greater good."

Since 1973, the National Wild Turkey Federation has invested over a half-billion dollars into wildlife conservation and has conserved or enhanced over 22 million acres of critical wildlife habitat. The organization continues to drive wildlife conservation, forest resiliency and robust recreational opportunities throughout the U.S. 🇺🇸



NEW DURABLE LICENSE CARDS SHOW BLUEGILL, PHEASANTS

By Michael Bergin, Senior Communications Specialist

Each year, Oklahoma sportsmen and sportswomen may choose to have their hunting and fishing licenses encoded on collectible license cards. The plastic cards are durable and waterproof, easily carried in a wallet or pocket.

The newest pair of cards features images of a bluegill (see front cover) and a pair of ring-necked pheasants, both painted by local artist Shea Meyer. They are available now for \$6.

The cards can carry up to seven licenses or privileges, which are encoded on the back side. The card can then be carried into the field or on the lake and serves as proof of license whenever needed.

A portion of the sale of each card is designated for outreach efforts aimed at recruiting, retaining and reactivating lapsed hunters and anglers — important because the Wildlife Department relies on hunting and fishing license sales for funding.

Additionally, Meyer's original paintings will be framed and donated to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation to be auctioned at one of its upcoming events. OWCF is a nonprofit charitable foundation formed to work exclusively alongside and

provide support for the Wildlife Department. Artwork auction proceeds will further benefit conservation efforts in Oklahoma.

Meyer created the artwork featured on last year's collectible cards: a white bass and a mallard. He won the Department's annual waterfowl stamp design contest in 2014, and was a runner-up in the contest in 2022 and 2023. He's a lifetime license holder, outdoorsman, and educator at Stratford Schools. He is an accomplished outdoorsman and a supporter of conservation.

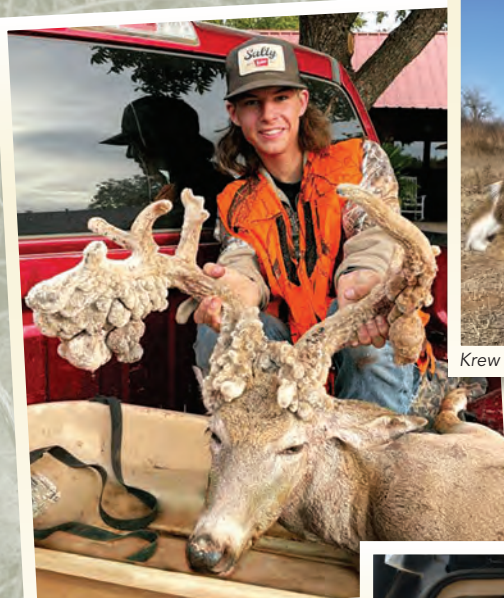
"I am a proud Oklahoman, and I am honored to have my work represent our state and it's amazing wildlife," Meyer said.

To get your hunting or fishing licenses encoded on one of the newest collectible cards, log on to your Go Outdoors Oklahoma profile and click "Purchase Licenses." If you already have a current hunting or fishing license, you can still buy a collectible card from the License Catalog. Or, when buying any license, you can add a collectible card to your purchase. 🇺🇸



WELCOME TO THE TAILGATE!

Is the hunting good? You bet! Step up to **The Tailgate** and check out some great harvests made recently by hunters in Oklahoma. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To submit your photo of a successful hunting trip, or to see what others have harvested, go to wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/tailgate or scan the code:



Major Edmonds, white-tailed deer, Tillman County.



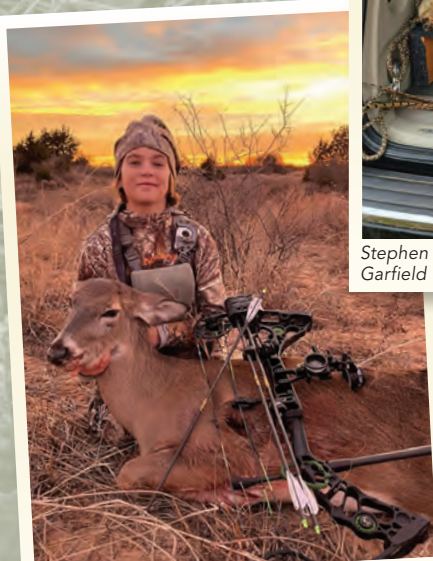
Krew Wilson, first white-tailed deer, Woodward County.



Dan Stewart, white-tailed deer, Carter County.



Stephen Wayne, ring-necked pheasants, Drummond Flats WMA, Garfield County.



Jack Shaw, first white-tailed deer, Dec. 10, 2023, Sandhills WMA, Woods County.



Thomas Hudson, white-tailed deer, Cotton County.

2023 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

"I WAS DETERMINED TO SHOOT A DEER"

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Oklahoma Station Chapter Safari Club International sponsor a creative writing competition for middle and high school students. A boy and a girl from two age divisions are selected winners. Students write essays using the theme "Hunting: Sharing the Heritage" or "Archery: What I Like About Archery in the Schools and Bowhunting." Winners in the age 15-17 category receive a guided antelope hunt in the Texas Panhandle, and winners in the 11-14 age category receive a hunting trip with Rack Attack Outfitters of Fairview (or similar) and a scholarship to the Outdoor Texas Camp. In this issue, Outdoor Oklahoma honors junior category male winner Cooper Davidson, 14, from Elgin Public Schools.



By Cooper Davidson

Bowhunting is a skill not all people can easily master. I think Ron Laclair said it best when he said, "Archery is like a journey; it begins with a love for shooting a bow and a passion for watching our arrows fly." I couldn't agree with him more.

In 2016, at the age of 7, I was first introduced to the love of archery. My mom was the teacher/coach of the school's National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), and my two older brothers were on the team. I was compelled to attend their practices, but after only a couple of practices, I started to join in as I thought it looked fun. I quickly found out how much fun shooting a bow could be. Unfortunately, I was never able to compete because we changed schools, but I still used the archery skills I learned.

Just two years ago, I got my first compound bow. I still remember it like it was yesterday. It was Christmas morning, and I thought that I had already opened all my presents. Yet, I did not know that my parents had one more gift for me. They said they had to go grab it, and then I looked up and saw it. It was my very own compound bow, and I was filled with pure joy. The Fred Bear Legit bow was just the bow I wanted. It even had my favorite camo pattern on it, veil Whitetail Camo. I quickly went to set up the bow by putting the sight and accessories on it, then ran outside to shoot it. It took me several practices to get good at shooting my bow, but I knew by the next deer season, I would be ready to put it to use. That first season, I had a few encounters, but unfortunately I didn't have any shot opportunities.

However, this past summer, I was determined to shoot a deer in the upcoming hunting season. I bought some new arrows and broadheads and set out on a goal to harvest a deer. I didn't want another season to leave me empty-handed. I've

practiced over and over, and shooting is becoming second nature. With a lot of hard work and a little bit of luck (luck being God on my side), opening day of deer season didn't leave me disappointed. My dad dropped me off, and I climbed a tree. Shockingly, not even 30 minutes later, a doe walked out 20 yards from me. I drew back my bow and let my arrow fly. I hit her, that beautiful doe, perfectly behind the shoulder and watched as she ran 40 yards and fell. I was pumped that I had just shot my very first deer with that bow I had been carrying around like a prized possession.

After that, I set another goal for myself of shooting a buck with my bow. I had no luck at first. Then, it was a couple of weeks that my dad and I went out hunting just for fun; we didn't think we were going to shoot a buck. Little did we know, our day would look different from what we had expected. It was 4:30 p.m., and we heard some noise behind us that was getting closer and closer. We looked over to our right and saw a nice buck walking about 40 yards from us. We grunted at him to get his attention. My dad and I thought that the buck would come to us, but he didn't want to wander our way. So my dad rubbed one of our rattling antlers on a tree behind us thinking he would come. Sure enough, he started walking straight toward us. That buck came within 14 yards, and I shot him and watched him run away. We later found him dead, and I was so happy that my skills and my bow helped me reach another goal. I had my very first buck to brag about.

I have yet to truly master the skill of bowhunting, but I feel I am well on my way to understanding what it means to be a bowhunter. I have started my journey, and I truly love shooting a bow and watching the arrows fly. Bowhunting has become my passion and something I believe will bring me joy for years to come. ♥



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 Wildlife Department,

Thanks to all the effort put forth through the Oklahoma Wildlife Departments Hunters Against Hunger program. Once again, here at Terry's Taxidermy and Wild Game Processing, working with City Rescue Mission and Yukon Manna Pantry, we were able to supply several thousand pounds of venison to needy families in our state. Thanks to all the hard-working people that help make this program a success.

Terry's Taxidermy and Wild Game Processing, via Facebook

Dear Interim Director Wade Free, Law Enforcement Chief Nathan Erdman, and LE Assistant Chief Wade Farrar,

On behalf of Police Chief Loyd Berger and myself, I want to thank all of you for sending Game Warden Capt. Gary Emmons and Game Warden Lt.



Gary Emmons



Casey Young

Casey Young to assist in teaching multiple LASER active shooter classes in the Oklahoma City metro area. During these classes, 94 officers from 34 different agencies participated and completed this class. This was a huge effort, and the officers that attended greatly benefited from being trained by such an experienced group. I have taught with Emmons and Young for many years and admire the passion, experience, and hands-on approach they bring when teaching such an important class as this one.

Emmons and Young are tremendous assets, and your Department is blessed to have them.

Austin Slaten, Assistant Chief of Police, Del City Police Department

Dear ODWC Special Investigator,

I wanted to take a moment to commend you for your outstanding work on the recent investigation and recovery of stolen big cat and bighorn sheep mounts. Your dedication and thoroughness throughout the entire process have not gone unnoticed.

Your commitment to locating and recovering the property and returning it to its rightful owner is truly impressive. The meticulous attention to detail and perseverance you exhibited in handling the investigation reflects your professionalism and Department.

I know the theft victim was heartbroken when he realized what

had happened to him. Your efforts have not only returned years-old stolen items, it brought a peace of mind to the victim.

Thank you for your exceptional work and tireless dedication. Your contributions make a significant difference, and I feel privileged to have worked with someone as dedicated and skilled as you.

Jared Cockerham, Fort Worth Police Department Homeland Security Unit

Dear ODWC Law Enforcement Supervisor,

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the excellent work of Game Warden Riley Willman, who successfully removed a group of poachers from one of Tusker LLC's properties in Delaware County. I am a wildlife enthusiast, and I was appalled to learn that some people were illegally hunting there.



Riley Willman

Your Game Warden showed great courage, skill, and professionalism in confronting the poachers and asking them to leave. He is a true hero and a valuable asset to your Department.

I appreciate your leadership and support for the Game Warden and his mission. You have demonstrated a strong commitment to the conservation of wildlife and the protection of the environment. I hope you will continue to support and encourage Willman and his colleagues in their noble work.

Bill Lawson, grateful citizen, Tusker LLC (owned by the Lawson family)

Dear Don P. Brown, Associate Editor,

Thank you for the nice article on the Crosstimbers Primitive Society, as well as the story on Caleb Flies (January/February 2024 issue). Our club embraces all things primitive. Caleb is a great ambassador for traditional archery! As one of the three remaining charter members of the Crosstimbers club, it warms my heart to see the old ways preserved. Oh, to be young again!

Clifton Sikes

Dear Editor,

I just read your articles ("Shooting Ol' Smokepoles Sparks Passion for Past," "A Hunt for the Ages") in the January/February 2024 issue of Outdoor Oklahoma. I shoot a smokepole, and I shoot a recurve and long bow, so I agree with all that was said; they add much more to the hunt, and they require you to get intimate with the animal.

I always say a prayer of thanks over the animal, perhaps reflecting that intimacy. Hemingway said something about loving the animal that you harvest.

Anyway, your articles made me feel good and warm. Thanks for that. Stay the course.

Wayne Turner

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN ARTWORK WINS ODWC AWARD

A scratchboard artwork titled "The Lesser Prairie Chicken" by Cristen Bosch of Alva Schools won the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Award in this year's Sutton Award student art competition.

A 12th-grader, Bosch received a cash prize for the best depiction of an Oklahoma-related conservation subject. Her artwork is a dramatic portrait of a single lesser prairie-chicken on a mostly black background.

The first-place Sutton Award winners in each category for this 19th annual contest are:

- 2-D Art: Micah Beeson, Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences, "Hungry."
- 3-D Art: Destiny Hurst, Broken Arrow High School, "Mother Nature."
- Photography: Ashtyn Wichert, Northwest Tech Center-Fairview, "The Melodious World of Songbirds."

