

Outdoor Oklahoma

MARCH / APRIL 2025 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR



2025 ANGLER'S GUIDE

**Fishing
Access?
Bank On It**

**Coonhounds
Bring Students'
Novel to Life**

**Public Gobbler
Harvest Hinges
On Right Choices**



A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



PANORAMAS



As I began writing about ODWC's Oklahoma Fishing in the Schools Program (OKFITS), I found myself constantly distracted by memories of how I grew up in the 1970s and '80s when, for a kid, going fishing was king. It was a huge part of growing up for myself and my buddies. Deer hunting wasn't so big in our culture. It was also before kids competed in year-round sports. Don't get me wrong; I got very involved with competitive sports as a coach and a parent. But back when I was a kid, fishing wasn't difficult and didn't require a lot of experience. It was simple. It only required a fishing rod and bait.

Bait could be most anything: worms, grasshoppers, chicken liver, hot dogs or even bacon. All of these things could be found around the house any time.

Many years later, a friend invited my son and I to go fishing with him. He was one of my best friends, and we had grown up together fishing ponds and lakes around Osage and Tulsa counties. He became a good bass tournament angler along with others that I grew up with. My son was around 12, and we hadn't fished together much due to my busy work schedule and his sports. That day, as I watched him fish and have such a great time, I truly regretted not taking him and his sisters fishing when they were younger.

I began my public school teaching and coaching career in 1994. I was a coach of football and wrestling (along with almost every other sport at some point). While teaching at Coweta Public Schools, I was allowed to start an outdoor education program in the junior high school. It was developed to introduce kids to outdoor activities. The class consisted of hunter education, fishing and archery, along with many types of hunting and outdoor activities. I was really shocked at how many 12-year-old kids had never picked up a fishing rod!

A few years later, the Wildlife Department started offering its outdoor education curriculum consisted of Explore Bowhunting, National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), and Oklahoma Fishing in the Schools Program (OKFITS). Outdoor education classes began to pop up in many schools across the state.

OKFITS began in 2011. Hundreds of schools have taken the program and expanded it. Thousands of students from elementary through high school have been introduced to fishing during this time.

I've been teaching outdoor education the past 20 years, initially teaching the students and now as a trainer of teachers in ODWC's education programs. I have done hundreds of fishing classes and clinics in that time. When I see someone catch their very first fish, whether they're 3 or 102, the reaction is still the same. I saw a 102-year-old lady catch her first fish ever, and it was pretty awesome. Such an easy and simple activity can bring such happiness!

But now what I'm seeing is a whole generation of people missing out on an awesome blessing that everyone should get to experience and enjoy. I thank all of the teachers and schools for passing down the love of both fishing and the great outdoors to the next generation. Remember, it is never too late or too early to enjoy fishing. If your school doesn't have OKFITS or other outdoor education programs that ODWC offers, please contact us and help us teach this generation about these time-honored traditions. 🍷

Shawn Gee

Shawn Gee, Communication and Education Specialist

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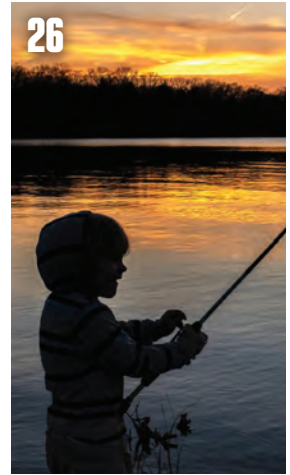
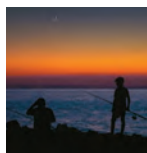


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ON THE COVER:

Springtime brings many anglers out of winter hibernation, and they can't get their lines wet soon enough! Those who don't have boats always have plenty of miles of shoreline, and these two

boys have found a great place on the bank for some twilight fishing. In this issue's 2025 Angler's Guide, we highlight how to enhance your bank fishing, and where you will now find better boat launching and dock fishing opportunities in Oklahoma. See Page 26.

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OKLAHOMA



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

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

OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA CHIEF EDITOR NAMED ODWC ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



Nels Rodefeld is the new assistant director of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Nels Rodefeld has been named assistant director of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Most recently chief of the Communication and Education Division, Rodefeld has been with the department for over 30 years, and he carries a wealth of institutional knowledge to his new role.

Throughout his tenure, he has worked closely with the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Oklahoma Legislature, the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation, and every division and section within the department.

He has held positions of information specialist, information supervisor, assistant chief, and chief of C&E Division, with additional duties as legislative liaison.

ODWC Director Wade Free said Rodefeld "has always been a next-level thinker and is passionate about our mission. Nels has been involved in many projects that span across the agency. He has also been an integral part of the legislative process for years, resulting in passage of important ODWC legislation. Nels is also one of the agencies longest tenured reserve officers with nearly 20 years of service."

Nels and his wife, Sarah, reside on their farm near Maud. He enjoys hunting and fishing in his spare time. ♡

WEB PORTAL LAUNCHES FOR MAGAZINE CUSTOMER SERVICE



Outdoor Oklahoma has a new magazine subscriber portal on the Internet! Check it out at sfsdata.com/subscriberServices/AccountStart.html?PUB=OK.

Subscribers can visit the webpage to do various things such as buy or renew subscriptions, give gift subscriptions, change their delivery address, look up their account number, and see how many more issues are left in their subscription.

This new customer service portal is also linked from the magazine's webpage at wildlifedepartment.com/outdoorok/magazine. This site provides various information for Outdoor Oklahoma readers, including a digital version of the previous magazine, a digital archive of previous issues, gift subscription postcards for printing and mailing, freelance submission guidelines, reader survey reports, and much more. ♡

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 73152-3465, or send e-mail to donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov.

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

I would be remiss if I failed to bring to your attention the commendable service of District 3 game warden **Mark Hannah**.

Having spent my life living in major cities, I am a recent transplant to McCurtain County. While there are many aspects I have love about living in the country, deer season isn't one of them.

Beginning two weeks before deer season opens, during, and trailing off well after the season closes, poachers shoot across our pastures. Recently, I crossed paths with three trespassers (a woman and two men, dressed in orange and carrying long guns) on our property. The audacity was breathtaking.

Hannah responded quickly, professionally, and more importantly effectively to my call: for the remainder of the hunting season the daily shootings stopped. Hannah patrolled our area so thoroughly he discovered and informed us of a new calf we didn't know we had. Additionally, he instructed me in personal safety.

If Hannah is an example of the men and women who serve under you, you can be proud.

Kelley Barnhart, *Valliant*



IT'S THE LAW:

Oklahoma's spring turkey hunting seasons will be here soon. Remember that each harvested turkey must be tagged immediately in the field with hunter's name, ODWC customer ID number, and date and time of harvest. The hunter must report the harvest via the online E-Check system (GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com) no later than 24 hours after leaving the hunt area. The seasonal limit is one tom turkey for each youth or adult hunter. Statewide season dates are April 12-13, 2025, for youth turkey, and April 16 to May 16, 2025, for spring turkey. 🦃



AARON GOODWIN/RPS 2019

Saddle up and get your photos submitted by April 15 for the 2025 Readers' Photo Showcase contest.

SNAP TO IT! TIME TO ENTER YOUR BEST OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Outdoor Oklahoma has always been a showcase for great photography. And the annual Readers' Photography Showcase feature is no exception!

This friendly contest is your chance to have your amazing work published and admired by thousands of readers. And if your photo is selected the "best of the best," it will likely grace the magazine's cover!

The entry period is open now through April 15, 2025. Go to www.tinyURL.com/EnterRPS and follow the instructions to enter your images.

Outdoor Oklahoma's July/August issue showcases photos of wildlife, landscapes, scenic and other outdoor imagery captured by sportsmen and wildlife enthusiasts from across the state. This issue is always among the most popular each year!

Each participant may submit up to three original digital images. Photos must be in sharp focus, and image resolution should be at least 300 dpi (dots per inch) for magazine printing.

So why not give us a shot — or your best three shots? Thanks for participating, and good luck! 🦃

2024 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

"THE TIME I SHOT A BIG BUCK"

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 big game hunt in a western state, 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 senior category female winner Kaleigh Baker, 16, from Weleetka High School.



By Kaleigh Baker

My grandpa lived in a small community outside of Henryetta, Okla. When I was 10 years old, he retired and purchased 80 acres on a mountainside near Weleetka. It was a beautiful property. It had fields flowing with tall, crisp grass, cedar trees along the newly built fences, and new ponds across the property. My grandfather loves being out in nature! He is nearly 80 years old and continues to maintain cattle, hunt, fish, and enjoy his days of retirement. (I suppose anyone who served in a war would want a place to escape car horns and loud individuals.)

When I turned 11, my brother, dad, grandpa, and I built a hunting cabin. It was small and cozy. My dad and brother spent the whole summer collecting pine and cedar trees to mill logs for building materials. I had the best place controlling the sawmill.

After we finished the cabin, we cleared hunting areas that we hand-selected for my siblings and I to hunt. I chose to place my stand through a green briar thicket with a large walnut tree overlooking a small creek running into one of the ponds. We worked very hard with my family to build a place and spend time together.

The cabin was complete, I dug out ponds for wildlife with my grandpa, and now I could focus on getting a bigger deer than my brother!

I woke up on Saturday morning to put out a corn feeder for all the mothers and yearlings to snack on their nightly adventures. In addition, I put out a motion camera near my deer feeder to

see what animals were enjoying all our hard work! You would not believe what images and animals I was capturing. I saw many yearlings, raccoons, a few opossums, and a couple of monster bucks. I was so excited.

A few weeks of impatiently waiting and it was my time to shine. It was season opening morning. I dressed warm, gathered my gun, and loaded up the ATV with my siblings. It was about 6 o'clock when I climbed up my walnut tree.

The smell of wet bark was soothing in the cold, brisk air. I played with the moss growing on the tree for a few hours. I was losing hope. I can be a little impatient at times. I was singing "Strawberry Wine: by Deana Carter in my head when I noticed a flicker of white along the creek bed. It was a doe and her yearlings! She took her time walking towards my feeder.

The doe occasionally looked behind her, so I prayed that it was my buck. It was my buck! I was very happy and surprised. Immediately I began to shake in disbelief. I swear the temperature dropped at least 10 degrees as soon as I saw him. I grabbed my .30-06 slowly and looked through my scope. There he was, a 12-point buck!

He strolled toward the other deer eating corn. He went through the green briars in my direction. As soon as he turned horizontally in perfect view, the deer feeder turned on, scaring them. I panicked. I knew it was time. I took a deep breath and squeezed the trigger. The gun roared as I took my shot, and my buck fell right where it stood. ♥



WELCOME TO THE TAILGATE!

Is the hunting good? You bet! Step up to **The Tailgate** and check out some great harvests during recent seasons 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:



Cooper Bell, white-tailed buck,
Custer County.



Montana Shaw, white-tailed doe, Carter County.



Ashlyn Trebbe, white-tailed buck,
Pottawatomie County.



Tate Simmons, white-tailed buck, Logan County.



Braxton Peel, ring-necked ducks,
Hughes County.



Sierrah and Clinton Cooper, white-tailed bucks,
Wagoner County.



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

WE WANT TO KNOW THE
OPINIONS OF OUR READERS!

Please scan the QR code to provide feedback
about Outdoor Oklahoma magazine.



GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

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



Game warden **Karlin Bailey**, based in Okmulgee County, was notified about two deer locked together by their antlers in Muskogee County. One of the bucks had already succumbed to its injuries.

The expired buck had a hook-shaped, broken antler, which brought the heads of both deer closer together and making an antler shot more risky. Bailey chose to shoot the base of the skull of the dead deer in hopes it would fracture and allow enough movement for the other deer to escape. A well-placed shot broke



the skull, and after some twisting, the live buck was able to free itself and keep its antlers.

Okmulgee Wildlife Management Area technician **Dalton DeShazer** assisted during the incident.

There are many methods and strategies that hunters use. Two nonresidents from Louisiana recently chose to use several wrong ones. They violated

hunting laws by choosing to shoot from a public roadway, hunt with the aid of a motorized vehicle, and unlawfully possess wildlife.

Special thanks go out to a witness who reported these offenses to game warden **Blake Cottrill**, based in Garfield County.