This year's online contest drew 67 entries. The top 20 artworks were to be exhibited at the NatureWorks Art Show and Sale in Tulsa. Sponsors of the 2024 contest included the Wildlife Department, NatureWorks, American Heritage Bank, Oklahoma Sculpture Society, and Grant's Frames.

Established in 2005, the Sutton Award recognizes high school students who demonstrate the ability to communicate current conservation topics in compelling ways. The show is free to enter and open to



all Oklahoma high school students grades 9-12. The award is funded up to \$20,000, which is distributed to winning students and their instructors as determined by a selection committee.

"From honeybees to Texas horned lizards, through sculptures to pastels, these students have intriguing stories to tell," said Audra Fogle, development director for the Sutton Avian Research Center in Bartlesville. "It is exciting to be able to connect our conservation mission with schools to provide significant scholarships for students and the teachers who work so hard to run their programs on shoestring budgets."

Fogle said nearly 2,700 students have been encouraged to express themselves through this art competition.

The next Sutton Student Art Award competition will start seeking entries in fall, with artworks due in January. For more information and to view a gallery of this year's entries, go to www.suttoncenter.org/education. 🦋

ODWC Award winner Cristen Bosch of Alva High School, ODWC Education Supervisor Colin Berg, and George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center board member Jay Pruett at the NatureWorks Art Show and Sale in Tulsa.



VIA ODWC FACEBOOK



YOUTH SCORES DOUBLE-BANDED MALLARD ON CONTROLLED HUNT

Nicole was selected a winner of a Wildlife Department controlled youth waterfowl hunt and was lucky enough to harvest a mallard with not one, but two, leg bands! Banding migratory birds is a practice that biologists use to track harvest rates, migratory patterns, and survival rates for various species across North America. Only a small number of birds that are banded will have two bands. This is a part of a reward band study that gauges the reporting rate of harvested birds. Congratulations, Nicole, on a hunt to remember! 🦋

OKLAHOMA BLACK BEARS EMERGE IN EARLY SPRING

Black bears are established in eastern and southeastern Oklahoma, and in the western Oklahoma Panhandle. But they can be encountered nearly anywhere from Interstate 35 eastward in Oklahoma.

Through winter, bears hibernate in dens or other places that offer them safety while they "doze." Come springtime, the bears begin to wake up and head out.

Bears that have denned up near homes or highways may startle the human neighbors when they leave dens. More than one bear has been rudely awakened by a homeowner discovering it denned up under the porch.

Sows with cubs born earlier in the year are the last bears to emerge from their dens. By 8 to 10 weeks old, healthy black bear cubs have grown from the size of a stick of butter at birth to 4 to 8 pounds. The baby-fine hair they were born with is turning into a protective fur coat.

Black bear cubs still spend a lot of time nursing on the sow's high-fat, extra-nutritious milk. Nursing cubs often sound as if they are purring.

In April, cubs become much more active. Cubs born in ground dens may hang around the entrance watching the world and playing with each other. Sows continue to keep the youngsters and the den clean.

By the end of April, most bears have left their dens for good. The days lengthen, the weather warms, and spring arrives, bringing with it nutritious spring grasses and budding plants. Bears start feeding on early spring greenery as well as any insects they can find, including ants, bees and termites. Ant colonies give off formic acid and have a distinct odor (to a bear). So does insulation made with formaldehyde. That often includes hot tub covers, bicycle seats and many insulated materials made of vinyl. A bear poking around your hot tub may think it's discovered a giant ant hill.

Hibernating bears can lose 20% to 50% of their body weight over winter; bears are still living off their fat reserves in spring. So, after a few days of drinking water, eating some roughage and stretching their legs, bears begin searching for more food.

Bears have great memories, so bears that learned to rely on high-calorie, human-provided food sources last year make a beeline for the bounty. Early spring is the time to take down bird feeders, secure the garbage, and make sure pet food is safely stashed inside. ♡

— Bearwise.org



Black bear cubs become much more active during April as they venture farther from their dens.

LYNN BISTROM/BEARWISE

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.

MARCH 2024

- 2** Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 3** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 4** Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/OutdoorOklahoma](https://www.youtube.com/OutdoorOklahoma).
- 6** Rack Madness free scoring event, ODWC, 1801 N. Lincoln, 1-7 p.m. Register: <https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx?id=107665>.
- 10** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 14** International Fly-Fishing Film Festival, 6:30 p.m., Tulsa. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx?id=108332.
- 17** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 22-24** Bassmaster Classic, Grand Lake and BOK Center-Tulsa, [bassmaster.com](https://www.bassmaster.com).
- 24** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 26** "Learn to Hunt-Turkey Habitat and Characteristics" free webinar. Register: <https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx>.
- 31** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) set in Tulsa (2); Wagoner (9); Claremore (13); Poteau (14); Stillwater (25). Info: www.ducks.org/events.
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events (date) set in Pryor (1); Seminole (9); Muskogee (14); Idabel (15); Wagoner (16); Weatherford (23); Chouteau, 23; Glenpool (30); Westville (30). Info: <https://your.nwtf.org/members/events>.
- **Quail Forever** event set in Blackwell, (2). Info: www.oklahomquailforever.org/pfqfeventsink.

APRIL 2024

- 1** Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/OutdoorOklahoma](https://www.youtube.com/OutdoorOklahoma).
- 2** "Learn to Hunt-How to Hunt Turkeys" free webinar. Register: <https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx>.
- 3** "Learn to Hunt-Controlled Hunts" free webinar. Register: <https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx?id=108222>.
- 6** Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required. Hunter Education Class, Elk City. Register: <https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx?id=107929>.
- 7** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 9** "Learn to Hunt-Regulations, Places to Go, Ethics, Private Land" free webinar. Register: <https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx>.
- 14** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 17** Oklahoma Scholastic Shooting Sports Program State Shoot, El Reno.
- 21** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 28** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) set in Bartlesville (2); Claremore (3); Mustang (5); Broken Arrow (5); McAlester (12); Tulsa (23); Enid (27). Info: www.ducks.org/events.
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events (date) set in El Reno (5); Woodward (19). Info: <https://your.nwtf.org/members/events/>.

** FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO
www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons **

WELCOME TO THE DOCK!

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:



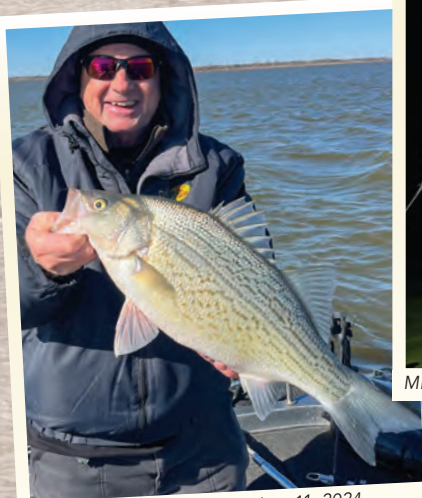
Darrell Ethridge, rainbow trout, Jan. 19, 2024, Medicine Creek Trout Area.



NEW UNRESTRICTED STATE RECORD!
T.J. Shearer, northern hogsucker, 2 pounds 1 ounce, Dec. 23, 2023, Illinois River.



Isaac Mardirosian, white crappie, Jan. 3, 2024, Route 66 Park.



Zac T., hybrid striped bass, Jan. 11, 2024, Waurika Lake.



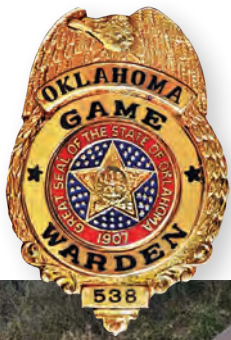
Michael Cathey, blue catfish, Dec. 27, 2023, Lake Texoma.



Jerry Cooper, striped bass, Nov. 29, 2023, Fort Gibson.

GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

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



This past fall, Wildlife Department personnel installed new signage at Cherokee Public Hunting Area. One sign was placed at the shooting range, and others at the main entrances to the PHA just outside of Tahlequah.

Unfortunately, on New Year's Eve, somebody decided to run over a couple of the new signs over with a vehicle. The signs were destroyed.



Game Wardens based in Cherokee County are asking for the public's help in identifying the suspect(s). Information leading to an arrest can result in a cash reward. And citizens sharing information can remain anonymous. Contact Game Wardens **Cody Youngblood** at (918) 431-2552 or **Matt Farris** at (918) 431-2562 with any information.



Game Wardens **Travis Garrett** and **Brandon Fulton**, based in Rogers County, investigated a report of waterfowl hunters shooting firearms before the legally specified time in Rogers County. The investigation led to multiple people being cited for hunting migratory birds over a baited area, hunting migratory birds without



a state waterfowl stamp, hunting without a license, and shooting before legal shooting hours.

Hunting regulations for migratory birds are implemented for several important reasons, primarily focused on the conservation and sustainable management of bird populations. Waterfowl undertake extensive journeys between breeding grounds and wintering areas, often spanning multiple countries. Harvest regulations for ducks and geese are critical components in responsible wildlife management, aiming to balance the interests of responsible hunters, the health of ecosystems, and the conservation of these remarkable species.

While performing routine compliance checks, Lt. **Chad Strang**, based in Cleveland County, and Game Warden **Mark Murray**, based in Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, checked a group of waterfowl hunters at a pond in Canadian County. The Game Wardens observed a large amount of corn scattered on the muddy bank of the pond.

When questioned about the corn, the hunters (two guides from a local outfitter along with their clients) confirmed seeing the corn when they arrived for their hunt that morning.

The guides and their hunters were cited for unlawfully hunting migratory waterfowl over bait.

Charges are pending in Canadian County District Court.

"Baiting" is the direct or indirect placing, exposing, depositing, distributing, or scattering of salt, grain, or other feed that could lure or attract waterfowl to the area where hunters are attempting to harvest waterfowl.

Both Oklahoma state law and federal law prohibits the hunting of waterfowl on or over any baited area where it is known, or reasonably should be known, that the area is or has been baited with salt, grain or other feed.



A baited area remains off limits to hunting for 10 days after all salt, grain, or other feed has been completely removed. This rule recognizes that waterfowl will still be attracted to the same area even after the bait is gone.

Hunters are responsible for ensuring that an area has not been baited and should verify its legality prior to hunting. It is also strongly suggested that hunters fully vet any guide operation before booking a hunt.

Game Wardens **Shane Fields** and **Matt Penwright**, based in Pittsburg County, received information that someone shot two tom turkeys on a job site located in the vicinity of Carlton Landing near Lake Eufaula. After arriving at the location, Fields and Penwright investigated the site. Evidence of blood and feathers led the two wardens to a large storage container.

Fields had received information that the carcasses were being stored inside the shipping container. After interviewing the foreman on the job site, he admitted to shooting the two birds with a .22-caliber firearm.

The suspect was issued seven citations totaling \$6,708 in fines and restitution. The charges were pending with the district attorney's office.

Game Wardens Lt. **Stephen Paul**, based in Noble County, and **Marshall Reigh**, based in Grant County,



assisted with a recent event held by the Cherokee Strip Quail Forever/Pheasants Forever on the Big Fork Ranch, a commercial hunt area.

The pheasant hunting event, designed for women who have had little opportunity or experience in upland hunting, drew 22 women from Oklahoma and Texas. The Game Wardens helped with firearms safety instruction, shotgun shooting, and the hunt.

As we dive into 2024, consider trying something new in the outdoors. Or better yet, take a new hunter/angler with you on your next excursion. The future of fish and wildlife conservation depends on it!



(Reports from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation-Game Wardens Facebook 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: ODWC ARCHERY RANGE RULES

Below are some of the archery range rules for Wildlife Department areas that include an archery range. For a full list of archery rules, consult the current Oklahoma Fishing & Hunting Regulations in print or online at wildlifedepartment.com.

- Target shooting isn't allowed in areas where shooting ranges aren't provided.
- Any person younger than 16 using the shooting range must be immediately supervised by an adult age 18 or older.
- Archers using an elevated platform must wear a safety harness meeting the standards of the Treestand Manufacturers Association and be attached to the platform at all times.
- Archers must draw and release arrows only from the tower or directly below the tower.
- Shooters and accompanying adults must possess a valid Oklahoma hunting license or Oklahoma combination hunting/fishing license, unless exempt.
- Firearms aren't allowed on the archery range. 🛡️

WILD ABOUT COOKING

BLACKENED CATFISH ON THE GRIDDLE

This simple blackened catfish recipe for the griddle or cast-iron skillet is a bit spicy and a tad sweet, perfectly crisp outside with a flaky, tender inside. The best part is it can be cooked outside on a griddle, so clean-up is a breeze, and there are no lingering fish smells inside!

The catfish itself has a mild yet smoky flavor and a tender, flaky texture.

—Sheila Thigpen



INGREDIENTS

2 8-ounce catfish filets
2 Tbsp. canola oil
1 Tbsp. unsalted butter

FISH RUB

1 Tbsp. smoked paprika
1 Tbsp. dark brown sugar
2 tsp. dried oregano
1 tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. cumin
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper

DIRECTIONS

- To make Fish Rub, add spices to shallow dish and stir with a fork until combined.
- Pat catfish filets dry with paper towel. Dredge filets in Fish Rub mixture, shaking off any excess.
- Preheat griddle over medium-high heat. Add canola oil and spread in an even layer with a long-handled spatula. Then add the butter and spread it around until it is melted and foamy.
- Place filets on hot griddle and cook on each side about 3 minutes, until fish is browned and flakes easily with a fork.

NOTES

- To cook in a cast-iron skillet, preheat skillet over medium-high heat, then add the canola oil and butter. Once butter is melted and foamy, add catfish. Cook on each side for 3 minutes, until the fish flakes easily with a fork. To avoid smoke indoors, you could heat the cast-iron skillet on an outdoor gas grill with the lid closed.
- Another cooking method is frying the blackened catfish in an air fryer.
- Don't miss the sides of the fish when coating it with the spice mixture!

Garnish with fresh parsley and serve with lemon wedges for a squeeze of lemon juice to brighten the flavor. Serve catfish with dirty rice, tangy coleslaw, and homemade hushpuppies for a complete and satisfying meal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheila Thigpen is a recipe developer, food photographer, and food writer. She is publisher of "Life, Love, and Good Food" — a Southern food blog — and author of "Easy Chicken Cookbook" and "The 5-Ingredient Fresh and Easy Cookbook." After 20-plus years in the publishing industry, she retired in 2018 to focus on her own creative endeavors full time. Her website is Lifeloveandgoodfood.com. She and her husband live near the beautiful Smoky Mountains.



Sheila Thigpen

LATE DIRECTOR LEAVES LASTING IMPACT ON CONSERVATION

EDITOR'S NOTE: Former ODWC Director Greg Duffy died Dec. 8, 2023. In his 38-year career, Duffy also held the positions of Chief of Wildlife, Assistant Chief of Wildlife, Wildlife and Lands Biologist, and Waterfowl Biologist.

BY NELS RODEFELD, CHIEF, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION DIVISION, OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Greg Duffy served as the Director for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation from 1993-2009.

He was one of longest-tenured directors among the states that make up the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. In fact, his tenure as director is one of the longest in the country in the modern era of state fish and wildlife agencies.

Duffy started his career helping Oklahoma restore and create the amazing fish and wildlife opportunities we enjoy today. He hauled turkeys, deer, elk, geese, river otters — almost everything we have today. During his tenure as the Department's leader, he helped grow our public land opportunities by more than 550,000 acres through landmark agreements with timber companies in southeast Oklahoma and by purchasing numerous wildlife management areas throughout the state.

He led the Department through some of the most tumultuous times for wildlife conservation the state has faced, including the drought cycle in the late 2000s and early 2010s. There were numerous deer

season debates and rule change proposals, landing us where we are today — truly a top-10 deer hunting state. He laid the groundwork for Oklahoma being much more than just a great deer hunting state. Amazing elk and bear hunting opportunities come to mind, and he helped put a focus on quail research and management, something he was very passionate about.

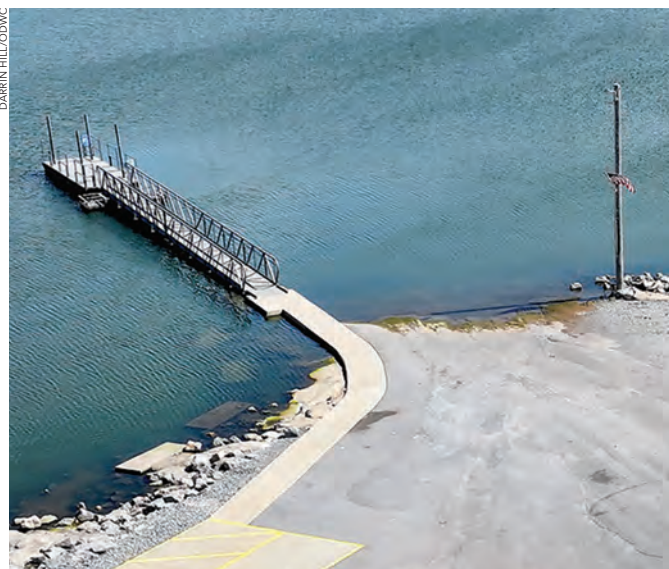
Working with the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission and Oklahoma State University, he helped establish a pilot program that led to the world's most foremost paddlefish research and management program. Oklahoma has the most extensive understanding of paddlefish in the world, and his vision helped ODWC raise more than \$10 million, which helped ODWC stay solvent without regular increases in fees for everyday hunters and anglers. Striped bass, hybrid striped bass, saugeyes, Florida largemouth bass — all of those fisheries were developed and thrived during his tenure.

His personal, and personable, style made him able to talk to anyone, and he "never met a stranger" at a boat ramp or at a public hunting area campground. ♡



Greg Duffy on a deer hunt ca. 2021.

COURTESY BOAT DOCK ADDED AT FORT COBB RESERVOIR



Southwestern Oklahoma boaters have cause for celebration as ODWC has added a new courtesy dock at Fort Cobb Reservoir. This 8-by-14-foot dock and 64-foot gangway will improve the boating and fishing experience for local residents and visitors.

Found at the Fly Inn 2 access area, the new courtesy dock can accommodate multiple boats at once, cutting down on wait times. It is now easier for boaters to dock in the event of fluctuating water levels. The project aims to make Fort Cobb Reservoir a welcoming destination for boaters of all skill levels.

Fort Cobb Reservoir, a popular fishing and recreational destination, is in Caddo County. This new courtesy dock confirms ODWC's dedication to providing exceptional amenities for all who enjoy Oklahoma's natural resources. Work has also begun on similar courtesy docks for Stroud Lake and Lake Ellsworth at Collier's Landing. ♡

— Nathan Copeland,
Boating Access Coordinator

A full-page background image showing a person sitting in a small boat on a calm lake at sunset. The sky is a vibrant orange and yellow, with silhouetted clouds. The water reflects the warm colors of the sky. The person in the boat is also silhouetted. A dark treeline is visible in the background.

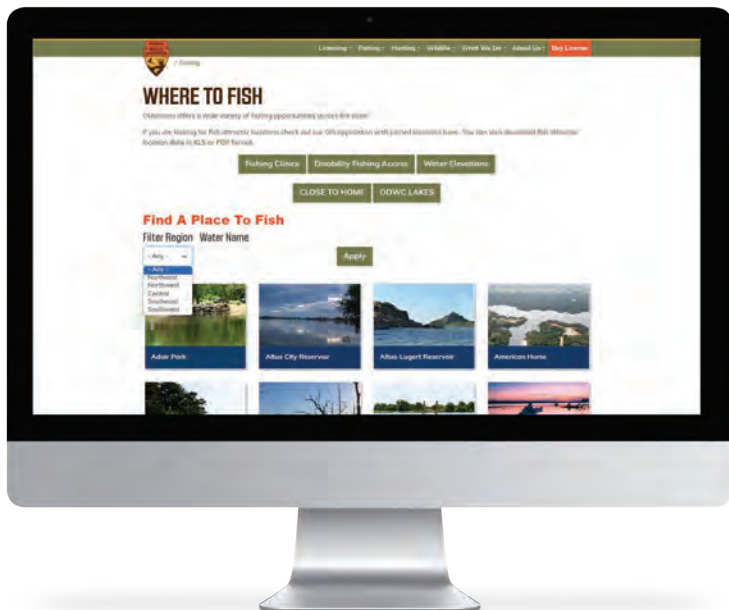
ANGLERS' GUIDE 2024



NEED FISHING ADVICE?

ODWC'S ONLINE FISHING RESOURCES WILL HOOK YOU UP IN SHORT ORDER

BY HEATHER GAYLORD, FISHING R3 COORDINATOR



Uncover the wonders of Oklahoma's ponds, lakes, and rivers through the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Fishing Resources online. Whether you're a seasoned angler or a beginner, our user-friendly platform offers insights into everything from fishing hotspots to the latest trends and techniques.

With more than 200 lakes, including the bass-filled waters of Lake Eufaula, to a multitude of rivers and streams, like the cool flowing Lower Illinois River, Oklahoma offers many diverse fishing experiences.

The ODWC website can help you navigate to and through the amazing lakes across the state while giving details into some of the best sport and recreational fishing there is. Another popular online tool is the Global Information System (GIS) fish attractor locator, which can help lead any angler to success.

With Oklahoma having a number of different fish species, fish identification can often be difficult. But



with the help of the ODWC Fishing Resources section, fish ID can be made easier, which is vital to regulations (also found in the helpful resources section).

And what about bait and tackle? We share information about the various types of bait and tackle that experts have found work best. This knowledge can be found under the "Fishing Tips" portion of the Fishing Resources section, along with fishing advice organized to skill level, and how-to videos. There are even great tips on cleaning and cooking your catch.

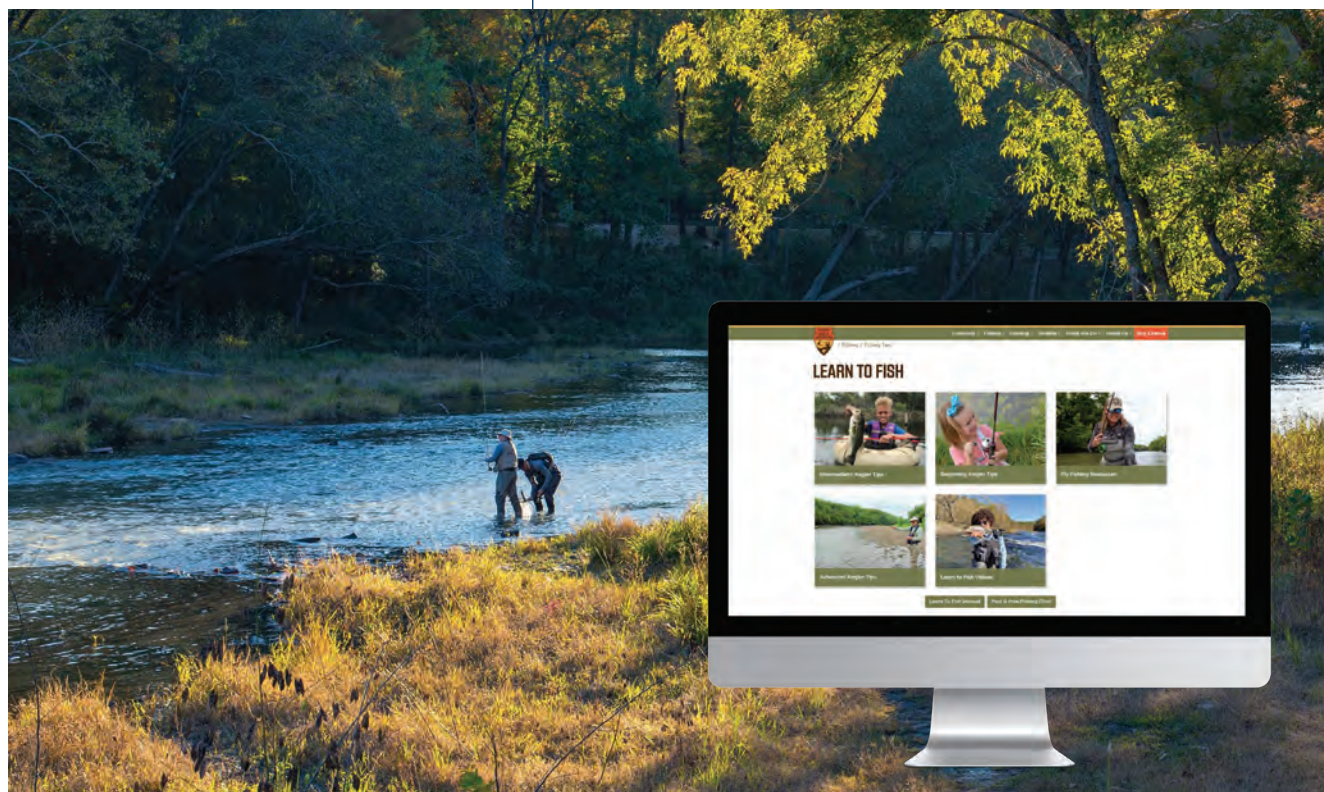
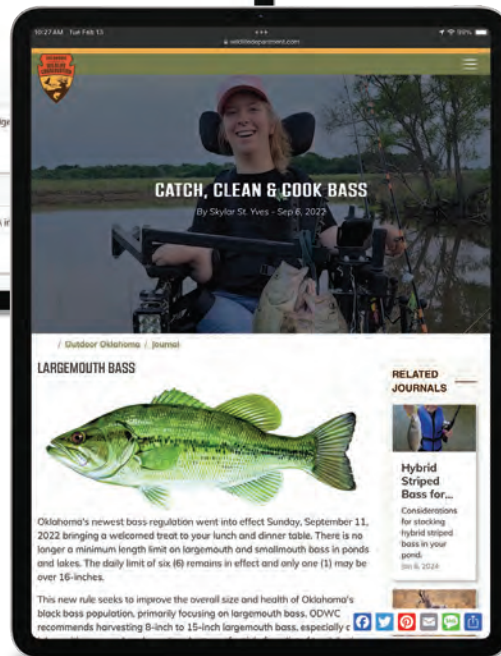
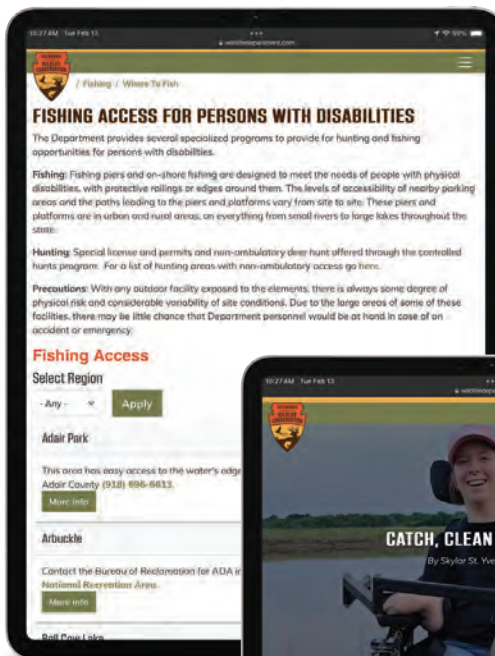
All of this information and more is just a click away at <https://www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/resources>.