Citizens and other hunters are sometimes the only eyes we can rely on to help catch wildlife violators. If you

see something, say something! If you witness a crime, please notify your local game warden or make an anonymous call to Operation Game Thief at (800) 522-8039.



Game warden **Jerry Henry**, based in Sequoyah County, received a report from concerned citizens about anglers having over the limit on trout on the Lower Illinois River trout area. The citizens reported watching the two anglers bagging fish into plastic sacks and putting them in their pack. Game wardens arrived and observed two anglers matching the description. They found the individuals to be in possession of 20 trout, 14 more than their combined daily limit. Multiple citations were issued. Thanks to concerned citizens who made the call and helped the game wardens protect the state's fish and wildlife resources.

On Nov. 18, game warden **Tucker Clem**, based in Jefferson County, started investigating a nonresident suspect concerning a potentially illegally possessed deer. During an interview, the suspect admitted to the crimes and to hunting the previous days without appropriate licenses.

The suspect was issued citations for illegal possession of white-tailed deer, nonresident hunting without hunting license, nonresident hunting without archery license, and providing false information to the online E-Check system.

Game warden Lt. **Garret Harley**, based in Seminole County, received a call about a hunter illegally killing a deer. After investigating online E-Check details and licensing information, Harley and game warden **Trae Taylor**, based in Hughes County, interviewed the suspect. The game wardens learned the suspect had killed a deer with a muzzleloader outside of muzzleloader season, and the deer wasn't reported to E-Check.

During the interview, game wardens observed a recently killed turkey. The suspect was cited for illegal possession of the deer and turkey, failure to check, and taking game in closed season for the deer and turkey.

(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.



NEW DURABLE LICENSE CARD FEATURES BLACK BEAR

Whenever Oklahoma sportsmen and sportswomen buy a license, they 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 card features artwork of a black bear painted by local artist Shea Meyer. This card and the 2024 collectible card designs are available at GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com for \$6 (plus \$3 credit card processing fee).

The cards can carry up to nine licenses or privileges, which are encoded on the back side. The card can then be carried in 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 receives no general state tax revenues and 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 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, accomplished outdoorsman, conservation supporter, and educator at Stratford Schools.

"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 the newest collectible card, 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. ♡

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 2025

- 1** OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 1-2** Backwoods Hunting & Fishing Expo, State Fair Park, Oklahoma City.
- 2** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 3** Okla. Wildlife Conservation Commission meets, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/@Okwildlifedep](https://www.youtube.com/@Okwildlifedep).
Webinar: Turkey Hunting 101, 7 p.m., 4-week series by Oklahoma Hunters & Anglers. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- 5** Rack Madness free scoring event, 1 to 6 p.m., ODWC headquarters. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- 8** Crappie Fishing 101 Workshop by Oklahoma Hunters & Anglers, 9 a.m., Arcadia Conservation Education Area. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- 9** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 10** Webinar: Turkey Hunting 101, 7 p.m., 4-week series by OHA. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- 12** "Reel Talk Real Tips: Crappie Craze" online episode, noon-2 p.m., [YouTube.com/@okwildlifedep](https://www.youtube.com/@okwildlifedep).
- 16** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 23** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 24** Webinar: Turkey Hunting 101, 7 p.m., 4-week series by OHA. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- 30** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 31** Webinar: Turkey Hunting 101, 7 p.m., 4-week series by OHA. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation** event (date) in Tuttle (22). Info: www.rmef.org/events.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Wagoner (1); Enid (1); Stillwater (4); Norman (7); Poteau (13); Broken Arrow (28). Info: www.ducks.org/events.
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events (date) in Lawton (7); Idabel (8); Muskogee (13); Wagoner (15); Weatherford (29). Info: <https://your.nwtf.org/members/events>.
- **Quail Forever** events (date) in Blackwell (1); Yukon (27); Newcastle (28); . Info: www.quailforever.org.
- **Friends of NRA** event (date) in Ada (20). Info: www.friendsofnra.org/events.
- **Hunter Education Class** set in McLoud, March 29. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.

APRIL 2025

- 1** Controlled Hunts application period opens, GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com.
Oklahoma Waterfowl Stamp Design Contest registration opens, GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com (search "waterfowl" events).
 - 5** OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
 - 6** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 7** Okla. Wildlife Conservation Commission meets, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/@Okwildlifedep](https://www.youtube.com/@Okwildlifedep).
 - 9** "Reel Talk Real Tips: Bass Bonanza" online episode, noon-2 p.m., [YouTube.com/@okwildlifedep](https://www.youtube.com/@okwildlifedep).
 - 20** Easter.
"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 27** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - **National Wild Turkey Federation** events (date) in El Reno (4); Canton (11); Woodward (12); Glenpool (12); Tuttle (19). Info: <https://your.nwtf.org/members/events>.
 - **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Cushing (5); Bartlesville (8); Claremore (9). Info: www.ducks.org/events.
 - **Hunter Education Class** set in Checotah, April 5. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx.
- ** 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:



David Williams, rainbow trout, Dec. 12, 2024, Veterans Park Pond.



Hailey Schaefer, white crappie, Dec. 29, 2024, Oologah Lake.



Gage Owens, rainbow trout, Dec. 30, 2024, Medicine Creek Trout Area.



Brad Homer, hybrid striped bass, Jan. 2, 2025, Foss Lake.



Milton Cade, black bass, Dec. 5, 2024, Skiatook Lake.



Laken Snapp, paddlefish, Jan. 18, 2025, Kaw Lake.



A camper engages the ropes course at the 2022 Wildlife Youth Camp.



These girls along with a camp counselor show the results of their fishing trip at the 2022 Wildlife Youth Camp.

TEENS LEARN OUTDOOR SKILLS AT FREE WILDLIFE YOUTH CAMP

Know anyone age 14 to 16 who is interested in a career with the wildlife department? Share the word about this great opportunity.

A week full of fun outdoor activities, conservation education and camaraderie is in store for up to three dozen lucky teens selected to attend the annual Wildlife Youth Camp hosted by the Oklahoma State Game Wardens Association and supported by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Applications are now being accepted for this summer's once-in-a-lifetime event. **Deadline to apply is April 20.**

"The entire camp is conducted by game wardens, wildlife and fisheries professionals, and dedicated hunters and anglers," said game warden Lt. Dru Polk, youth camp coordinator. "If you are interested in hunting, fishing or a career with the Wildlife Department, then this camp is for you."

The camp will be June 15-20 at Goddard Youth Camp at Lake of the Arbuckles. Activities are supervised and include archery, wildlife identification, rifle/shotgun shooting, fishing, ropes course, self-defense, wildlife law enforcement scenarios, wildlife and fisheries management education, and deer/turkey/waterfowl law enforcement techniques.

And the five-day camp is all free for the youngsters!

Applicants must be Oklahoma residents who will be 14 to 16 years old as of June 15, 2025. Prospective campers must fill out an application form and write a 75-word essay describing why they want to attend the camp, why they should be selected, and what they expect to learn. Also, they must furnish a letter of recommendation from someone other than a family member, and a recent photograph showing the applicant participating in an outdoor-related event or activity.

The application form is online wildlifedepartment.com/education/youth-opp/wildlife-youth-camp. The page also includes additional information about the camp and photos from previous years. 



Campers get to learn about shotguns and clay target shooting at Wildlife Youth Camp.



Scan the QR code to apply online.



Campers practice archery skills during Wildlife Youth Camp in 2024.

WILD ABOUT COOKING

BUTTER PHEASANT

Oklahoma hunters reported good results while pheasant hunting this year. There is still plenty of time to harvest some birds in the northern areas of the state. Here's a recipe for those wanting to prepare this tasty gamebird in a different way.



INGREDIENTS

- 1-1/2 lbs. pheasant breast, cubed
- 2 medium onions, sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, smashed
- 2 inches ginger, roughly chopped
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. garam masala
- 1 tsp. turmeric
- 1 tsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. cayenne
- 1 tsp. fenugreek
- 1 Tbsp. curry powder
- 1 tsp. coriander powder
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 qt. crushed tomatoes
- 1/4 cup labneh, Greek yogurt, or sour cream
- 4 Tbsp. butter, divided

INSTRUCTIONS

- Season pheasant with salt and pepper, brown in large saute pan, about 2 minutes per side. Remove from pan and set aside.
- Saute onion, garlic, and ginger in 2 Tbsp. butter until fragrant and onion begins to turn translucent.
- Add tomatoes and all spices except cinnamon stick. Simmer about 10 minutes to allow flavors to meld, adding some stock or water if necessary. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly.
- Transfer sauce into a blender and puree. Add pheasant back to pan. Simmer until cooked through, about 5 minutes.
- Add labneh, Greek yogurt, or sour cream. Then add remaining butter.
- Add cinnamon stick. Simmer for a few minutes, adding water if necessary to bring sauce to desired consistency. If sauce is too thin, allow it to reduce by simmering longer.
- Serve and enjoy.

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

MEET THE CHEF

Wade Truong, a lifelong Virginian, self-taught chef and hunter, has been featured in The New York Times and Garden & Gun. His passion for cooking and sharing food is the foundation of his obsession with the outdoors and the resources it provides. He believes every meal should be "enjoyed and celebrated, meaningful and mindful."





Join Our Mission

THE OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation was formed in 2018 to encourage private support to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The Foundation's vision is to enable all outdoor enthusiasts to actively enjoy our state's wildlife and wild spaces.

The goal is to look for opportunities where the Foundation can partner with the ODWC to leverage resources, doing more together than could ever be done alone.

The Wildlife Department receives no general state tax revenue to pay for management of Oklahoma's fish, wildlife and habitat. Your donation to OWCF will benefit Oklahoma's natural resources and generations of Oklahomans to come!

Learn more at OKWildlifeFoundation.org

LUCKY DRAW PUTS HUNTER IN SUBLIME SPOT

IAN BURROW/COURTESY



My first elk, taken with a Remington 700, manufactured in 1972, chambered in .270 Winchester.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A Kansas resident, Ian Burrow, provided this account of his final day in the field after his name was drawn for a coveted hunt in ODWC's Controlled Hunts program.

By Ian Burrow

On the last day of my experience, just as the sun breached the draw dividing Cedar Mountain and Mt. Marcy to my east, I had finally found what I had endured and yearned to discover with my own eyes. Across from the eponymous Elk Pass, they began to appear, bounding down from Geronimo Ridge and up to a spur that split the difference between us.

A pair of ears quickly grew into a head, from a head into shoulders, until, at last, the stately figure of an elk presented itself. And then another, and then another, and so forth until, before me, nearly a half-mile as the crow flies, a herd of cow elk had materialized.

Their movement was something shy of a trot, but there was no indication that the herd intended to stop anytime soon. I would need to move with a deliberate vigor if I had any hope of positioning myself within shooting range.

Rocks slid under my boots, the weight of a week's worth of provisions and essential equipment bouncing on my shoulders, as I sprinted down to the pass and up the next mountain; carefully choosing my route to ensure my presence would remain undetected.

As I climbed, just beneath a vantage point that would place me facing due east, I dropped my pack midstep and unslung my rifle. One hand reached for my range finder, the other hand employing its thumb to confirm the magnification on the rifle's scope was at its low-



IAN BURROW/COURTESY

Miles from the designated parking area, I would spend an entire day quartering the elk and packing it out one piece at a time.



IAN BURROW/COURTESY

This is the view a few feet from where my elk lay; no sign of civilization as far as the eye can see, 360 degrees around.

"CHRISTMAS DINNER MENU CONFIRMED, ELK STEAK."

est setting to ensure a quick acquisition.

A pause — a cycle of breathing, a gut check and a pep talk all at once — and then a slow, deliberate approach, cloaking myself behind a man-size boulder until I was close enough to peer over and down onto the spur where I had, just minutes before, last seen my quarry.

Shortly thereafter, as a tear escaped my eye, I reached for my phone to type out a message, the first I'd sent to my family after a week of radio silence. "Christmas dinner menu confirmed, elk steak."

This year, I drew a cow elk tag for the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in the controlled hunts program of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. This place is one of two (that I know of) places in the world where someone who is not an enrolled member of a Native American tribe can walk among free-ranging bison and hunt elk.

As I write this weeks later, I'm still struggling to compose the words that give justice to the soul of that landscape. The opportunity to explore and hunt in such a place is just shy of being a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I will cherish memory of this hunt, of this place, and of this elk until my final breath. 🍖



IAN BURROW/COURTESY

Bison grazed, indifferent to my presence, as I scoured the 60,000-acre refuge for a cow elk.

APPLY FOR CONTROLLED HUNTS STARTING IN APRIL

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's popular controlled hunts program will open for online applications April 1, and hunters wanting to enhance their selection chances will have several options this year.

The annual controlled hunts program allows hunters to enter randomized drawings for ODWC-sanctioned hunts including once-in-a-lifetime elk and antelope hunts, highly sought-after buck hunts, and a range of other quality deer and turkey hunting opportunities. Controlled hunts are held on ODWC or other government-owned or -managed lands where unrestricted hunting would pose safety concerns or where overharvest might occur otherwise.

A list of available hunts and locations will be provided online at GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com. Account holders can apply for hunts in various categories for a one-time entry fee of \$10 for residents and \$50 for nonresidents. The application period will close May 20.

Some features that applicants can add when they apply are PointGuard, Preference Point Only, One Additional Preference Point, and Additional Hunt Choices.



PointGuard protects a winning hunter's preference points and eligibility for future drawings in case the hunter cannot attend the hunt he or she wins. PointGuard is like an insurance policy that can be claimed anytime before the day of the winner's hunt. This protection costs an additional \$10 for residents and \$50 for nonresidents when applying.

Preference Point Only (PPO) is for hunters who choose not to enter in a category drawing but still want to obtain an additional preference point for future drawings in that category. This option is only available during the application period. To



choose the PPO option, the hunter will apply as usual for the standard fee, but the hunter will now have an option to select PPO in each category. Hunters may purchase only one point per category per year. PPO is designed for hunters who already know when they apply that they will not be able to attend hunts during certain times of the year if selected for those hunts.

Applicants can **add one preference point** in each hunt category at a cost of \$10 for residents and \$50 for nonresidents for each point. These points will carry forward if the hunter isn't drawn.

Applicants can **add extra hunt choices** beyond the standard limit for \$3 each, with no limit.

Log on to www.wildlifedepartment.com/ControlledHunts for complete application instructions, including tips on enhancing chances of being selected. Last year, more than 5,100 controlled hunt permits were available, and a similar number of hunts will be drawn for this year. 🍷

LAST YEAR, MORE THAN 5,100 CONTROLLED HUNT PERMITS WERE AVAILABLE, AND A SIMILAR NUMBER OF HUNTS WILL BE DRAWN FOR THIS YEAR.

COONHOUND HERITAGE HITS HOME FOR SCHOOLKIDS THANKS TO DOG DEMO

BY DON P. BROWN, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

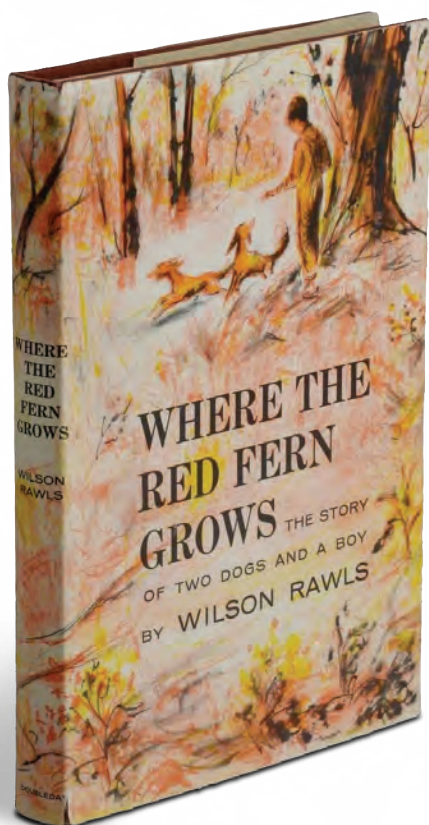


Hunting raccoons with dogs is a time-honored tradition in the Ozark foothills of eastern Oklahoma. It's the topic of the novel "Where the Red Fern Grows" by Oklahoman Wilson Rawls, which has become a reading rite of passage for grade-schoolers across America.

The 1961 children's book tells the story of a boy in rural eastern Oklahoma who buys and trains two redbone coonhounds for hunting raccoons.

In some ways, the real-life story of Dwayne Daugherty resembles the story about Billy Colman in Rawls' book. Daugherty, now 54, was born and raised in Muskogee. "We grew up hearing coon dogs out the window every night."

In the late 1970s, a 9-year-old Daugherty decided he wanted to learn how to trap. He went to Brother Defoor, an older man in his church who made a living by trapping and fishing, and asked to learn. When Defoor would return from running a trap line, he'd call Daugherty over and teach him about skinning and cleaning — "We didn't throw anything away!"



Trapping went by the wayside for Daugherty as he became an adult. But about 15 years ago, he decided that his son should learn about trapping and hunting furbearers. They spent many Christmas breaks trapping and selling furs.

Daugherty also grew up hunting quail and deer. And his passion for outdoor sports led him to become certified with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to teach hunter education classes. About five years ago, a teacher from Muskogee's Irving Elementary School happened to be attending one of Daugherty's hunter education classes, and she made a remark that her students were currently reading "Where the Red Fern Grows."

And that got Daugherty to thinking.

"These kids don't know what coon dogs are like," he said. And the idea hit him: Why not bring a simulation of coon dog hunting to the school for



Dwayne Daugherty



Heath Weston carries Diamond.



Students get a chance to feel some furs.



Daugherty tells students about trapping and hunting raccoons with dogs.



Area coon hunters helping with the school program are Dru Darden with Gunner; James Brown with Diamond; and Heath Weston with Thunder the bloodhound.



Diamond, a red tick, tries to climb the tree, urged on by Gunner, a blue tick.

the students to experience firsthand? Add to that a teaching session about trapping and Oklahoma furbearers and how it all fits together for wildlife conservation, and Daugherty has effectively brought the novel to life. "The main thing is to get these kids to learn what it's like."

With the help of local raccoon hunters Dru Darden, James Brown and Heath Weston — and their coonhounds — Daugherty once again offered his presentation at Irving school this year.

At first, the students learn about trapping and hunting with dogs during a short lecture period. Daugherty brings some of the gear used by raccoon hunters, along with some furs of various animals that are passed around for some hands-on education.

Then the kids assemble outside, where the dog demo happens. Daugherty has set up the scene beforehand. To the far left is a tree where a live raccoon in a cage is hanging about 8 feet up the tree trunk. At the far right are the hounds and their handlers.

Then it's "Release the hounds!"

The canine demonstrators on this day were a bloodhound named Thunder, a red tick named Diamond, and a blue tick named Gunner — all experienced coon dogs.

Hearing the baying of the hounds and seeing them "tree" the raccoon in real life helps the students vicariously experience the hunting action described in "Where the Red Fern Grows."

It's all come full circle for Daugherty.

"It was Mrs. Mary James, my fourth-grade teacher in Muskogee in 1978; we read the book," he recalled. "She grew up in Tahlequah, and she told us about the times when the book was written. I love it because it was all about hunters and hunting coons.

" 'Where the Red Fern Grows' is a great book. And I remember there wasn't a dry eye in the room at the end of the book, when we got the news of what happened to the dogs." 🐾



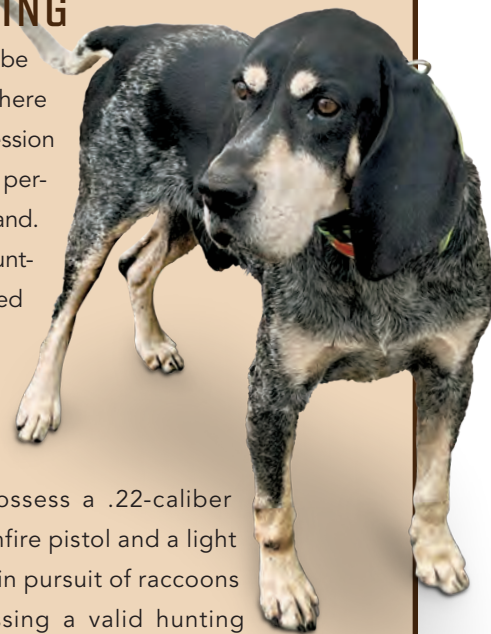
The object of the all the chasing and baying.

RACCOON HUNTING

In Oklahoma, raccoons may be harvested year-round, and there is no daily bag limit or possession limit. Pursuit with hounds is permitted at all times on private land. Regulations vary on public hunting areas; some areas are closed to pursuit with hounds.

Raccoons may be taken with archery gear, traps or firearms.

At night, hunters may possess a .22-caliber rimfire rifle or .22-caliber rimfire pistol and a light carried on the person while in pursuit of raccoons with hounds, while possessing a valid hunting license, unless exempt. 🐾



TAKING TURKEY REQUIRES MAKING **RIGHT DECISIONS**

BY DANIEL MILLIGAN



GINKY MOORE/NATURALIST CC-BY-NC

The sound of a gobbling turkey is unique and exciting.

My first turkey hunt was around 2007. The exact date has been lost to time. I had never heard a turkey gobble in the wild. The experience was addictive.

A friend and hunting mentor went out with me on a few occasions that first season. We heard birds every time we went but never could make a harvest happen. Finally, on the last day that I had available to hunt for the season, my buddy called three jakes down a fence line and over a rise, and I harvested my first turkey.

Super fun. Super delicious. And then I was ready for next season.

The next season was as good as anticipated. I killed a couple of birds, one being a solo spot-and-stalk on another jake. The following season was even better: two mature birds; both exhilarating hunts.

Before another season rolled around, I moved. It turns out, as is often the case, I didn't realize what I had. Locations to hunt were hard to come by at my new place. Bird numbers began to decline, life got busy, and turkey hunting took a backseat.

In the 11 years I lived at that location, I hunted turkey only a few seasons and took just two birds.

My wife and I recently relocated and bought a house on 10 acres in the country. I was sitting on my front porch in late February reading when I heard a recognizable putt. I looked up

to see 22 turkeys march right in front of me!

I saw the flock on a couple of other occasions, and captured a few pictures of them on my trail camera. They dispersed as opening day of season approached, but the day before the season opened, I had a longbeard hammering on the back side of my place. Expectations were high!

Opening day was windy. I hunted morning and evening but never heard a bird. The next morning, I settled in early near the decoy I left out from the previous evening. When I could clearly see the decoy I scratched out a single soft yelp on a slate call.

A gobble blasted into the morning stillness.

The bird was roosted not 50 feet away. Too close! He must have slipped in shortly after I had slipped out the previous evening. I gave him one more small yelp about five minutes later. He answered, and then I shut up and waited.

He flew down pretty early and started looking for the hen. Unfortunately, his nearness caused him to fly down a little behind me to my left. I tried to shift around to make the shot. **Wrong decision No. 1:** I got busted.

I forced a shot and missed as the tom retreated. **Wrong decision No. 2.**

After work the following evening, the tom busted me as I walked in. **Wrong decision No. 3.**

The woods went silent. My turkey was gone.

But as I said, the experience is addictive! I wanted a bird, and I hatched (no pun intended) a plan to find one.

**I tried to shift
around to
make the shot.**

**WRONG
DECISION
NO. 1**

I got busted.



The turkey flock on Milligan's property just before the hunting season opener.

DANIEL MILLIGAN

Fifteen months earlier, while duck hunting, I had seen a flock of turkeys on a Wildlife Management Area near the river. The spot required a short kayak ride and a 1.5-mile hike to reach, but it was good turkey habitat and difficult to access. Maybe a bird would be there.

I was off work the following Friday. I woke up at 4:30, made some coffee, drove to the WMA, floated the kayak, hiked the distance, and was set up next to the field before shooting light. I waited on the sun, hoping to hear a gobble. I didn't.

About 20 minutes after sunrise I spotted a hen with two jakes on the far end of the field through my binoculars. The birds were over 500 yards away. Almost simultaneously,

I considered
taking the
longer shot but
decided to wait.