Fishing Resources topics that you will find include:

- General fishing information.
- More than 130 “Learn to Fish” videos.
- Find free fishing clinics.
- Tips from the pros.
- “Angler Tips” sections for beginning, intermediate, and advanced anglers.
- Fishing tips for all seasons.
- Family fishing tips.
- Find a fishing tournament.
- Find a fishing campground.
- Knot tying.
- More than 25 hours of “Ask An Angler” educational seminar videos.
- Outdoor insights for women by women.
- Lake access closures/campgrounds.
- State records.
- Fishing regulations.

And don’t forget to take a look at our “Close to Home” Fishing Program that offers local fishing spots in many of the state’s urban areas and helps provide quality fishing opportunities to anglers of all skill levels.

So cast, click, and reel in the excitement with ODWC’s online Fishing Resources section, and then take all your newfound knowledge into Outdoor Oklahoma!



WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM

THE LONG AND SHORT OF BASS LIMITS AND HOW TO MEASURE FISH

Since the 1970s, the Wildlife Department has been setting length limits for various species of fish that anglers can harvest. Any fish caught that doesn't satisfy the length regulations must be returned to the water.

Solid scientific reasons support each regulation set. The main philosophy behind such decisions is to give Oklahoma sportsmen and sportswomen the best in outdoor recreation, while ensuring a plentiful wildlife resource for future citizens.

Small lakes and rivers have been studied extensively for good management methods. In streams, bass are highly vulnerable to fishermen. Length limits in streams have significantly increased both the sport fishery and, after a few years, the total fish harvest.

Length limits, when applied in the right situation, are a very positive management tool. But, before we can understand the biological need for length limits, it's important to recognize the problem. Simply, it boils down to either overharvest or underharvest, as compared with the water body's ability to provide forage.

More than a half-million anglers use Oklahoma waters each year for fishing. Improvement in fishing tackle and the unending refinement of techniques have made today's fisherman a much more efficient predator. That, combined with the vast numbers of fishermen of all kinds, has led to a decline in the quality of fishing on many smaller lakes and streams.

Wildlife Department lakes get tremendous fishing pressure. One study concluded that every acre of Lake Watonga had more than 800 hours of fishing per year. For comparison, popular Lake Texoma was fished only about 16 hours per acre per year, and Eufaula about six hours per acre per year.

A popular myth that length limits are necessary to protect spawning bass doesn't hold water. A female bass can produce up to 10,000 eggs for each pound of her body weight. Therefore, only a few fish could produce enough young bass to fill all the habitat available to that age class. That's an abstract concept, but put more simply, a lake can support only so many young bass. For instance, if it can support 1,000 young bass, it doesn't matter how many eggs are hatched. The excess will die from disease, predation, starvation or any of a hundred other causes. A lake must be in balance to produce quality fishing.

Under ideal conditions, bass grow at a fairly rapid rate. In its first year, a bass may reach 4 to 6 inches. By the next year, it could be 10 inches, and after just three years it reach 12.5 inches. The growth rate of bass in any location really depends on the availability of forage. When the numbers of forage fish of the right size are in balance with the bass, growth and fishing is excellent.

If by chance bass are underharvested, population structures can go out of balance the other way. Competition for forage fish becomes intense among bass, and their growth rate slows dramatically. This phenomenon is called "stockpiling" and is a real danger when length limits are implemented. Lakes must be constantly monitored by biologists to assure that the regulations are accomplishing the objective of quality fishing. If stockpiling of smaller fish occurs, regulations need to be adjusted to allow for greater harvest.

This is what ODWC did in 2022, when it changed the length limits for largemouth and smallmouth bass in lakes and rivers. Now, the statewide harvest limit for those species is six fish per day, and only one of those can be longer than 16 inches. Bass in the 12- to 15-inch class that wind up on the stringer are good keepers and well worth the effort to clean and eat.



When measuring a bass, squeeze the tailfin together for an accurate reading.



A bump-nosed fishing ruler has a built-in stop for the fish's nose, and often can be stuck onto a boat surface for handy use while angling.

This new limit doesn't apply to spotted bass, which is another member of the black bass family. And always check for special area regulations for the specific water body being fished, because the bass daily limits and legal sizes for harvest might be different.

Measuring fish presents no great difficulty. Measure a bass from the tip of its lower jaw to the tip of its tail. Everything counts.

When you catch a borderline bass on a lake or river and you need to measure it, wet your hands to avoid disturbing the fish's protective slime layer and carefully unhook it. Place the bass flat along a ruler or tape measure. If the tip of the jaw is on the beginning of the measuring device and the tail is short of 16 inches when the tailfins are squeezed closed, then the fish can be harvested. If the tip of the tail is longer than 16 inches, you may keep that fish – but only one bass longer than 16 inches may be kept per day.

To say length limits are the only way to control harvest in small lakes and streams is not completely accurate. There are other methods, but they aren't the best in terms of angler opportunity.

The quota method has been tried in some states. This allows 40 percent of the bass in a lake to be harvested each year. Censuses are taken of the bass population, and then creels are checked until the harvest reaches 40 percent. Then, the lake is closed for the rest of the year.

More restrictive creel limits have been tried experimentally in some states, but they have failed due to the tremendous fishing pressure. All they have accomplished was to spread the harvest around to more fishermen without solving the over-harvest problem.

Refuge areas on lakes also have been tried. This method closes entire sections of a lake to bass fishing. The idea is that the refuge will produce enough large bass to keep the rest of the lake in balance. However, when nearly half of a lake was set up as a refuge, bass still moved out too fast to prevent overharvest.

Fishing for "sport only" has also been tried. This definitely prevented overharvest because no bass could legally be kept. While this sounded ideal to some anglers, it also was a failure because bass became too crowded and consumed most of the forage. The result was stunted bass.

When all possible methods of controlling bass overharvest are considered, the length limit still comes out on top. Its success depends upon fisherman cooperation.

What's at stake with the length limits? Anglers are losing the chance to catch a bunch of bass of all sizes and keep one of the bigger ones. It's Oklahoma's way to improve fishing, and improved fishing is what fisheries management is all about.

FEDERAL SPORT FISH RESTORATION FUNDS IMPROVE FISHING ACCESS IN OKLAHOMA

Early in the 1900s, anglers noticed the quality of fishing was deteriorating due to unregulated harvest, industrial pollution and other causes. Anglers organized and joined with the fishing tackle industry to develop a program to improve sport fishing.

Both anglers and industry were willing to help pay for these improvements and pushed for a special tax to be placed on fishing equipment. These funds were used specifically for enhancing sport fishing, and this program became known as the Sport Fish Restoration Program, which was created by the Dingell-Johnson Act in 1950.

In the 1980s, boaters eagerly joined the ranks of the Sport Fish Restoration program by having their federal fuel tax added to the program with the assurance that the money would be used to improve and increase boating access facilities.

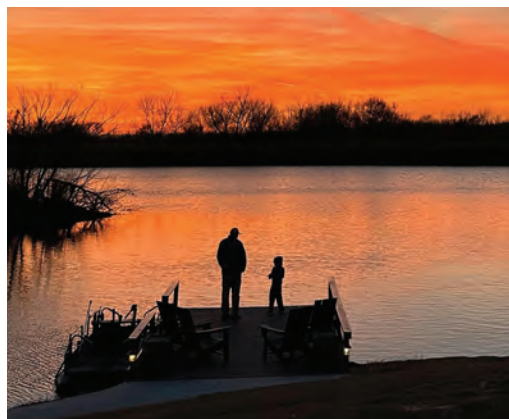
The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has received millions of dollars annually since 1991 through the Sport Fish Restoration Program from these federal excise taxes. These funds are earmarked for

sport fish management, boating access development, and aquatic education programs.

In 2023, Oklahoma received a total of \$8.7 million in Sport Fish Restoration Funding.

Each state receives its share of the total funds collected based on a formula that fac-

tors in the number of licensed anglers (60 percent of the formula) and the size or area of the state (40 percent). Sport Fish Restoration funds are used by all state wildlife agencies to improve fishing and boating access, but these funds are especially helpful in states like Oklahoma where the main funding source is hunting and fishing license fees, not general state tax appropriations. ODWC does not receive state tax appropriations.



Fishing and boating docks are projects undertaken by the Wildlife Department, supported by federal Sport Fish Restoration Program funding along with Department funds.

TOM EVANS/READERS PHOTO SHOWCASE 2023



A quiet farm pond is a great place to begin fishing in the early spring.

KICK OFF FISHING SEASON AT FARM POND

Oklahoma fishermen are blessed with a seemingly limitless fishery resource called farm ponds.

Springtime is prime time to take advantage of the opportunities provided by these waters, for farm pond fishing action usually warms up a few weeks ahead of that in the state's major reservoirs.

A few days of springtime sun is all it takes to push the surface temperature in a small pond up into the high 60s or low 70s, even though the surface temperature in nearby major lakes may still be in the low 50s. When the shallows of ponds warm up, bass, sunfish and crappie all move up to feed.

A small spinnerbait or jig-and-grub fished on shallow flats or upwind shores can often pay off handsomely at this time of year. Wind direction and sunshine play an important part in pond fish behavior in early spring. In periods of sunny weather, winds push sun-warmed surface waters to the downwind side of the pond, and that is a good place to search for active fish. There may be a difference of 10 or 12 degrees in the water from one side of a pond to the other.

By the same token, if air temperatures drop for a day or two, the wind can push chilled water across the pond to the downwind shore, and the fish could go back to deeper water or to the lee shore.

Studying fish movements and behavior in ponds can teach an angler about movement and behavior in larger bodies of water. The same environmental factors apply in both places, but the changes usually occur more slowly in larger impoundments.

Pond fishing though, isn't just a training ground for bigger things. It can stand on its own merits as a productive, enjoyable kind of fishing.

For the boatless angler, farm ponds present the best chance of catching a lunker largemouth bass. Many bass weighing 5 pounds or more are caught from ponds by anglers walking the shores. Each pond is unique, however. One may produce three or four 5-pounders. Another may give up only a single fish, perhaps a big-bellied 1-pounder. The next may not offer up any lunkers but may provide dozens of strikes on as many casts. Still another might be a mediocre bass pond, but instead yield dozens of whopper bluegills or redear sunfish, or a basket full of chunky channel cats.

A pond's virtues may loom larger to one fisherman than another. A black bass devotee may consider a clay-red western Oklahoma pond worthless. But to a 10-year old with a can of garden-dug worms or a scrap of beef liver for bait, that same pond might be a treasure trove of hungry bullheads that can turn a boring afternoon into a cherished memory of youth.

Many rural landowners will share their ponds with friends and guests. Some ranchers and farmers who guard their precious coveys of quail or who very grudgingly parcel out permission for deer or turkey hunting might willingly allow strangers who ask permission to fish in their ponds.

A myth has circulated for years that says landowners who get any kind of government financial assistance in building ponds must allow the public to fish those ponds. That isn't true. There's another myth that says any pond owner who accepts fish from the Wildlife Department for stocking a pond must open the pond to the public. That isn't true either. Owners of ponds on private property are not required to grant access to the general public in either case.

Resource management agencies do encourage pond owners to allow fishing, but allowance might be only for friends or family, not the public at large. The important thing: Always ask permission and abide by the landowner's wishes. Being courteous and cooperative can go a long way toward getting invited to fish again.

Farm ponds are an excellent place to kick off the new fishing season, and there's no time like the present to give one a try.

LEARN TO PROPERLY HANDLE CAUGHT FISH TO BOOST SURVIVAL

There are times when keeping a certain size or age class of fish is beneficial.

Recently, the Wildlife Department authorized new daily catch limits for largemouth and smallmouth bass in ponds and lakes. There is no longer a minimum length limit for harvesting those species. The daily limit of six remains in effect, but only one “keeper” may be over 16 inches.

This change seeks to improve the overall size and health of Oklahoma's black bass population, primarily focusing on largemouth bass. ODWC recommends harvesting 8-inch to 15-inch largemouth bass, especially at lakes with an overabundance of fish that size.

The Department is encouraging anglers to “catch and keep” bass for table fare instead of sticking with the decades-old philosophy of “catch and release.”

However, when anglers do release caught fish and fail to do so properly, they aren't helping the resource, especially larger bass.

Live release can be effective only if injury and stress levels are kept to a minimum and the fish survives to be an effective predator again.

Studies conducted on fish that have been hooked or handled indicate that released fish will survive, provided they aren't profusely bleeding or they aren't hooked in the brain, gills, or deep in the throat. Almost all fish caught with artificial bait and immediately released will live. Some mortality is unavoidable because tissue damage caused by the hook may lead to bacterial or fungal infections. The severity of the



JODI KEITH/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2019

injury depends on where the fish is hooked.

However, the best way to ensure survival is to release a fish back into the water immediately after landing it. Handling the fish as little as possible and removing the hook with minimum tissue damage are the best ways to ensure survival.

Fish are covered with a layer of slime on their bodies, which helps keep them disease-free. Excessive handling by an angler can damage the slime layer and open the fish up to infections. Don't handle caught fish with dry hands; always wet hands with water before touching the fish.

Fisheries managers recommend holding a bass by grasping its lower jaw and opening the mouth downward, which immobilizes the fish and allows the angler to hold it securely. For large bass, though, it's important to provide additional support by resting their body on something or keeping it in the water while holding the lower jaw.

Grasping a hook with pliers can also result in quicker and less-damaging hook removal than can be accomplished by twisting and pulling a hook with your fingers.

When a bass is hooked in the throat or gills where excessive tissue damage will result from removing it, the chance of survival is greater if you cut the line and leave the hook in the tissue.

Most fish will survive catch-and-release if they are not hooked in a vital area such as the gills or brain.



WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM

Leaving the fish in the water while handling and unhooking is a recommended technique for larger fish.



DARRIN HILL/ODWC

A kayak fisherman takes care to support the body of the black bass he just caught.



TODD BENTON/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2018

Fishing in Oklahoma offers some spectacular sights. Take a day and enjoy the outdoors.

DO YOUR PART; GET PROPER LICENSES TO SUPPORT OUTDOOR RECREATION, WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

The first step before going fishing is to make sure you have the correct legally required fishing license. You can buy an Oklahoma fishing license online at wildlifedepartment.com, via the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app for Apple or Android devices, or through an approved license vendor such as a tackle shop or sporting goods store.

The cost of a one-day or short-term fishing license is inexpensive (usually less than \$20), although fishing licenses generally cost more for nonresidents. Those younger than 16 can fish for free in Oklahoma.

If you plan to fish more than once or twice, check into buying an annual license. An annual license will cover you for the entire year, making it the most cost-effective option.

So what do I need to go fishing in Oklahoma?

LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

- An Oklahoma resident or nonresident fishing license is required of all persons who take, attempt to take, or possess fish or other aquatic dwelling organisms by any method in Oklahoma. Persons fishing the Red River must have a valid Oklahoma fishing license unless exempt.
- In addition, people fishing on waters located within the Honobia Creek or Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas must have a valid Land Access Permit, unless exempt.
- People residing in another state who own land in Oklahoma but do not live on that land, and are fishing on that land, must purchase a nonresident fishing license.
- All required licenses or written evidence of exemption and identification must be carried on your person while fishing.

COMMON FISHING LICENSES PURCHASED

Residents

- Annual Fishing License - \$25 (valid for 365 days)
- 2-Day Fishing License - \$15 (valid two consecutive days of choice)



MARSHALL REIGH/ODWC

Time a trip to a nearby stream and enjoy some fast-paced action when the sand bass are running.

- Youth Annual Fishing License - \$5 (valid for ages 16 and 17 for 365 days)

Nonresidents

- Annual Fishing License - \$55 (valid for 365 days)
- 6-Day Fishing License - \$35 (valid six consecutive days of choice)
- 1-Day Fishing License - \$15 (valid one day of choice)

EXEMPT FROM FISHING LICENSE REQUIREMENT

Residents

- Residents under 16 years old.
- Resident owners or tenants, their spouses, parents, grandparents, children and their spouses, grandchildren and their spouses who fish in private ponds on land owned or leased by such owner or tenant.
- Resident disabled veterans with 60 percent or more disability. Call State Department of Veterans Affairs, (888) 655-2838 to acquire proof of exemption.
- Any person who fishes with pole and line, trotline or throw line in streams, natural ponds and mine pits in or forming the boundary of the county in which he is a bona fide resident, when using any bait other than commercial or artificial bait, blood, stink bait, cut fish, and shrimp.
- Residents having a proven disability rendering them nonambulatory and who must use a wheelchair as certified by a duly qualified physician.
- The following people are exempt from the purchase of the Land Access Permit required only for Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs: Any Oklahoma resident who on the first day of the current calendar year was younger than 18, or anyone 64 or older. All nonresidents are required to purchase an \$85 annual Land Access Permit (no exemptions).

Nonresidents

- Nonresidents under 14 years old.
- Nonresidents under 16 years old who reside in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New

Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Texas or Wisconsin.

- Nonresidents 65 and older who are residents of Texas. (Valid ID required.)

Residents and Nonresidents

- Any person legally blind or physically impaired who is unable to properly use fishing apparatus and one accompanying companion while the blind or physically impaired person is fishing.
- People under 18 who are in legal and physical custody of the State of Oklahoma or its agencies by court order.
- People under 18 who are in the custody of a



KAYLEE HERRMAN/PROVIDED

child care facility as defined by Title 10 O.S., Section 402.

- People fishing during Oklahoma's Free Fishing Days.
- Any patient of a state institution in Oklahoma established for the care and treatment of mental illness or alcohol or drug dependency or any person developmentally disabled residing in any group home or other institution or persons developmentally disabled when accompanied by an attendant of such institution or legal guardian or when fishing on institutional property.
- Job Corps trainees of this state, having a proper identification card.
- Any person participating in an aquatic education event or clinic sanctioned by the Wildlife Department.

Bowfishing is a form of angling that is growing in popularity. The activity requires a regular fishing license in Oklahoma.

Conservation

Fun Outdoors!

Bees have been getting a lot of buzz lately. You can help these important pollinators by creating a bee watering hole. Use the flat ceramic tray from a flowerpot. Place it in a protected place near growing flowers where bees will likely visit. Scatter colorful marbles and glass beads across the bottom of the tray, then add water but leave the tops of the beads or marbles above the water level. Check back later to see if any bees are getting a drink!

Hunting Tip

Will you be pursuing a tom turkey this spring? Be prepared by scouting your chosen hunting area. Arrive early and listen for gobblers to sound off from their overnight roosts before they fly down for the day. Pattern their movement as they travel to feed. A location between roost and feeding area is usually a good spot to hunt. Oklahoma's youth spring turkey season is April 13-14, 2024.

Fishing Tip

Want to try catching some channel catfish? They aren't picky feeders. While stink baits and punch baits work well, some "experts" claim that hot dogs soaked in cherry drink mix and garlic powder are the best thing going. Since channel cats use smell to find food, these "dogs" will surely get the cats' attention.

for Kids!

Word Search: Let's Go Fishing!

H	F	G	O	O	B	A	V	I	K	R	T	Z	P	X	P
M	H	Q	X	A	C	C	M	Y	O	P	D	E	A	Y	V
M	T	G	U	K	K	O	O	H	G	K	B	U	L	F	D
D	K	Y	F	X	M	C	S	R	U	E	V	T	W	S	N
E	K	I	E	S	B	E	S	Z	K	B	R	E	K	V	L
A	F	C	X	N	Z	S	X	X	A	O	F	N	E	F	C
E	E	E	P	C	M	W	Z	I	D	V	M	J	N	I	U
P	A	C	C	M	N	B	T	G	Z	U	R	S	Z	L	U
V	C	H	W	S	A	B	R	E	K	A	L	T	Q	L	Q
Z	B	E	X	R	U	R	V	V	K	Z	C	R	X	E	A
J	K	S	T	C	F	P	T	A	Y	P	W	I	S	T	H
A	U	T	K	B	S	P	S	A	V	X	C	N	R	K	J
M	G	E	W	O	J	L	V	H	O	H	E	G	N	N	Q
J	T	L	V	F	S	E	Q	Q	P	B	J	E	X	I	B
Y	H	T	J	M	R	E	B	B	O	B	F	R	Q	F	J
M	R	T	E	S	J	R	P	P	W	M	B	H	A	E	M

Find and circle these things you might see when you go on a fishing trip.

Bait Bucket
Fillet Knife
Lake
Reel

Boat Ramp
Hook
Moss
Rod

Bobber
Ice Chest
Net
Stringer

COOL FACTS About Channel Catfish:

- Oklahoma's record channel catfish weighed 35 pounds 15 ounces, caught in 2005 by Gary Doak Jr. at Taft Lake.
- Statewide daily limit is 15 channel or blue catfish combined, with no size limit for channel cats.
- They are common statewide in streams, ponds, and reservoirs.
- They have a forked tailfin as does blue catfish, while flathead catfish have a rounded tailfin.
- When taken from clean waters, they make excellent table fare.
- Catfish feed more by taste and touch than by sight.
- They are omnivorous, feeding on a wide variety of organic matter, dead and alive.
- Some of the more common foods are fish, mussels, snails, insects, and crayfish.



Color a Critter: Channel Catfish





DON P. BROWN/ODWC

Snake Day gives youngsters a chance to get acquainted with some slithering reptiles.

SNAKES ALIVE!

GAME WARDENS CREATE PROGRAM ON STATE'S VENOMOUS SERPENTS

BY DON P. BROWN, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Oklahoma Game Warden Trey Hale placed his hand into a small bucket and lifted it out again. What he held up in front of the crowd of schoolkids caused many of them to shriek, scream and back away in alarm.

It was a juvenile western rat snake twisting itself around Hale's hand.

For Hale, that's one of the best favorite parts of the educational program he and fellow Game Warden Ty Runyan present each spring.

"I like to watch the kids and see their faces when they see them and look at them," Hale said.

What the students are seeing up close and personal are live snakes.

Hale and Runyan developed their program about Oklahoma's venomous snakes about four



Game Warden Trey Hale, based in Marshall County, and Game Warden Ty Runyan, based in Garvin County, developed an educational outreach program on Oklahoma's venomous snakes, which they present to school students across southern Oklahoma.



years ago as a way to educate the public about snakes of all kinds, and to fulfill a public outreach role as representatives of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Hale, who is based in Marshall County, and Runyan, based in Garvin County, have taken the program to an average of four schools each spring and have also presented at several other public events across southern Oklahoma.