RIGHT DECISION NO. 1

a thunderstorm arrived (the one the weather man said wasn't going to happen). I used the storm to sneak through the timber and cut the distance to set up within 50 yards.

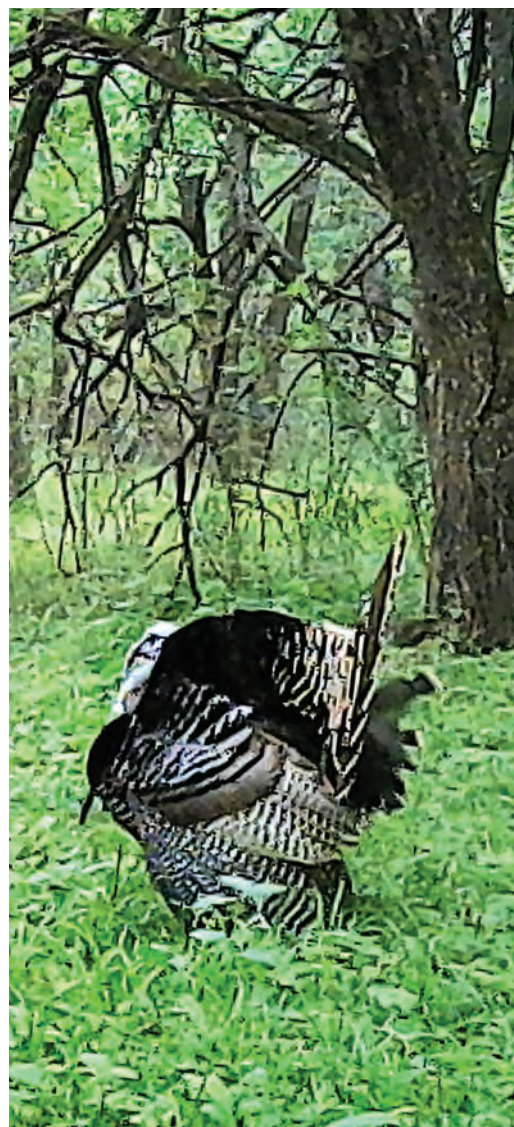
I located the birds in the middle of the field, waiting out the storm. It rained hard for probably 30 minutes, and I was soaked to the bone.

As the weather eased, I gave out a few yelps with a mouth call, the slate call being worthless due to the rain. Both jakes answered. All three birds began to work my way. The jakes would answer when I called but were hesitant to break away from the hen. They crossed just out of range.

I considered taking the longer shot but decided to wait. **Right decision No. 1.**



Deciding when and when not to call can often determine the outcome of a turkey hunt.



Milligan's game camera caught this hefty tom in the area he planned to hunt.

I pulled back into the timber, retraced my previous path, located the birds, anticipated their direction, and set up. **Right decision No. 2.**

The birds were about a 100 yards out. Both jakes would come to alert when I yelped, but neither gobbled. I called sparingly, two or three times in a 30-minute span. **Right decision No. 3.**

They slowly worked my way. As they approached, a large cedar tree standing at the field edge blocked my view, and my shot. The hen finally appeared in my shooting lane at 10 yards. Once again, almost too close! She stood and stared into the darkened timber for a couple of minutes, but then moved on. I knew the jake was only a couple of steps behind.

The jake entered into the lane. I settled the bead on the bird's head and pulled the trigger.

Click!

I was confused, but the light rain kept the turkeys unaware. I slowly ejected the shell from

my Mossberg 535 pump and slid the reserve shell into the chamber, took aim and fired.

Success! I had my bird. It wasn't a big bird, but it was a super fun experience! (I later confirmed that the first shell had a dented primer.)

I love hunting public land white-tailed deer with my bow, but I had never harvested a public land turkey. It was gratifying. I took a picture, hiked out, floated the creek, and drove home.

A couple of nights later, the Milligan family enjoyed fried turkey breast. We'll have it again soon, and we plan on using the leg meat in tortilla soup. The cape dried in the barn for a while and is now hanging in the den.

The hunts are super fun, and the birds an incredible resource, one I hope is on the rebound. I'm looking forward to this spring turkey season. Maybe then I'll make two or three right decisions and come home with a longbeard. We shall see. ♡

SUCCESS!

I had my bird.

It wasn't a big bird, but it was a super fun experience!



Success! Daniel Milligan with his turkey harvest on a nearby Wildlife Management Area.



Fried chunks of wild turkey breast: the Milligan family's reward from a successful public land hunt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Milligan lives in the Muskogee area with his family. He has pastored Oklahoma churches the past 19 years and currently pastors Southeast Baptist Church in Muskogee. He didn't grow up hunting but has been hooked since friends in his congregation invited him to go bowhunting many years ago. He dabbles in various hunting pursuits, but bowhunting remains his favorite. ♡



Conservation

Fun Outdoors!

We know them as weeds. But some people find dandelions healthy and delicious! In spring, you can make dandelion tea from the young tender leaves. A delicate, slightly sweet herbal tea can be made with dandelion flowers. But there are some precautions to take. Learn all about it cupandleaf.com/blog/how-to-make-dandelion-tea.

Hunting Tip

Do you know about yelps, clucks, purrs and gobbles? They are all sounds made by turkeys, and replicated by hunters using turkey calls. Calling turkeys during a hunt is somewhat of an art and requires practice and knowledge. Whether you choose a box call, a slate call (pot) or a mouth call (diaphragm), take the time to learn how to use the call you have, when to use it during the hunt, and what sounds are most effective in various situations. Do these things, and you will up your odds of going home with a tom or a jake.

Fishing Tip

Every good angler should know how to properly tie something onto his or her line. It only takes a little time and practice to become proficient at knot-tying. A good basic fishing knot is called the improved clinch knot. It can be used to attach hooks, lures and swivels to your line. And it's easy and fun to do! Learn all kinds of fishing knots at wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/resources/learn-fish/how-tie-every-fishing-knot.

for Kids!

Word Search: Oklahoma Lake Names

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

Find and circle these names of lakes found in Oklahoma.

American Horse
Eufaula
Skiatook
Watonga

Broken Bow
Keystone
Texoma
Waurika

Elmer Thomas
Oologah
Tom Steed
Yahola

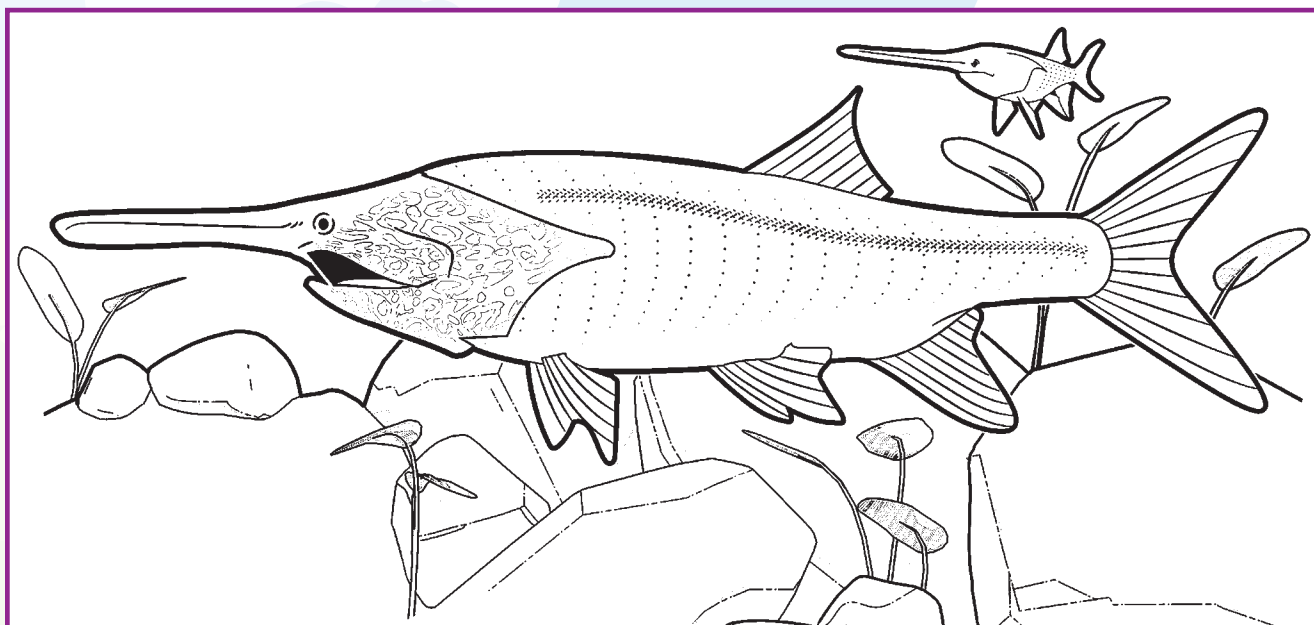


COOL FACTS About American Paddlefish:

- It is among Oklahoma's largest fish, with the state record at 164 pounds.
- The American paddlefish feeds on tiny microscopic insects by swimming with its mouth gaping wide open.
- A free paddlefish permit is required to fish for them in Oklahoma.
- American paddlefish are well-adapted to living in rivers and lakes.
- The species was swimming around when dinosaurs roamed the world in the late Cretaceous Period about 65 million years ago.
- In Oklahoma, they are found mainly in the Grand, Neosho, Arkansas, and Red River systems.
- In Oklahoma, an angler may harvest one paddlefish daily, and a total of two paddlefish per year.
- American paddlefish can live up to 50 years.
- They are found mainly in the central and eastern U.S. from Montana to Louisiana.
- Paddlefish have a long oar-like or spoonlike bill called a rostrum.
- They have smooth scaleless skin and broad tails that resemble a shark tail.
- Snagging is the method of angling most commonly used to catch American paddlefish.



Color a Critter: American Paddlefish



ANGLER'S GUIDE 2025

Access Allowed!

NEW DOCKS AND RAMPS GIVE ANGLERS, BOATERS MORE OPTIONS

BY JACOB TISON, FISHING R3 COORDINATOR



Nate Copeland



Increasing the number of access points at local lakes and rivers is a very important goal for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Leading the charge toward meeting that goal is Nate Copeland, who was hired two years ago into the new position of fishing and boating access coordinator for ODWC. One of his main jobs is to leverage federal grant funding to provide more boating and fishing access for outdoor recreationists.

Copeland inherited three incomplete boating access projects when he started, all of which have been completed and are open to the public. He's also finalizing plans for several boating and fishing access projects with local municipalities across the state.

If you have been to Stroud Lake recently, you will notice a new T-shaped courtesy dock along with an expanded parking lot, Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant access, and a resurfaced road to get to the dock.

He's coordinated the completion of a similar project at Lake Ellsworth.

"Both projects would not have been possible without a joint effort between the cooperators,

Lake Burtischi has received an upgraded boat ramp and courtesy dock (lower left) along with its fishing jetties that allow bank anglers to walk out to deeper water.

ODWC Fisheries regional staff, and the ODWC federal aid and accounting teams."

Exciting projects are on tap for 2025. The City of Bixby and ODWC are partnering to renovate facilities at Lake Bixhoma. This project has been in the works for five years and will renovate/develop two boating access areas along the north shoreline.

The first part of the project will focus on the boat ramp area and will include a new boat ramp, parking area with ADA-designated parking spaces, walkways, restrooms, courtesy dock, and a complete overhaul of the access road and stormwater drainage leading to the boat ramp.

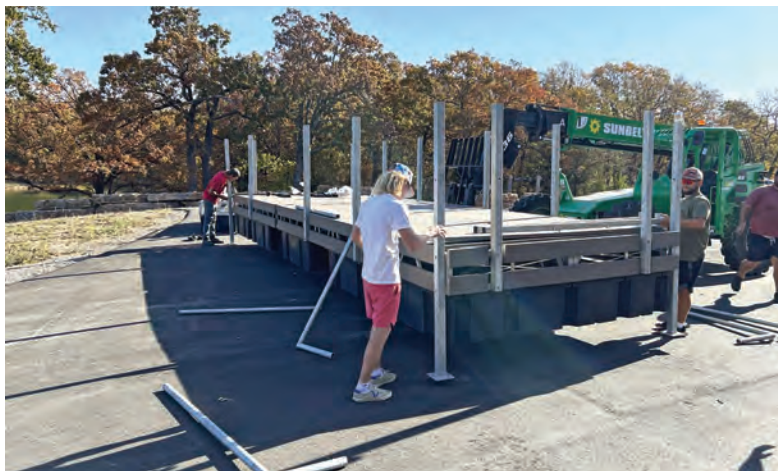
The second part will overhaul the section of access road west of the boat ramp and will include a new parking area and walkway leading to a new paddle-craft launch dock.