"People often don't have a good understanding of venomous snakes. We just wanted to raise public awareness from a conservation mind-set.

"Just because it's a snake, it doesn't necessarily need to die."

Preparing for the program begins in early



One of the teachers at Milburn Schools reacts to the feel of a live snake on her hand.

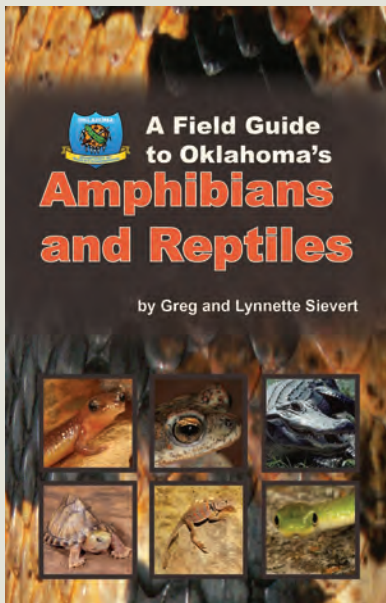
IDENTIFY SNAKES WITH FIELD GUIDE

Wildlife from both the east and west meet in Oklahoma, and "A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles" by Greg and Lynnette Sievert carefully details the mixed bag of salamanders, frogs, turtles, lizards and snakes that can be found within our state's borders.

"Oklahoma's diversity of amphibians and reptiles is really incredible," said Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist with the Wildlife Department. "This book features 140 of the species that can be found in our state; from the eastern collared lizard with a near statewide distribution, to rare salamanders found only in the Ouachita Mountains."

Tips for identification, a map of its Oklahoma range, and information about its diet and preferred habitats are provided for each species. The book's spiral binding makes it easy to flip through and make comparisons of different species when identifying animals in the field or at home.

This updated, fourth-edition guide features six new species accounts and updated range maps. Scan the QR code to order your copy today!



A video presentation gives youngsters a basic knowledge of venomous snakes found in Oklahoma.



Game Warden Ty Runyan uses snake tongs as he prepares to give the program at Milburn School.

spring, when Hale and Runyan try to collect an example of each of the venomous snake species that are prevalent in southern Oklahoma. As the weather warms, snakes emerge from their dens and are often found soaking up the sun on nearby rocks.

In southern Oklahoma, the venomous snake species are the western diamond-backed rattlesnake, western cottonmouth, timber rattlesnake, copperhead, and western pygmy rattlesnake. Oklahoma has two more venomous snakes — the prairie rattlesnake and western massasauga — in the northwestern counties.

The program caters to students from kindergarten to seniors, Hale said. Many of the kids have never been able to see real venomous snakes up close and in person. And they all get the chance to do so at the program, and to ask any questions. Of course, safety is always the utmost priority; no venomous snakes are taken out of their enclosures, and Hale has never had any incidents at any of the programs.

At some schools, the Game Wardens will present the program eight times in a single day so every grade level is able to get educated. Sometimes other Game Wardens from the area are invited to help during the day. The kids watch a slide show that shares snake facts and debunks myths about snakes.

Hale said many people believe a venomous snake bite is deadly most of the time, but actually advances in medical treatment have drastically improved outcomes in recent years. He also said it's a myth that sucking on a bite will help the victim; all that really does is put snake venom into someone else's mouth.

The program is also certified by the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET) and is shared with Game Warden

DON P. BROWN/ODWC



A student reaches out to touch the juvenile western rat snake held by Game Warden Trey Hale.



DON P. BROWN/ODWC



DON P. BROWN/ODWC

Milburn School students interact with Game Warden Trey Hale and his friend.

These young ladies fix their gaze on a classroom visitor.



Milburn School students are invited to check out a live rattlesnake in a display case.

Students get a close look at a western diamondback rattlesnake in a sealed display case.





DON F. BROWN/ODWC

Scores of students learn about Oklahoma's venomous snakes from Game Wardens Trey Hale and Ty Runyan.

recruits during ODWC training academies. Game Wardens never know what situations they might have to face, so the recruits need to be training in general snake handling knowledge and what to do in the event of snakebite.

The onset of summer break for the local schools means the venomous snake program also wraps up for the spring season. The snakes that Hale and Runyan collected for the program are all returned to the same dens they came from. Hale believes it's likely that some of the snakes are repeat performers in the program because the same dens are used for collection every year.

Hale said he plans to continue the educational outreach as long as there are students to benefit from it, and because he's slowly building a name for himself.

"The kids just love it, and sometimes they will even recognize me when I'm in the field. They say, 'You're the snake guy!' "

There's no way Hale can slither away from that moniker. 🐍

GET A FREE SNAKE POSTER!

Oklahoma's venomous snakes is the subject of this Wildlife Department poster available for download free from the ODWC website. The front side shows photos of the seven species of venomous snakes found in our state, while the back side offers details about each of the species and also facts about snakes in Oklahoma. To download a printable poster, click the QR code:





State Rep. Ty Burns and his son, Ty, meet with ODWC Game Wardens to learn how airboats are used in wildlife law enforcement.

ODWC TALKS MISSION AND MONEY

LAWMAKERS LEARN ABOUT CONSERVATION AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation fosters hunting, fishing, shooting sports, and wildlife-watching activities that generate more than \$6 billion in positive impact to the state's economy.

At the same time, ODWC conserves and manages the state's fish and wildlife resources and habitats to ensure they are enjoyed by the generations to come.

In doing all of this, ODWC receives **zero appropriations** from the Oklahoma Legislature. But ODWC often finds itself subject to legislative actions.

Providing education to all Oklahomans about fish and wildlife conservation and showing how ODWC meets its public-trust responsibilities to care for the state's natural resources are among the Department's day-to-day operations.

Familiarity with the Department's activities and the state's fish and wildlife resources is especially important for senators and representatives who represent the people of Oklahoma in the state Legislature. In nearly every legislative session, bills that directly or indirectly affect ODWC operations are proposed. Sometimes those proposals arise from ODWC, and other time they arise from legislators themselves or the constituents they represent.

To give lawmakers the perspective and knowledge they need to make informed decisions that are in the best interests of conservation,

ODWC invites them into the field to directly experience the work done by the managers of fish and wildlife.

These **in-person opportunities** give lawmakers the chance to see ODWC activities taking place in their legislative districts, meet local Department staff, and learn about local issues. And the field trips also give ODWC employees the chance to share more about their missions without the distractions around the State Capitol.

Also important is to inform lawmakers about the **positive impact to local economies** provided by the state's hunters, anglers, sport shooters, and outdoor recreationists. ODWC is committed to managing and protecting fish, wildlife, and their habitats while also growing the state's hunting and angling communities, partnering with people who love the outdoors, and fostering sound stewardship with people who care for the land.

Not only are these outdoor activities a solid driver for Oklahoma's economy

(see infographics on following pages), they also contribute in a big way at the national level.

In October 2023, the USFWS released the final report from the 2022 National Survey. This report found that hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching contributed \$394 billion to the U.S. economy, adjusted for inflation.

Wildlife watchers made up the largest group of outdoor recreationists in 2022, with 148 million people participating. Anglers totaled 39 million (15% of the U.S. population 16 years and older); hunters totaled 14 million (5.5% of the U.S. population 16 years and older); target shooters totaled 47 million; and archery was practiced by 19 million people.

The national report breaks down results into regions. But ODWC paid for access to specific state-level results to have a better understanding of the contribution made to the state's economy by hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers. 🐾

— **Compiled by Kelly Adams, Catherine Appling-Pooler, Don P. Brown, and Betsey York.**



Scan the QR Code to view the national survey report.



State Sen. David Bullard and State Rep. J.J. Humphreys listen to wildlife managers at Pushmataha Wildlife Management Area.



State Sen. Todd Gollihare gets a close look at an ODWC airboat during a trip to learn about ODWC-landowner partnerships.



State Sen. Dwayne Pemberton catches some white bass while learning about fisheries management.



State Rep. John Waldron and his son get to snag a paddlefish while learning about fisheries management.




State Sen. David Bullard and his daughter snagged a paddlefish while learning about ODWC's management of the unusual species.



ECONOMIC IMPACT: WILDLIFE WATCHING

OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE WATCHING ANNUAL EXPENDITURES

 **\$9.8 BILLION**
annual expenditures

 **\$9.5 BILLION**
retail sales

 **\$213 MILLION**
trip-related expenses

BIRD WATCHING

Over half of the U.S. population 16 years old and older enjoyed wildlife watching in 2022.

In Oklahoma, more than 773,000 people enjoy watching birds.

HOW WE ARE FUNDED

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation does not receive any state or local tax dollars. License sales and federal Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program grant revenues are the main funding sources.

WILDLIFE WATCHING PARTICIPATION

2.9 million people participated in wildlife watching activities in Oklahoma.



WILDLIFE WATCHING IS FOR EVERYONE

61% of urban Oklahomans participated in wildlife watching while 71% of rural Oklahomans participated.





ECONOMIC IMPACT: FISHING

OKLAHOMA FISHING ANNUAL EXPENDITURES



\$3.7 BILLION
annual expenditures



\$3 BILLION
retail sales



\$686 MILLION
trip-related expenses

TOTAL IMPACT

ODWC fosters a hunting and fishing industry that annually generates over \$4.1 billion in retail sales and over \$906 million in trip-related expenses.

HOW WE ARE FUNDED

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation does not receive any state or local tax dollars. License sales and federal Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program grant revenues are the main funding sources.

FISHING PARTICIPATION

1.1 million anglers spent an average of 12 days fishing in Oklahoma.

MOST FISHED SPECIES

Largemouth bass is the top targeted species followed by crappie and channel catfish.





ECONOMIC IMPACT: SHOOTING SPORTS

OKLAHOMA SHOOTING SPORTS PARTICIPATION

725,612 RESIDENTS

participated in shooting sports in 2022

NEARLY 6,000 STUDENTS

participate in ODWC's trap shooting program

MORE THAN 50,000 STUDENTS

participate in ODWC's National Archery in the Schools program

ODWC is engaged in a multi-year plan to renovate or build new public-access shooting ranges for recreational shooting opportunities across the state for the benefit of shooting enthusiasts.

ODWC also supports youth shooting sports by providing manpower, equipment and running the state FFA shotgun competitions.

TOTAL IMPACT

All of the time spent enjoying shooting sports has a big impact on the state's economy. Oklahoma's recreational sport shooters contribute more than \$1.65 billion annually to the economy.





ECONOMIC IMPACT: HUNTING

OKLAHOMA HUNTING ANNUAL EXPENDITURES

 **\$1.3 BILLION**
annual expenditures

 **\$1.1 BILLION**
retail sales

 **\$220 MILLION**
trip-related expenses

TOTAL IMPACT

ODWC fosters a hunting and fishing industry that annually generates over \$4.1 billion in retail sales and over \$906 million in trip-related expenses.

HOW WE ARE FUNDED

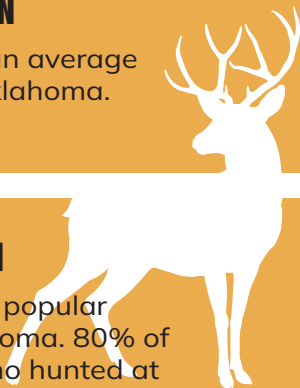
The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation does not receive any state or local tax dollars. License sales and federal Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program grant revenues are the main funding sources.

HUNTING PARTICIPATION

305,815 hunters spent an average of 11 days hunting in Oklahoma.

MOST POPULAR SEASON

Deer season is the most popular hunting season in Oklahoma. 80% of active hunters (those who hunted at all in 2022) hunted deer during 2022.



VARIETY OF OUTDOOR OPTIONS AWAITS PUBLIC LAND VISITORS

COMPILED BY BETSEY YORK

DID YOU KNOW THE
OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION HAS
MORE THAN 100 AREAS THAT ARE
MANAGED FOR HUNTING, FISHING
AND WILDLIFE WATCHING?

*Talimena Drive at Ouachita
WMA-Le Flore Unit*

Across five management regions, the Department's dedicated biologists manage these diverse habitats for a myriad of plant and animal species. Department staff highlight many Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) because of the exciting opportunities they provide using social media channels or emails shared with license holders.

Although some WMAs are in the spotlight more often, every WMA in the state was established for a reason, and management that is under way at these areas creates opportunities that many people may not be aware of.

This article highlights a single WMA from each ODWC management region and an opportunity available on the area. The highlighted WMAs have been selected by the staff in that region — the folks who know the areas the best!

a diverse collection of furbearing animals that are legal to harvest, including striped skunk, opossum, coyote, gray fox, red fox, raccoon, bobcat, river otter, beaver, muskrat, and mink.

Cherokee WMA, just outside Tahlequah, is a great location to get started. With over 31,000 acres and over 92 miles of public road on the area, there is plenty of ground to cover. The WMA consists of oak-hickory forest on rolling hills, with some lowland riparian areas, fields, native grasses, and several miles of creeks.

Additionally, the area has a robust population of furbearers.

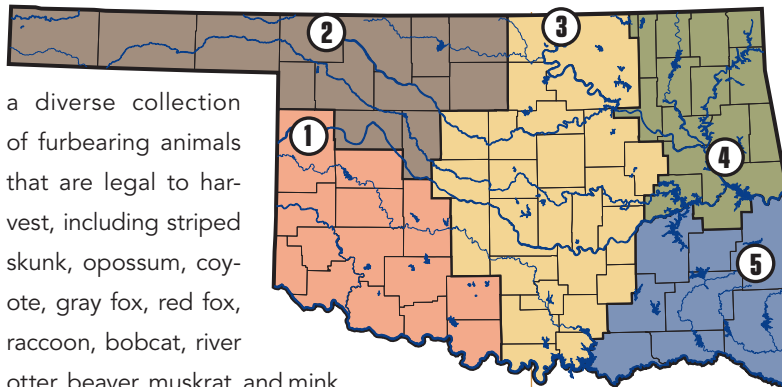
Even though fur prices are depressed at present, trapping is a great way to learn to be more observant in nature, learn more about your target species, and make great memories with friends and family. The skills

learned in becoming a trapper will make anyone a better and more well-rounded hunter.

PRIORITY OBJECTIVES OF WMAS

For the sound management and use of fish and wildlife resources on ODWC-managed land, the public use priorities in order of importance are:

- Hunting, fishing, trapping, running dogs for sport, and associated activities.
- Other wildlife-oriented activities (nature observation or photography, and conservation education).
- Non-wildlife-related activities, when such activities do not conflict with wildlife management objectives (picnicking, hiking, backpacking, short-term camping, horseback riding).
- Large group activities (military training, organized trail rides, etc.).



Oklahoma WMAs

- 1 Packsaddle
- 2 Cimarron Bluff
- 3 Kaw
- 4 Cherokee
- 5 Ouachita-Le Flore Unit



Cherokee WMA

NORTHEAST REGION: TRAPPING AT CHEROKEE WMA

The northeastern Oklahoma management region has more than 208,000 acres of public land. Stretching from the tallgrass prairie and cross-timbers of Osage County to the pine-covered Sans Bois Mountains of Haskell County, this region offers something for everyone. And even in a region with one of the highest populations, there are still plenty of missed opportunities available on the Department's WMAs.

One of these missed opportunities would be furbearer trapping. In northeastern Oklahoma, several WMAs are open to the use of foothold traps for land and water trapping. The region has





WES EDENS/READERS PHOTO SHOWCASE 2020

Hunting for western diamondback rattlesnakes is an adventure awaiting visitors at Cimarron Bluff Wildlife Management Area.

For those who have always been interested in trapping but had no mentor, the Wildlife Department offers seasonal trapping workshops at several WMAs across the state.

NORTHWEST REGION: RATTLESNAKE HUNTING AT CIMARRON BLUFF WMA

The northwestern region of Oklahoma has the lowest rainfall totals in the state. Cimarron Bluff WMA covers 3,590 acres in northeastern Harper County. This WMA is dominated by mixed-grass prairie vegetation with isolated pockets of sand sagebrush, sand plum, and sumac occurring on red clay and gypsum soils. Cottonwood, hackberry, and western soapberry trees exist along the creeks flowing through the area. A limited amount of Cimarron River floodplain is found along the eastern boundary of the WMA, dominated by salt flats and interspersed with salt cedar.

Cimarron Bluff WMA has a stable population of western diamondback rattlesnakes and prairie rattlesnakes that are legal to hunt. Anyone hunting rattlesnakes must have an Oklahoma hunting

license. Those without an Oklahoma hunting license can get a 5-day rattlesnake permit. Rattlesnake season is open from March 1-June 30, and there is no daily limit. Snakes that can be hunted with no daily limit are prairie rattlesnakes, timber rattlesnakes, and massasauga.

The most common method of snake hunting is with snake tongs and a restraining tube to put the snake into. This method can be used for catch and release of rattlesnakes at the many snake festivals, snake education clinics,

and regulated snake hunts and roundups for spectators' entertainment.

Another way to use the rattlesnake is by harvesting for the meat. Rattlesnake meat is considered a premium and healthy exotic meat in certain areas. Many people consider the flavor to be like that of alligator meat.

It is highly recommended to have the appropriate gear for a snake hunting adventure, including snake boots, snake chaps, snake tongs, restraining tube or sack, and if possible a well-educated snake hunter to demonstrate how to have a safe and fun time in the great outdoors.

CENTRAL REGION: SQUIRREL HUNTING AT KAW WMA

The central region is situated between the wetter forests of eastern Oklahoma and the drier short-grass prairies of western Oklahoma. Portions of this region are referred to as the cross timbers and contain a mosaic of forests, woodlands, and prairies. This region has a high percentage of the state's population (52%) and a low percentage of the Department's overall WMA acreage (11%). The Tulsa metro sits just



to the east of the central region.

These characteristics make it a little harder to discover unknown areas, but focusing on less popular species can be a way to avoid the crowds.

Squirrels are plentiful on Kaw, Okmulgee, Deep Fork, Lexington, and Cross Timbers WMAs. All of these areas (in no particular order) are good places to start. Be sure to check specific area regulations as season dates do vary from WMA to WMA. Hunters interested in pursuing squirrels should focus on blocks of timber that have mast-producing trees; trees that produce some type of berry or nut. Upon locating such trees (oaks, pecans, mulberry, walnut, etc.) the hunter can sit and observe the forest floor or canopy for movement. Typically, squirrels will run along the forest floor when searching for or concealing food but will commonly run through the canopy, jumping from tree to tree to move throughout the woods. If one is not observing movement, listening for squirrels barking, chattering, teeth grinding, or even the rustle of the leaves on branches or on the ground from squirrels moving around can be just as effective. Sitting under a tree looking and listening for 20-30 minutes is more than enough time to know if squirrels are in the vicinity.

Other ways to locate squirrels includes using calls and looking for sign. Commercial calls are available for purchase through several sporting goods or outdoor stores. The simplest call

is using two quarters from your pocket. Tap them together to mimic squirrel barking or rub the edges together to mimic the teeth-grinding sound. Signs that suggest squirrels could be nearby include nests in the treetops and busted shells on the ground beneath trees.

*Kaw Wildlife
Management Area*

PUBLIC ACCESS AT WMAs

- Most WMAs require visitors (hunting or nonhunting) to possess a hunting, fishing, or combination license, or a Wildlife Conservation Passport, to legally enter the area. Check the "Special Area Regulations" sections of the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations for WMA-specific rules.
- Buying a hunting or fishing license can cost less than buying a Wildlife Conservation Passport. Plus, license holders are granted the privileges of that license and can enjoy fishing or hunting during the license term.
- People younger than 16 at the start of the calendar year, and students and instructors participating in bona fide educational tours or activities sponsored or organized by an education institution, or any other organized event sanctioned by and approved in advance by the Wildlife Department, are exempt from the Wildlife Conservation Passport requirement.
- Anyone carrying a firearm or archery equipment on Department-managed lands must possess a hunting license. All persons using shooting ranges must possess a valid Oklahoma hunting or combination license, unless otherwise exempt. Anyone younger than 14 must be immediately supervised by an adult while afield. Minors aged 14-16 must be immediately supervised by an adult unless they possess hunter education certification.



Squirrels build nests in treetops using sticks and leaves and they are usually constructed toward the top of the tree in a fork of the branch. Nests are much more noticeable than busted shells on the ground. These pieces fall or are dropped while a squirrel is feeding. Sometimes they will feed on a log lying on the ground or on a limb up in a tree.

In summary, the best way to start squirrel hunting is to spend time in the woods looking for mast trees and looking/listening for squir-

rels. And, Kaw WMA is a perfect location for your next squirrel hunting adventure.

SOUTHWEST REGION: PREDATOR HUNTING AT PACKSADDLE WMA

Southwestern Oklahoma is known for its beautiful landscapes. One of the most visited national wildlife refuges in the country, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, draws more than 1 million people every year, a testament to the amazing recreation opportunities that this area of Oklahoma provides to residents and nonresidents alike.

Ellis WMA, Packsaddle WMA, and Black Kettle WMA are three areas in this region that provide a variety of opportunities to hunters. These areas lie in Ellis and Roger Mills counties. These WMAs have a mixed grass prairie habitat: a mixture of rolling sand hills and wooded bottoms with the South Canadian River as its southern boundary. Vegetation includes big bluestem, Indiangrass, little bluestem, side-oats grama, and buffalo grass, along with brush species such as shinnery oak, sagebrush, and sand plum.

CAMPING ON WMAs

- Camping is limited to 16 days, and for no more than 21 days in any 30-day period, on the same WMA, except in areas open only to hunter camping for special seasons. Camping on these areas is limited to two days longer than the period the camper (hunter) is authorized to hunt.
- Leaving a campsite unattended for a period longer than 48 hours is prohibited. Unattended camp items will be removed.
- Quiet hours are enforced from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.
- All dogs or other pets must be kept on a leash or otherwise confined while in camping areas.

A hunting season that may not readily come to mind is coyote or predator hunting. This season is a great one to try, as it is open year-round and has no bag limit. Night hunting coyotes with lights or dogs is prohibited.

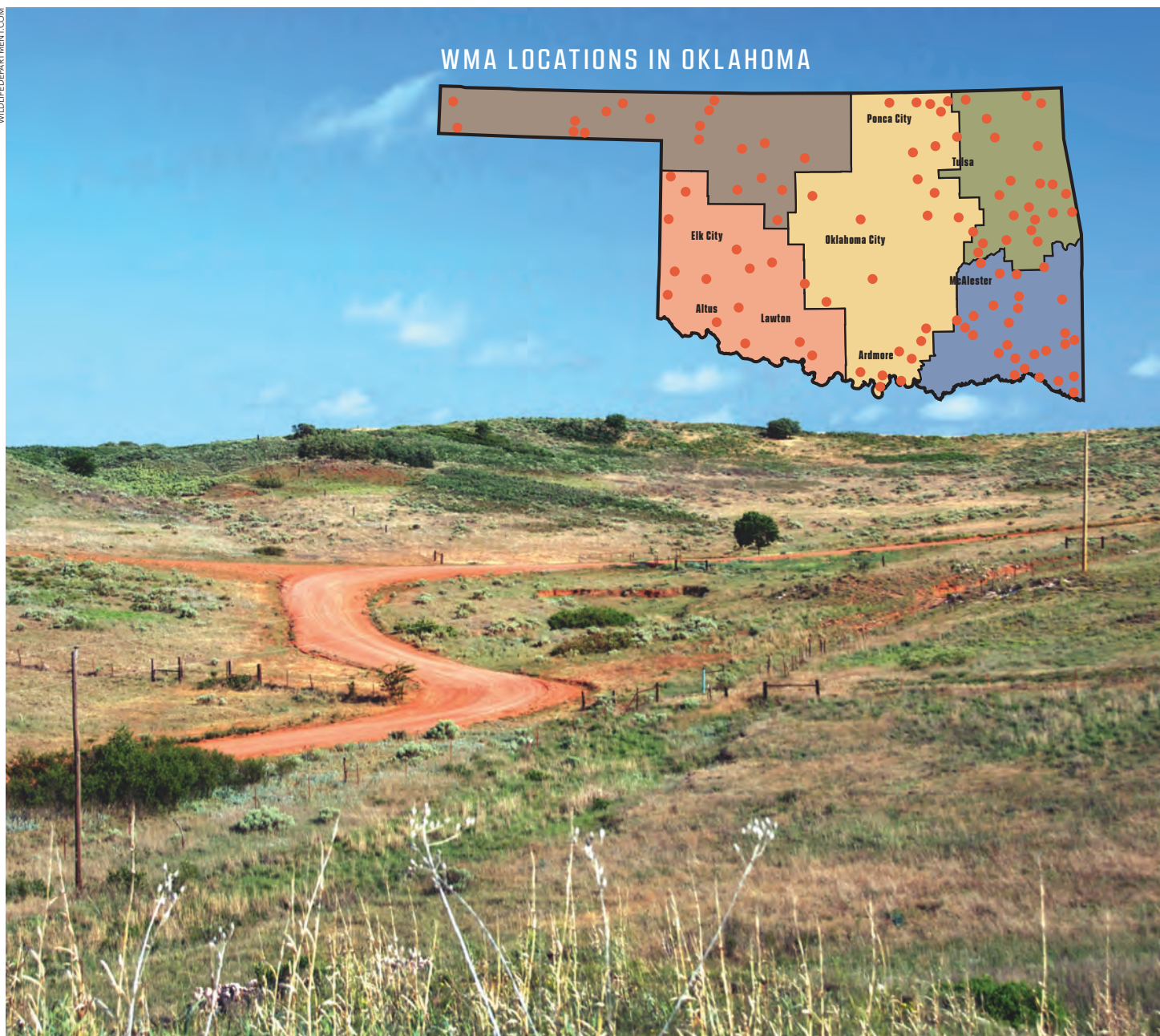
Area biologists suggest that predator hunters scout locations on the WMA beforehand so the hunters can quickly move from one calling spot to another. Focus on water holes and food plots to start. Predators are more active with weather changes and fronts, so make sure to pay close attention to the weather.