To learn more about fishing access, go to wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/wheretofish.

We visited with Copeland for a short question-and-answer session:



DARRIN HILL/ODWC



NATHAN COPELAND/ODWC

Marine Development Inc. contractors assemble part of a new courtesy dock that will be placed at Stroud Lake.



NATHAN COPELAND/ODWC

Installation of a courtesy dock taking place at Collier's Landing at Lake Ellsworth.

Q: Can you give a quick explanation of the process to put in an access point?

A: Funding for boating and fishing access projects is made possible through the federal Sport Fish Restoration Program and the Boating Access sub-program. What is great about these grant programs is they allow cooperators to be reimbursed up to 75% on eligible project components such as boat ramps, courtesy/fishing docks, access roads, parking areas and restrooms.

ODWC acts as a pass-through agency and cooperates with local cities and counties, along with other state and federal agencies, to secure grant funding for boating and fishing access projects across the state.

For example, ODWC works with the cooperator to finalize a project's scope and budget, complete the required compliance documents, and submit the proposed project to the Office of Conservation Investment of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for reviews and approval. When approved, ODWC works with the cooperator to ensure the project is



JARED NILL/CITY OF STROUD

An aerial view of improvements at Stroud Lake.

completed within the grant's timeline and audits the cooperator's expenses for the project. ODWC also enters an agreement with the cooperator to ensure the project remains open to the public and in good condition for the useful life of the project.

Q: How do your projects impact ODWC's constituents?

A: The boating and fishing access projects we work on have a huge impact on our constituents.

Creating facilities where people can easily launch their boat or access fish habitat is critical to enhancing their overall experience while in the outdoors, which directly aligns with part of ODWC's mission statement to grow our community of hunters and anglers.

Q: Do you have a favorite project? Why?

A: It is hard to pick a favorite project, as they are all unique in their own way. But, the project on Lake Bixhoma is currently at the top of my list because of the impact it will have on the lake and the surrounding communities. This project has involved seemingly countless people from the City of Bixby, the Planning Design Group, ODWC, and the Office of Conservation Investment to make it a reality.

Q: What made you want to work for ODWC?

A: Over the past decade, I have developed an awareness and passion for public access to the outdoors. Along that journey, I have found fulfillment in helping others find new places to enjoy their favorite outdoor activities or rediscover old places they forgot about. When this position opened, a former colleague at the time let me know about the opportunity and encouraged me to apply. I jumped at the opportunity to combine my passions for boating, fishing and public access into a role where I could create a positive impact across Oklahoma.



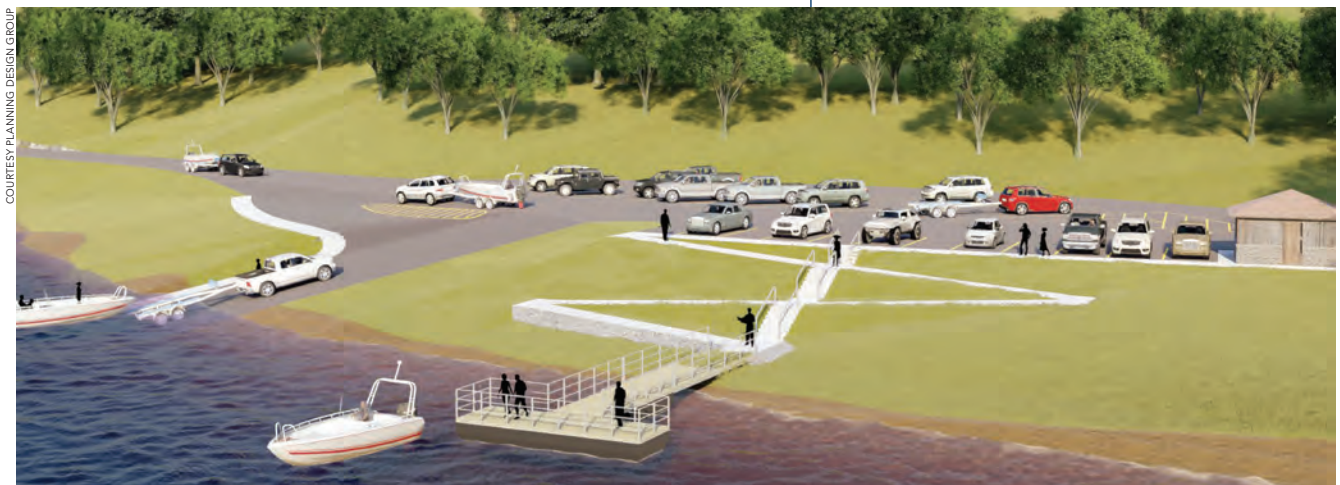
Improvements at the parking area, walkways, courtesy dock and boat ramp at Lexington WMA's Dahlgren Lake.



ODWC is working with the City of Yukon to install a larger fishing dock in Mulvey's Pond.

CLOSE TO HOME FISHING AREAS PROMOTE ANGLING ACCESS LOCALLY

The Close to Home Fishing Program was created as a partnership between ODWC and different municipalities across the state to provide urban and nearby angling opportunities. Find opportunities to




This image shows planned boating and fishing access improvements at Lake Bixhoma.

help us manage these local waterbodies and share the opportunity for others.

There are 46 ponds or small lakes open to the public statewide, offering quality fishing opportunities to anglers of all skill levels. Agreements with multiple municipalities make all of this possible. Each pond is intensely managed and receives extra attention when it comes to fish stocking, harvest, special events, angler access, and water quality. These waters provide anglers with the opportunity to catch fish without having to drive long distances to any of Oklahoma's large lakes. CTHF waters also pair quite well with those looking for bank fishing opportunities.

There are four projects in the works to improve and renovate fishing access at ODWC's Close to Home Fishing areas. These projects will provide local anglers even better opportunities to enjoy all of the fishing opportunities that these fishing areas offer.

Be on the lookout for events being held this spring and summer at Close to Home Fishing areas!

To learn more, go to wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/regs/close-home-fishing. 



NATHAN COPELAND/ODWC

Boating and fishing access grant funds allowed renovations at Fort Cobb Reservoir.

BOATING AND FISHING ACCESS PROJECTS 2013-'25

Completed Boating Access Projects (2013–2024)

- 1 Lake Ellsworth
- 2 Liberty Lake
- 3 American Horse Lake
- 4 Atoka Reservoir
- 5 Lake Louis Burtschi
- 6 Stroud Lake
- 7 Eufaula Lake
- 8 Lake Texoma
- 9 Okemah Lake
- 10 Pauls Valley Lake
- 11 Elk City Reservoir
- 12 Dripping Springs Lake
- 13 Fort Cobb Reservoir
- 14 Okmulgee Lake
- 15 Lee Lake
- 16 Grand Lake
- 17 Eagle Lake

Current Boating Projects

- 18 Lake Jap Beaver
- 19 Bixhoma Lake
- 20 Watonga Lake

Current Fishing Access Projects

- 21 Medford Outdoor Classroom

Proposed Boating Access Projects

- 22 Lake Carl Albert
- 23 Pawnee Lake
- 24 Purcell Lake
- 25 R.C. Longmire Lake
- 26 Elmer Thomas Lake

Proposed Fishing Access Projects

- 27 Mulvey Pond
- 28 Veterans Park Pond (Newcastle)
- 29 Eagle Lake
- 30 Ten Acre Lake

CATCHING FISH WITHOUT A BOAT?

Bank On It!

BY JACOB TISON,
COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST,
FISHING R3 COORDINATOR

Oklahoma is blessed with many beautiful lakes that offer anglers plenty of opportunities for fishing from the bank. A wide variety of fish can be caught statewide, and bank fishing is a great way to get started without the need for a boat or expensive equipment.

Fishing from the bank is also a great way to spend the day relaxing and enjoying the outdoors. Whether you want to hang out by a campfire listening to your favorite music or you'd rather be actively casting for walleye, you can find some of the best bank fishing right here in the Sooner State.

BANK FISHING'S APPEAL

Bank fishing is one of the most accessible forms of angling. You don't need a boat or fancy gear. All you need is a fishing rod, some bait, and a good spot along the shoreline. For those new to fishing or those without access to a boat, bank fishing opens up a world of possibilities. Oklahoma's lakes and rivers, including iconic locations such as Lake Texoma, Lake Murray and the Arkansas River, offer plenty of shoreline where anglers can easily set up and start fishing.

The great thing about bank fishing in Oklahoma is the variety of fish species you can catch. From the fan-favorite largemouth bass to the elusive walleye, and from catfish to crappie, the state's waters are loaded with different types of fish. With a little patience and the right techniques, anglers can have a relaxing and bountiful day, all from the comfort of the shore. When bank fishing, it is best to look for points, flats and structure around where you are fishing. The features to look for are often based on what species you are targeting.

BEST TIMES TO FISH IN OKLAHOMA

The best times to fish in Oklahoma can vary depending on the season and the species you're targeting. Here are a few general guidelines.

The spring and fall months are typically the best times for bank fishing in Oklahoma. During these times, the water temperature is more consistent, and fish are more active. Spring is a great time for catching bass as they move into shallow water to spawn. Fall brings cooler water temperatures, prompting fish to feed before winter hits.

For many species, early morning and late evening are the best times to fish. These are the cooler parts of the day when fish are more likely to be feeding near the shore. If you are fishing in a popular spot, getting there at dawn or staying until dusk can help you avoid the crowd and increase your chances of success.

While summer temperatures can make being outdoors a bit more challenging, it is still possible to enjoy bank fishing. Fish tend to move to deeper, cooler water during the hot months, so it's important to fish in areas where the water stays cooler, such as near submerged structures or shaded areas. Night fishing can also produce good bites during summer.

WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR WHEN FISHING FROM SHORE

From [TakeMeFishing.org](#)

Shoreline structures like docks, logs, stumps, brush and rocks provide shelter, shade and protection for fish. All of these create prime fishing

spots along the bank. You can find fish in shallow or deep water, in open water or near natural or man-made structures

Get to know lake structure. Points, inlets, holes, sunken islands, dams, submerged objects (man-made or natural), and reeds and weeds are all considered structure. You should always fish in and around structure. It's a simple formula.

- Structure creates shallows.
- Shallows create plant growth.
- Plant growth attracts baitfish.
- Baitfish attract game fish, the fish you want to catch.

Cliffs and Steep Shore Banks

A sheer cliff or bank that goes straight down into deep water provides no structure and rarely attracts fish. On the other hand, a cliff or bank that has an underwater shelf or slopes gradually toward deeper water will attract fish. Look for crumbled-off rocks at the underwater base of sharp cliffs. Deep-water fish may be attracted to these rocks for food or spawning.

Rocks

Some of the best fishing places are rocky areas. They provide fish with shelter (cover), food and a possible place to mate. Remember, always fish structure. If the rocks are in deeper water or on the edge of deeper water, they provide an even better place for lake and pond fishing. Just be careful not to snag your bait.

Points With Break Lines

A point extends from the shoreline and slopes gradually down and into deeper water. It is a good



MELISSA SADLER/PROVIDED

place to fish. But a point with a quick drop-off or one that doesn't extend into deeper water isn't a good fishing place.

The sloping-out formation of a point creates a break line, which helps draw fish from deeper water to shallow water in search of food. When bank fishing, try to cast out toward the tip of the point, and fish the edges of the point that curve back into the shoreline.

Drift Lines and Wind

Have you ever noticed lines on the water during a breezy day? The breeze is actually pushing surface water around the lake which, in turn, pushes surface food around. Look for the drift lines and you'll likely find fish.