Everyone has their own preferences on calls and calling techniques, but don't be scared to mix it up a little.

SOUTHEAST REGION: TALIMENA DRIVE AT OUACHITA WMA

The southeast region is dominated by the Ouachita Mountains containing oak, hickory, and short-leaf pine forests. The Ouachita WMA-Le Flore Unit covers 223,823 acres of the Ouachita National Forest in southeastern Oklahoma's Le Flore County. The WMA is man-

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Coyote hunters can find great success on Packsaddle WMA's wide-open spaces.



Designated camping area at Atoka WMA.



aged cooperatively between the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the U.S. Forest Service.

Situated in the scenic, mountainous, oak-pine forest, this is a popular destination for many small game, turkey, deer, and black bear hunters from across the United States. However, hunting is just one of the many activities available. Ouachita-Le Flore has something to offer most anyone who has an appreciation for the outdoors.

This massive WMA contains hundreds of miles of public travelable roads, ranging from through highways, to gravel and dirt logging roads. In addition to roads, are miles of designated hiking, horseback riding, and ATV trails. As a result of U.S. Forest Service timber management practices, the logging roads are rotationally maintained in areas where timber harvest occurs and consequently provide great access for hunters, trappers, and outdoor enthusiasts.

The Talimena Scenic Drive cuts the WMA's Le Flore Unit in half as it runs along the top of the Winding Stair Mountains from U.S. 271 to the Arkansas line. This drive offers many scenic vistas to pull off the roadway and enjoy the view. There are many primitive camping sites on the area, and two sites at Cedar Lake and Winding Stair Vista that have modern facilities. The area also has two shooting ranges, one on the south side, off State Highway 63, and one on the north, off U.S. 59.

Oklahoma has two species of squirrels that are legal to hunt: the eastern fox squirrel and the eastern gray squirrel. Both are common on the WMA, but the gray squirrel is more abundant. Oklahoma's squirrel season usually runs from May 15 through Feb. 28, with a daily limit of 25 fox and gray squirrels combined per day.

Squirrel hunting is a great way to sharpen marksmanship, stalking skills, and experience one of the best-tasting wild game delicacies out there. The preparation time, expense, and gear required to bag a few bushytails for the dinner table is often far less than what is required to hunt big game or waterfowl. Squirrel season offers a perfect opportunity for experienced hunters to introduce a young hunter to all aspects of the sport, from gun safety to the skillet. There is no better way to get a young person hooked on hunting and share some deep woods wisdom than by taking them to the woods and helping them harvest a few squirrels. The Ouachita WMA has plenty of habitat, squirrels, and elbow room to provide a chance to invest in our next generation of hunters. So don't let the opportunity scurry away.

Cedar Lake, an 80-acre impoundment, is the recreational gem of Ouachita National Forest. It is the largest and most-used recreation area in the national forest and has produced two state-record largemouth bass. Crooked Branch Lake, a smaller 15-acre water body, is also managed by ODWC and stocked with bass, channel cat, and bluegill.

From hunting, fishing, hiking, riding, or just sightseeing, Ouachita WMA really does have something for every outdoor enthusiast. 🐾

— Segments written by Colby Farquhar, Matt Hensley, Joey McAllister, Weston Storer and Marcus Thibodeau.

BIRD DOGS ON WMAs

- All training of bird dogs on Department-managed lands is closed from June 1-Aug. 31, annually.
- No person may train or have in possession more than three bird dogs on any Department-managed lands outside the regular harvest season.
- No person who owns or operates a commercial bird dog training business or is an employee in such a business whereby bird dogs are sold and/or trained for a price or a fee may use Department-managed lands for such training purposes.
- Anyone not in a dog-training business may work up to three personal hunting dogs outside the regular harvest season and may use Department-managed lands to train such dogs, except as otherwise provided.



Running of no more than three personal hunting dogs on WMAs is permitted outside of regular harvest season.

OUTDOOR STORE

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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, mid-pro shape, pro-curved visor, adjustable snap-back, 60% cotton/40% polyester. Various colors and styles will be available (subject to availability). (Online sales only.) — \$20

DURABLE COLLECTOR'S CARDS

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





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

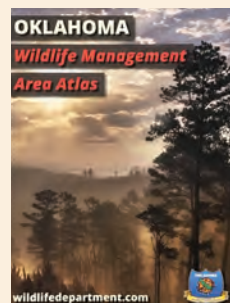


DURABLE FIELD TAGS

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



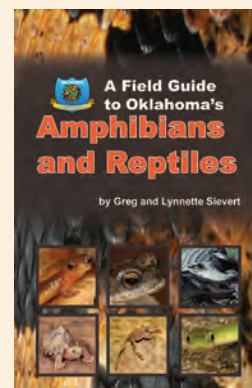
OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA ATLAS

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

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CATALPA SPHINX CATERPILLAR

BY MAGGIE WOOD, EDUCATION INTERN

Every summer, from mid-June through July, a favorite natural bait of many fisherman is abundantly available if they know where to look.

"Catalpa worms" only feed on catalpa trees, and they only feed for a few weeks. Catalpa trees are easy to recognize because of their light green, heart-shaped leaves. Another distinctive characteristic is the bean-like seed pods that are found after

the tree produces its white flowers.

The proper name for the catalpa worm is the catalpa sphinx caterpillar.

These caterpillars eventually become sphinx moths (*Ceratomia catalpae*). Their life cycle consists of four stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult.

As an adult, the sphinx moth lays up to 1,000 eggs on the underside of a new catalpa leaf in the spring. Those eggs hatch after 10-14 days, and the larva start eating the catalpa leaves. The larva continue eating and will molt five times before they leave the host tree to burrow into the ground.

Once burrowed in the ground, the larva begins the pupal stage. The pupa will stay burrowed through winter. In spring, the pupa emerges as an adult. As an adult, the catalpa sphinx moth does not have a mouth,

so therefore it cannot feed. All the catalpa leaves that were eaten during the larva stage is fuel for their next mission, which is to mate and lay eggs — starting the cycle over again.

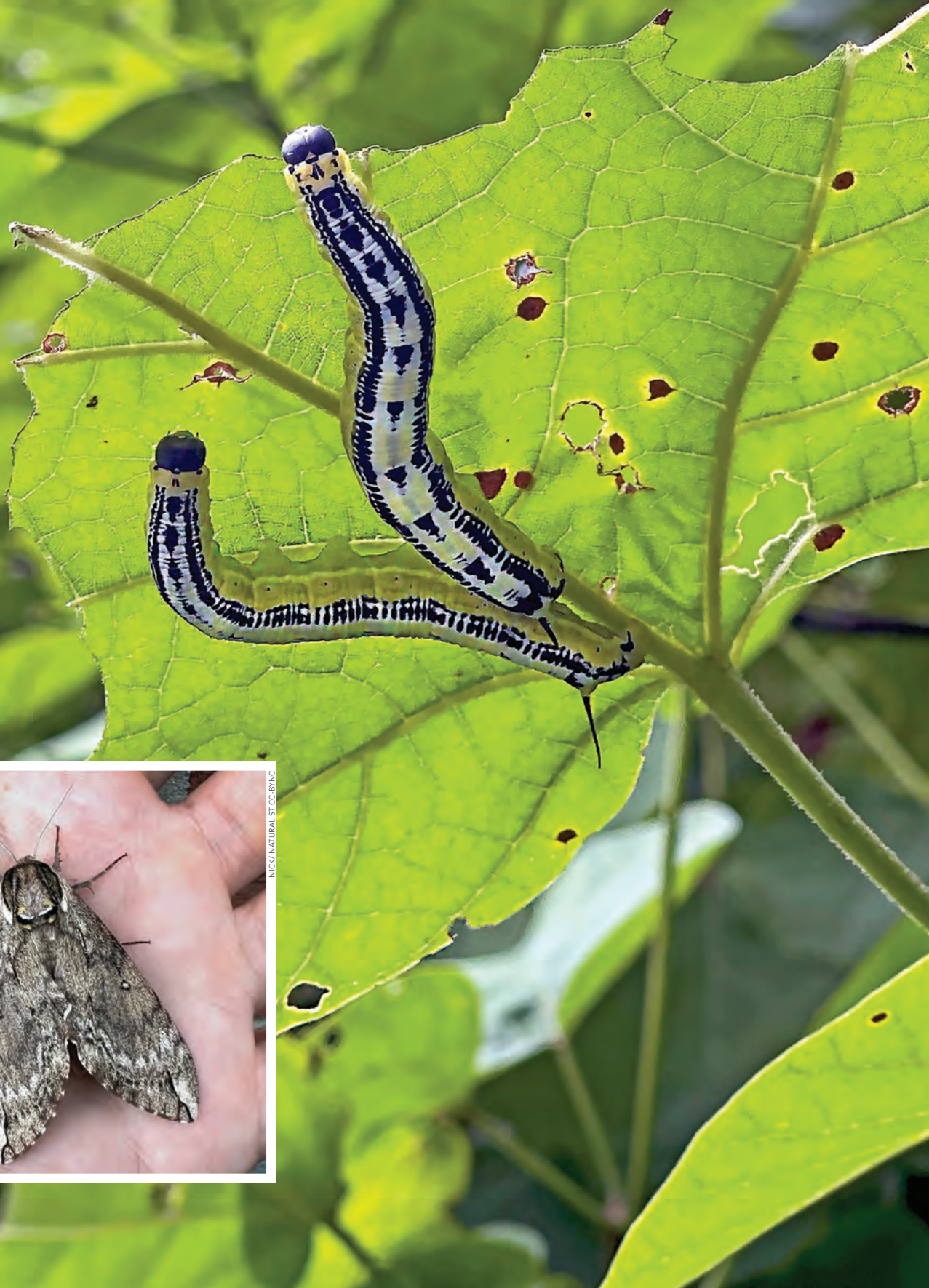
Catalpa caterpillars are most valuable as fish bait when they are larva eating away on catalpa trees. The caterpillars are yellow or green with a black stripe running down their entire length. They have suction cup-like feet, a shiny black head, and a black spine or horn on their back. The caterpillars can grow up to 3 inches long.

Oldtimers, and anyone they passed their knowledge to, will collect the worms as fish bait. Some will lay down a tarp or sheet and use a pole to hit the leaves and branches to knock the worms to the ground. Once on the sheet, the worms are easily collected into a bucket or container. Another method of collection is to just pull them off the leaves one by one.

Even though catalpa worms are only available in summer, catfish love them year-round dead or alive! To preserve a summer haul to use later, boil the worms and place them on a towel until dry. Put them in a sealable plastic bag with cornmeal to freeze.

Catalpa worms are known as "catfish candy" and "taffy worms," which is a clue for just how good they are as fish bait. ♡

Catalpa worms are known as "catfish candy" and "taffy worms," which is a clue for just how good they are as fish bait.



KEITH COOK/PROVIDED



Fishing is one of America's greatest pastimes. And with more than 100 lakes and about 1,300 square miles of water area, Oklahoma is a great place to wet a line. Cast your gaze inside this issue of Outdoor Oklahoma as we celebrate fishing with the 2024 Anglers' Guide.

Outdoor Oklahoma