Stronger winds can push bait fish closer to shore, bringing game fish closer to shore to feed. Try fishing from the bank when a stiff breeze is blowing into your face, as this is the shoreline toward which the wind will be pushing the fish.

Weed Beds

Weed beds provide food and shelter for baitfish, which attract game fish. Look for weed beds close to shore that taper off into deeper water.

Islands and Sand Bars

These sunken or partially sunken bodies of land will attract baitfish and game fish if they create a break line where the land slopes gradually down into deeper water. Water currents run around

islands, too, carrying small plant food and aquatic animals that float on the surface. That can also attract baitfish and game fish.

Sunken Objects

Trees, branches, logs, stumps and rocks are all considered to be structure. They all provide shelter, shade and protection for fish. So it's a good place to hook a fish.

Lily Pads

The insects and other aquatic critters that live on and around lily pads always attract smaller baitfish; and bait fish always attract bigger fish. Huge patches of lily pads can also create shade, which also attracts fish. Cast into the edges and openings. Otherwise, you will likely get hung up.

Gradual Shores

Like any structure that tilts gradually down and into deeper water, a gradual-sloping shoreline can provide plant food, attract fish and create a path out of and back into deeper water. However, a very gradual slope that creates a large expanse of shallow water won't attract fish.

Piers, Docks and Pilings

Wherever there's structure in the water, there's food, shelter and fish. Weeds, barnacles and other food sources can attach to anything. Docks and piers provide shelter from the sun and a nice resting spot for both big and small fish.

Coves: Opposite of Points

Small coves or inlets that cut into the shore are some of the best fishing places. If the water in the cove is shallow, you've got another break line, and another great place to catch fish.

Smaller fish will patrol a cove for plant food and baitfish, and game fish may arrive early in the morning or late at night.

Shoreline Shallows

Water along the shore often provides a lot of structure and food. So it attracts fish. Baitfish come in for the plant food. Panfish, such as crappie and sunfish, come in for the baitfish. Early in the morning or late at night, game fish will swim into the shallows to sneak up on both the baitfish and the panfish.

Inlets and Outlets

Lakes are normally fed by a river or a stream of some sort. So they have inlets and outlets for the



DON P. BROWN/OWG

water. Wherever water is incoming or outgoing, there's going to be a lot of food and maybe a lot of fish.

Ripples, Currents, Swirls and Sprays

Call it what you will, but these movements in the water might be caused by a fish. It might be baitfish feeding. It might be baitfish trying to jump out of the water to escape game fish. Or, it might be bubbles and rings from a big fish that just went down to eat a minnow. Cast quickly and you might get a bite. ♡



DON P. BROWN/ODWC

WHO CARES ABOUT BANK FISHING ACCESS? "WEEDOO!"

Bank fishing access at ODWC's Close to Home Fishing sites is a priority. It's certainly no fun to arrive at a pond or lake to fish and there are no cleared areas on the bank from which to fish, or the water near the shore is choked with aquatic plants.

So the Fisheries Division added a specialized workboat to its fleet in late 2023.

"Nothing Cleans Waterways Better Than Weedoo!"

That's the catchy slogan of the South Florida company called Weedoo that creates these boats that look like a floating forklift, with the front lift of the vehicle being able to pull up weeds and algae from the edges of ponds and other bodies of water.

Fisheries Technician Shelby Jeter, based at the Oklahoma Fisheries Research Lab in Norman, has logged the most time in the operator's seat.

"It takes a little bit to learn the mechanics, but it is so fun to use," she said.

The Weedoo has a bucket with tines on the front, which is floated underneath water plants and algae and pushed to the shore, where the bucketful of vegetation is lifted and dropped on dry land. This allows anglers to more easily access the edges of the water, and removal of the weeds and algae also helps keep the fish in the water healthy and thriving.



WEEDOOBOATS.COM

The workboat also has a skimmer bucket to remove other types of weeds, a side cutter to trim off cattails, and a root rake to dig out cattail roots. All the plants removed from the water are dropped on the shore to be removed or left there to dry and be mowed over.

Jeter said fisheries management decisions inform how the workboat is used. Usually some aquatic vegetation is left along areas of the shoreline to provide hatching and hiding cover for fish. Another great benefit is that it reduces or eliminates the use of chemical treatments to remove excessive vegetation.

For now, the Weedoo is mainly used to improve fishing access at the 40-plus CTHF sites across the state. For a list of those sites, go to wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/regs/close-home-fishing. ♡

— Don P. Brown, managing editor

PUBLIC FISHING AREAS & ODWC FISHERIES OFFICES



The Sooner State offers plenty of opportunities for fishing from border to border. This map depicts the locations of popular fishing spots, listed in alphabetical order, as well as ODWC fisheries offices. Many other places to fish can be found in Oklahoma but are not shown here, such as "Close to Home" fishing waters that exist in some of the state's urban areas (see page 22). The lake names in **blue type** are Wildlife Department fishing areas. The region the area is located in the state can be found in parentheses.

ODWC FISHERIES OFFICES

DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS

P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, 73152
1801 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, 73105
(405) 521-3721

Fisheries Division Chief — Ken Cunningham
Fisheries Division Assistant Chief — Richard Snow

JENKS OFFICE

300 Aquarium Drive, Jenks, 74037-9998
(918) 299-2334
(Adjacent to the Oklahoma Aquarium)

PORTER OFFICE

9097 N. 34th St. W., Porter, 74454-2743
(918) 683-1031
(On U.S. 69, 1.5 miles north of Muskogee Turnpike)

MIAMI OFFICE

61091 E. 120 Road, Miami, 74354
(918) 542-9422
(Four miles north of Twin Bridges State Park)

BYRON STATE FISH HATCHERY

71082 Jeerson Road, Burlington, 73722-4625
(580) 977-6396
(Two miles north, 1 mile west of S.H. 38 & 11)

LAWTON OFFICE & J.A. MANNING STATE FISH HATCHERY

18795 S.H. 49, Lawton, 73507-6015
(580) 529-2795
(West of I-44 on S.H. 49 in Medicine Park)

OKLAHOMA FISHERY RESEARCH LABORATORY

500 Constellation, Norman, 73072-7900
(405) 325-7288

HOLDENVILLE STATE FISH HATCHERY

3733 S.H. 48, Holdenville, 74848-6009
(405) 379-5408
(Below Holdenville Dam)

CADDO OFFICE & DURANT STATE FISH HATCHERY

2021 Caddo Hwy., Caddo, 74729-3807
(580) 924-4087 ; (580) 924-4085
(Six miles north of Durant)

HIGGINS OFFICE

6733 SW S.H. 1, Wilburton, 74578-7634
(918) 297-0150
(Call for hours of operation)

PUBLIC FISHING AREAS

SOUTHWEST—●

1. Elk City
2. Crowder
3. Vanderwork
4. Fort Cobb
5. Chickasha
6. Doc Hollis
7. Altus-Lugert
8. Burtschi
9. Hall
10. Tom Steed
11. Elmer Thomas
12. Lawtonka
13. Ellsworth
14. Taylor
15. Frederick
16. Humphreys

17. Clear Creek
18. Fuqua
19. Duncan
20. Waurika
21. Comanche
22. Mountain Lake
23. Jean Neustadt
24. Jap Beaver
25. Healdton
26. Scott King
27. Ardmore City

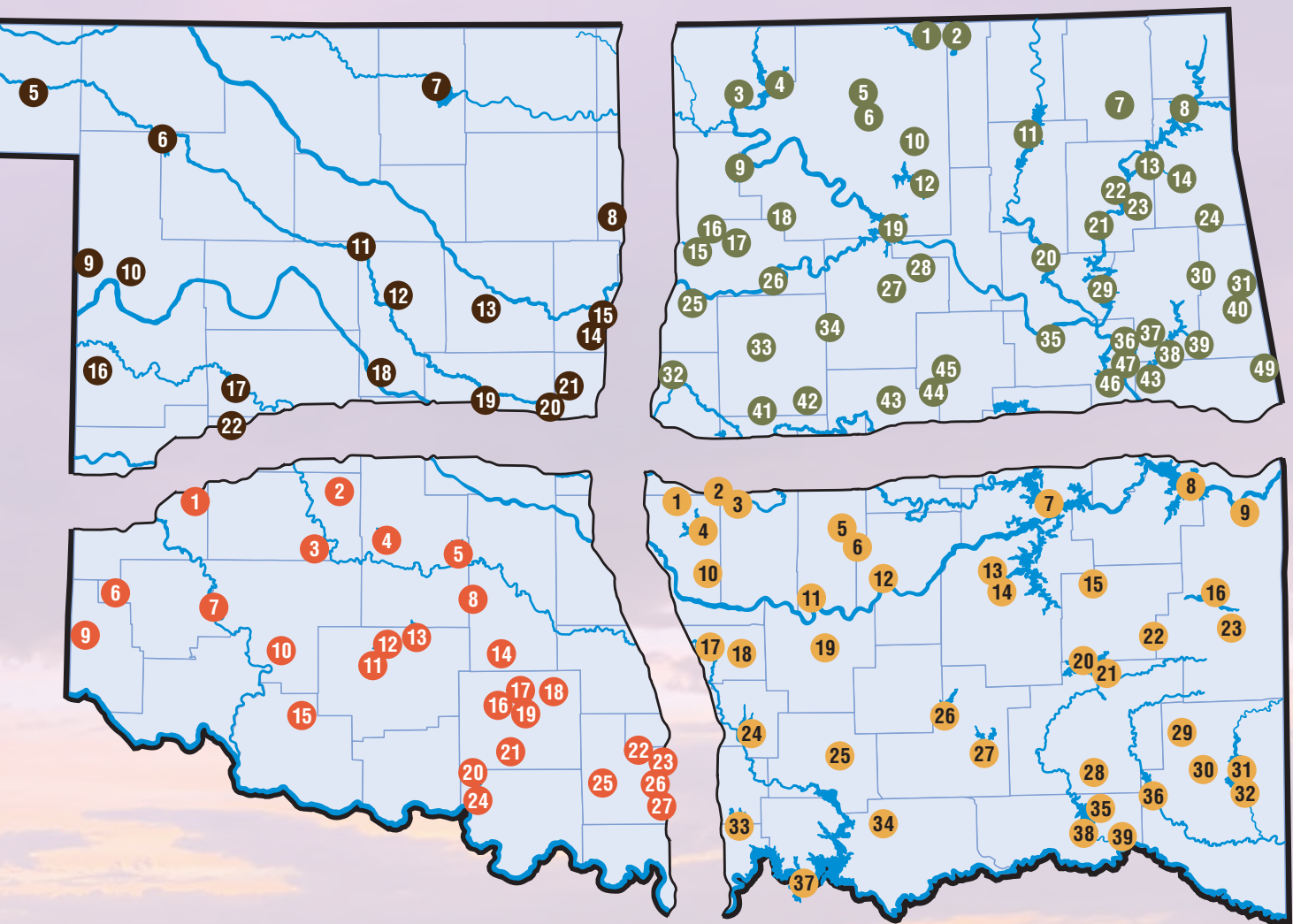
NORTHWEST—●

1. Carl Etling
2. Sunset
3. Optima
4. Beaver River WMA
5. Evans Chambers

6. Fort Supply
7. Great Salt Plains
8. Perry
9. Ellis County WMA
10. Vincent
11. Canton
12. Watonga
13. Elmer
14. Liberty
15. Guthrie
16. Skipout
17. Foss
18. American Horse
19. El Reno
20. Overholser
21. Hefner
22. Clinton

SOUTHEAST—●

1. Stanley Draper
2. Wes Watkins
3. Shawnee Twin 1 & 2
4. Thunderbird
5. Sportsman
6. Wewoka
7. Eufaula
8. Robert S. Kerr
9. W.D. Mayo
10. Dahlgren
11. Konawa
12. Holdenville
13. McAlester
14. Talawanda 1 & 2
15. Robbers Cave State Park
16. Wister
17. Pauls Valley



CHECK OUT THE OKLAHOMA FISHING TRAIL

The Oklahoma Fishing Trail features the best of the state's fishing. Six loops cover the whole state; each is organized by lake and by species such as bass, crappie and catfish. Oklahoma has more shoreline miles than the East and Gulf coasts combined. Attractions along the way make any trip unforgettable! Oklahoma's a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts! For more, visit FishinOK.com.



- 18. Longmire
- 19. Wintersmith Park
- 20. Sardis
- 21. Nanih Waiya
- 22. Carl Albert
- 23. Cedar Lake
- 24. Lake of the Arbuckles
- 25. Blue River PF & HA
- 26. Atoka
- 27. McGee Creek
- 28. Ozzie Cobb
- 29. Honobia & Three Rivers WMAs
- 30. Glover River
- 31. Broken Bow
- 32. Lower Mountain Fork River
- 33. Murray
- 34. Durant
- 35. Schooler
- 36. Pine Creek

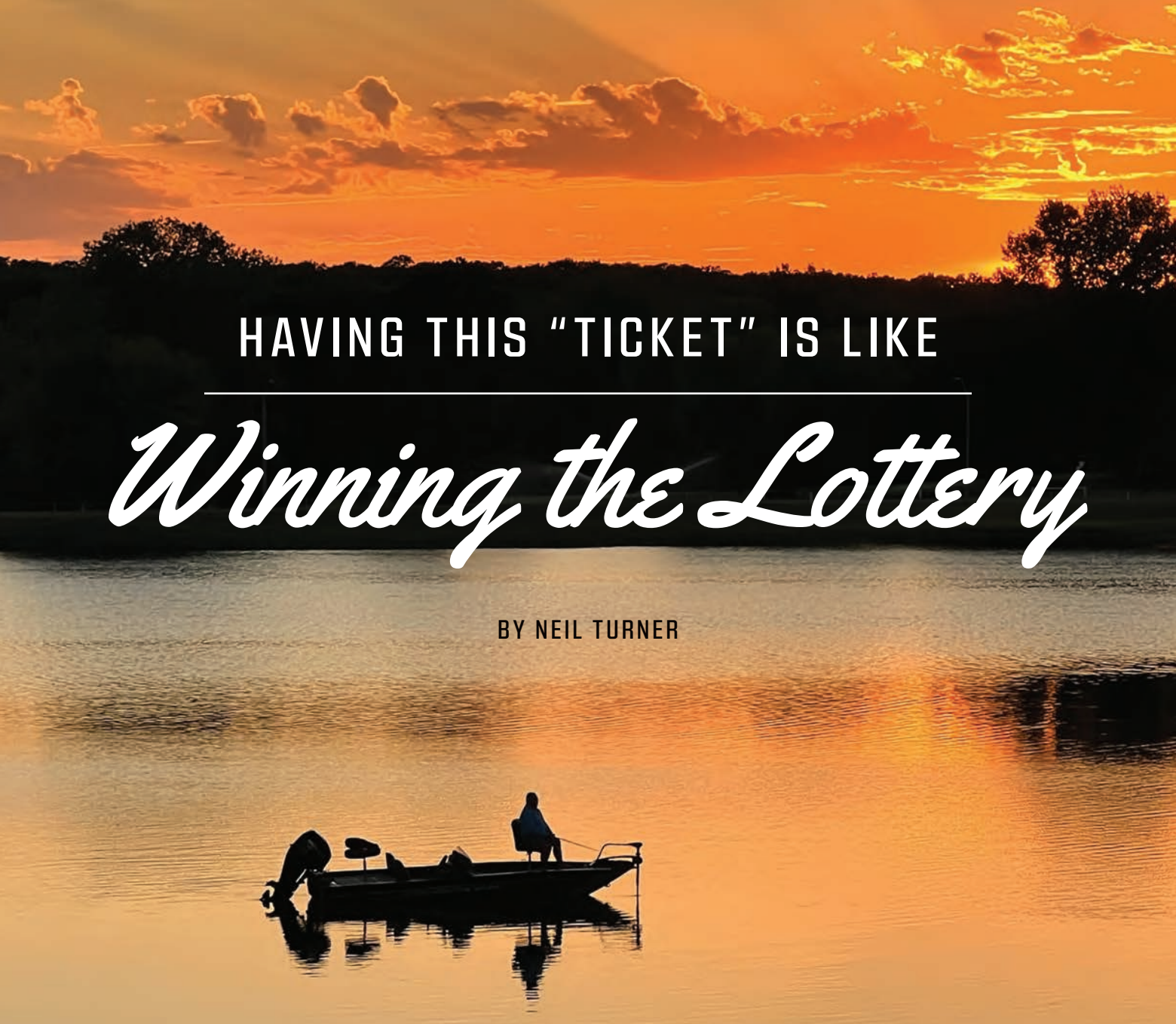
- 37. Texoma
- 38. Hugo
- 39. Raymond Gary

NORTHEAST—●

- 1. Hulah
- 2. Copan
- 3. Ponca
- 4. Kaw
- 5. Bluestem
- 6. Pawhuska
- 7. Vinita / Bull
- 8. Grand
- 9. Sooner
- 10. Birch
- 11. Oologah
- 12. Skiatook
- 13. Spavinaw
- 14. Eucha

- 15. Carl Blackwell
- 16. McMurtry
- 17. Boomer
- 18. Lone Chimney
- 19. Keystone
- 20. Newt Graham
- 21. Low Water
- 22. Hudson
- 23. Chimney Rock/ W.R. Holway
- 24. Flint Creek
- 25. Langston
- 26. Cushing
- 27. Heyburn
- 28. Sahoma
- 29. Fort Gibson
- 30. Barren Fork Creek —
Thomas A. Bamberger Sr. WMA
- 31. Barren Fork WMA
- 32. Arcadia

- 33. Bell Cow
- 34. Stroud
- 35. Taft
- 36. Camp Gruber (CGTC)
- 37. Cherokee GMA
- 38. Tenkiller
- 39. Cookson WMA
- 40. Adair State Park
- 41. Meeker
- 42. Prague
- 43. Okemah
- 44. Dripping Springs
- 45. Okmulgee
- 46. Webbers Falls
- 47. Greenleaf
- 48. Lower Illinois River PF &
HA - Simp and Helen Watts
Management Unit
- 49. Lee Creek



HAVING THIS "TICKET" IS LIKE *Winning the Lottery*

BY NEIL TURNER

Every once in a while, I play the lottery. It's the same routine each time. I buy a \$2 quick pick, go home and start looking with anticipation at Oklahoma ranches for sale.

I can spend hours looking at land listings online. I think I could be happy running cattle anywhere, but there are many other priorities in picking the right fantasy ranch purchase. Things that I am sure the cattle will appreciate, too.

There needs to be some good fishing spots. Preferably it will have ponds and a river. I award huge bonus points if it backs up to a lake. Of course, I'm going to get that water stocked with plenty of fish.

I love a good open prairie, but some woods are a must. And I'm not much of a farmer, but some of the land needs to be arable. I need to be able to grow

some food crops for the wildlife.

Of course, I'll need to hire some help to grow those crops. And I don't know what crops to grow, but I will have a plan for that, too.

I'm going to hire a wildlife biologist. He or she will manage the crops but also do population counts and other habitat management, like taking out cedar trees, prescribed burns, vegetation management, and probably a hundred other things I don't know anything about.

I'll also give the wildlife biologist full control over hunting access with a priority on maintaining healthy wildlife populations. This person will also have to make sure people are safe and abiding by the rules. And I don't have much hunting experience, so he or she will need to teach me some things.

I've thought about all those details a lot, but now



BECKY BUSCH/PROVIDED

that I see it all written down, I may need a wildlife management team.

And of course, accountants and support staff. So maybe a general manager, too. Whoever it takes, so I can just show up when I want and use the place within the expert guidelines.

Now keep in mind, depending on how big the jackpot is, there will likely be more than one location. Oklahoma has a lot of geographical diversity, and I want options of places to go. So everything we talked about, there will need to be multiples of some things and a travel budget for others.

I think about this so much, I usually don't check my numbers until months after the drawing. That allows me to prolong my fantasy for even longer.

So given all the thought I have put into this, you can

imagine my surprise when I discovered I have already won the lottery, and the winning ticket wasn't a lottery ticket at all.

It was my state fishing license.

My fishing license gives me access to 1.4 million acres of wildlife management areas (WMAs) managed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. There are also ODWC-owned fishing lakes and many other municipal and federal reservoirs I can use to wet a line.

No, I can't graze cattle on any of that land. But everything else in my lottery daydream is included. The wildlife experts, the food plots, the fish stocking, the support staff, the land management — all of the people needed to take care of it all are included.

And WMAs are scattered across the state, so I can explore all types of habitats.

I also really appreciate that access to all this land and water will get handed down to my kids and grandkids. I don't even have to worry about estate taxes taking it away from them.

Speaking of taxes, what's most impressive of all is that ODWC is funded by primarily by user fees and not taxpayer money. So the users are the ones that foot the bill. But in reality, everyone benefits because the benefits of a healthy and diverse wildlife habitat don't stop at the property fence line.

And yes, I do have to share this land and these lakes with my fellow Oklahomans. But by and large, Okies are some of the finest people on this planet. Of course, there are some people who don't play nice, but in my experience, those are the exceptions and not the rule.

That's a heck of a value for a \$31 annual fishing license or \$53 annual combo fishing and hunting license. And the odds of winning are a smooth 100%.

I'll still buy a quick pick every now and again. If by some miracle I win, my cows will have the swankiest digs around. But I'm going to daydream less about the other parts and spend more time appreciating the public lands I already have.

My thanks to ODWC. ♡

(Neil Turner lives with his family in Edmond and has embraced fishing and the outdoors since moving to Oklahoma in 2011.)





When Fish Fly!

PHOTOGRAPHER CAPTURES JUMPING
BASS OF WICHITA MOUNTAINS

The black bass (which includes the largemouth, spotted and smallmouth bass) is found in almost every pond, river, and lake in Oklahoma. Likewise, it would be hard to find a body of water that doesn't have at least one species of dragonfly near it or living in it. Any fisherman who has spent time trying to catch bass in Oklahoma's waters has seen the predator/pray relationship between bass and dragonfly. But not all bodies of water are favored by dragonflies. The preferred body of water for the dragonfly probably has to do with survival of their nymphs, or offspring. Maybe a future biologist will discover why some bodies of water attract dragonflies trying to lay eggs while others seem to be undesirable; for whatever reason, dragonflies do have their favored waters.

Some places that dragonflies desire are the lakes and ponds of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Oklahoma. There are 13 manmade lakes on the refuge and at least 10 to 15 small ponds. All of these waters have large populations of bass and dragonflies, but the dragonfly pairs that engage in creating the next generation seem to really prefer only a few of the smaller ponds.

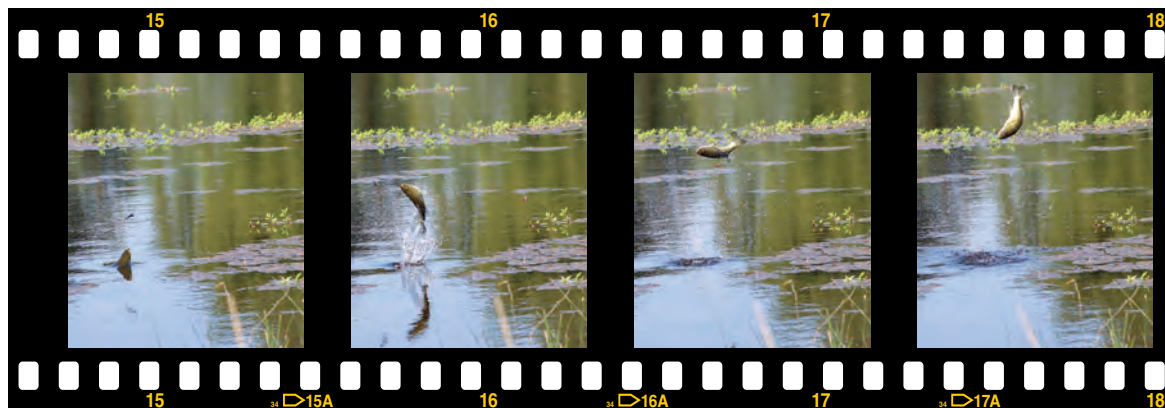
I stumbled upon one of these dragonfly hatcheries in summer 1990. The Black Saddlebag dragonfly pairs were all over a small farm pond created before the refuge was established in 1901. I had just started to photograph wildlife on the refuge and had very poor equipment. Nonetheless, I sat on the small dam of that pond many times during summer and did my best.

At the end of the summer, I had 20 slides that I hoped were good enough to be published in a magazine. I sent them to Bass Masters Magazine, and two of my images were published in the December 1991 issue.

Unfortunately, the cost of slide film exceeded the payback, so I had to stop. I returned to photographing this unique predator/pray relationship in summer 2005 after I acquired my first digital camera, the Canon 10D.

Over the past 20 years, I have taken thousands of photos of bass trying to catch pairs of dragonflies in mid-

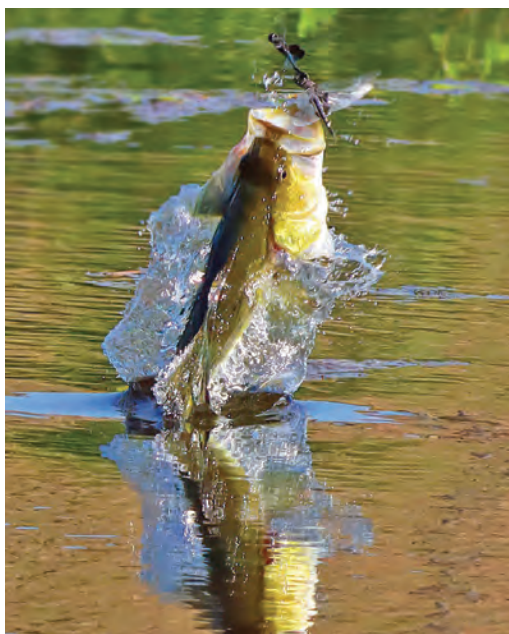
STORY AND
PHOTOS
BY ALBERT
LAVALLEE



air. Most often, the bass target only pairs of egg-laying dragonflies. Many species do not pair together to lay eggs, and the bass mostly ignore singles.

From my experience, the most sought-after dragonfly pairs by hungry bass in the ponds and lakes of the refuge are:

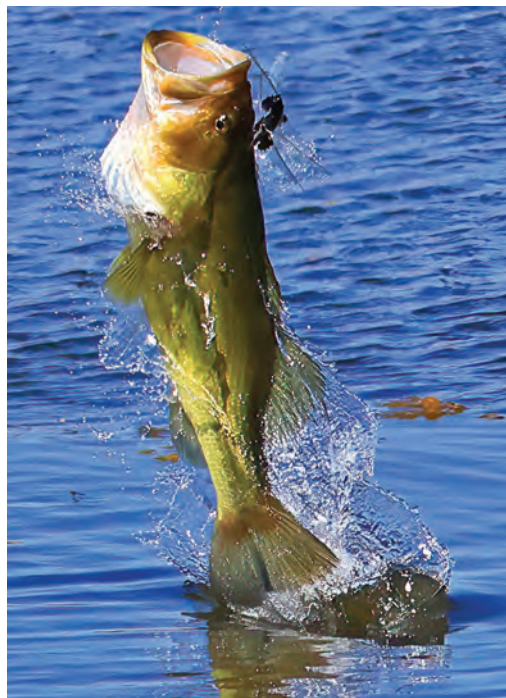
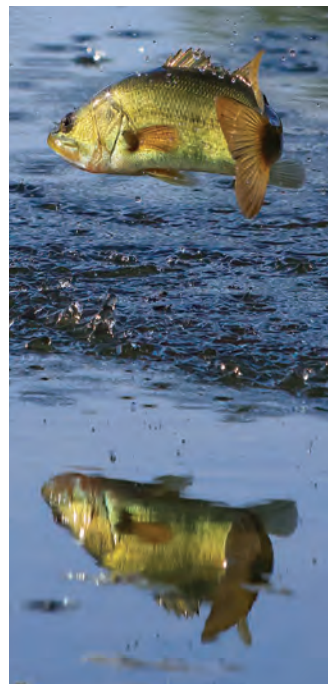
- Black saddlebag dragonfly pairs, and a color variation which is red. They both appear in spring and are the first to be eaten by the bass.
- Green darter dragonflies are the largest on the refuge but are not the most numerous. However, the green darter is by far the most desirable (probably because of their size) to the bass, which will chase them across the pond to get them.
- Autumn meadowhawk dragonflies are prevalent in late September and all of October. These dragonflies are really the only ones left to eat, and the bass take full advantage of the pairing's unusual egg-laying behavior. The dragonflies seem to be totally unaware of the danger that swims beneath them. Unlike



the green darter and the saddlebag dragonflies that do seem to understand that laying an egg can be fatal, the autumn meadowhawks hover over the water in the same spot to lay egg after egg until something eats them. Most often that something is a bass, but I have photos of frogs and sunfish also eating the autumn meadowhawks.

For those interested in technical information: I almost always use manual focus because dragonfly pairs are just too small and too fast for auto focus. I use a tripod because after hours of trying to capture a bass jump, my arms get very tired. I shoot my camera in aperture priority because I need as much depth of field as possible. You never know which way a bass will come from, and many times the bass jumps out of my focus.

I have a newer mirrorless camera that has a very fast shutter speed. But any fast shutter speed camera will do fine, so always set your drive to high. Here is a typical set-up on my DSLR: ISO 640, Av 7.1, Tv 1/2500 sec. You will also need a very fast card (and a large one). I use an Extreme Pro 256. Some days, I will shoot several thousand frames and manage get a few keepers. While this pursuit is very challenging, those few clear and sharp photos make all the time and effort worth it. ♡





Bowfishing

AS RESEARCH

TOURNEY EXPERIMENT YIELDS SCIENTIFIC INSIGHTS

BY JENA DONNELL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

An ancient skill was the focus of a modern science experiment, as researchers recently teamed with bowfishing anglers for a unique bowfishing tournament and learning opportunity at Shell Lake near Sand Springs in northeastern Oklahoma. As part of a joint effort between the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Oklahoma Fish Stickers organization, a simulated bowfishing tournament was held last August that yielded insights into the sport, its targeted fish, and how the two groups can maintain both the long-lived fishery and the specialized pursuit of fish.

"We're seizing any opportunity we can to learn more," said Jason Schooley, a senior fisheries biologist with the Wildlife Department. "This tournament gives us a unique opportunity to describe the population-level impacts of bowfishing at Shell Lake, but the work complements other ongoing efforts, including a multiyear genetics project."

BOWFISHING BASICS

A combination of archery and fishing, bowfishing typically involves a hunting bow that has been modified to include a reel with fishing line attached to an arrow.

People have long caught fish using a bow and arrow, with evidence from archaeological sites, and in early written accounts, reports and illustrations. The sport has since become more accessible with the invention of the compound bow in the 1960s and availability of customized boats with raised decks and lighting systems for night fishing. Bowfishing is



now thought to be one of the fastest-growing segments of archery in the United States.

Today, bows and crossbows can be used to take nongame fish in Oklahoma. Arrows used for bowfishing must have one point, two or more barbs, and be attached to the bow by a line for retrieving fish.

Participants gather before the start of a simulated bowfishing tournament at Shell Lake.

THE SHELL LAKE EXPERIMENT

To study the potential impacts of bowfishing on nongame fish, ODWC biologists first coordinated with the City of Sand Springs to turn Shell Lake, a source of drinking water for the city, into a temporary study site. The 573-acre reservoir, normal-



The City of Sand Springs operates Shell Lake as a drinking water source, and bowfishing is normally not permitted there.

ly closed to both bowfishing and nighttime use, is large enough to mimic a tournament setting but small enough to limit several outside variables.

The city issued a special permit and agreed to open the lake to accommodate the nighttime bowfishing study.



The weigh-in began at 1 a.m.

Biologists visited in late June and early July to study the fish populations. They used an electrofishing boat to momentarily stun and capture the lake's native nongame species including smallmouth buffalo, spotted gar, river carpsucker, and freshwater drum.

"There are no standardized methods for electrofishing these species, so we were modifying techniques on the fly," Schooley said. "Many of the fish could feel the electrical field from a distance and would zip past. We learned to herd them into the field and essentially ambush the fish to catch them."

Despite the early struggles in surveying Shell Lake's fishes, the team's catch rate improved each session. The survey ended once more than 900 fish, mostly native nongame species, were caught. A microchip, similar to those used to identify pets, was injected into each of the study's gar and buffalo species before they were returned to the water, allowing biologists to estimate the total number of fish in the lake, and later estimate the percentage of fish taken.

PIT tags (or passive integrated transponders) are often used in fish and wildlife studies to identify individual animals. They are similar to the microchips used by veterinarians to identify pets. The tag has no battery but is activated by a signal emitted by the handheld scanner, causing the tag to respond with a code unique to that fish, which is shown on the display. This same technology is used by the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's Pikepass program to identify vehicles driving on the state's toll roads. In long-term studies, individual fish growth and move-



Bowfishing involves the use of a traditional bow that shoots arrows attached by fishing line to a bow-mounted reel.

ments can be accurately tracked using these tags.

Biologists then invited five teams from Oklahoma Fish Stickers to fish in a two-night tournament, with up to four members per team. The event resembled other fishing competitions: teams stayed within the tournament boundaries, followed state fishing regulations, and for this tournament, delivered all fish shot to the weigh-in with no culling allowed.

After launching their boats, team members attended a brief pre-tournament meeting and set out at 8:30 p.m. They fished into the night and returned to the dock at 1 a.m. with their barrels of fish. As soon as the boats were trailered, the teams gathered at the weigh-in station to learn the tournament results.

WEIGH-IN WINNERS

After two nights of fishing, the tournament's 10 teams hauled in a collective 1,770.64 pounds of fish, heavily dominated by smallmouth buffalo and spotted gar. Each team's catch was weighed, and individual fish were scanned for tags as soon as the boats left the water, with nightly prizes for the top two teams with the greatest total combined weights and for the individual participant with the heaviest single fish shot.

Team T-N-T, based in Coweta, claimed the top prizes the first night, with 334.2 total pounds of fish, including a 19.84-pound black buffalo. The second night's catch was led by Lynch Mob II, with 175.04



total pounds of fish caught, and Team Rousey's 10.58-pound smallmouth buffalo.

Tournament sponsors included the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation, the Oklahoma Chapter of American Fisheries Society, Bass Pro Shops Broken Arrow, and Tulsa Scheels.

Signs were placed around the lake to notify the public about the research.



ODWC Fisheries personnel process the harvest from the simulated tournament.



A Hutton junior fisheries biology program scholar helps collect tissue samples.



The hole in this fin confirms that ODWC captured this fish during a pre-tournament population survey.

LATER DATA COLLECTION

Once the prizes were handed out, each night's fish were hauled to the Wildlife Department's Miami, OK, office in team-specific barrels and were stored in a refrigerated locker. Biologists met the following Monday to learn as much as they could from the tournament fish. Each fish was given an identification number and visited five stations, getting scanned for tags, weighed and measured, and dissected along the way.

"We're collecting everything we can," Schooley said. "We're looking at the length, weight, sex, and age of each fish to learn more about the age and size structure in the population and how it compares to other lakes. And we're taking tissues for other collaborators to learn more about the genetic structure of the lake."

By the end of the long day, the tournament's 325 fish had been processed, generating possibly the first ever dataset on bowfishing specifically designed to evaluate the impacts of the sport and its take of native nongame fishes.

Why hasn't this been done before? Well, it's a matter of scale. Oklahoma bowfishing tournaments are generally held on larger reservoirs. To get adequately detailed information on nongame fishes from a large reservoir requires a massive amount of time and effort, which has not been a focus for managers in Oklahoma or other states. Shell Lake provided the right-sized venue for this focused study. Though the lake is considered small, the dataset is substantial, and the age structure, morphology, population modeling, and genetic analyses are ongoing.

Preliminary estimates of pre-tournament population sizes were approximately 3,000 for buffalofishes — smallmouth buffalo, bigmouth buffalo and black buffalo, combined — and 1,200 for spotted gar. With these estimates of population size and the known numbers of these fishes taken in the tournament, biologists can have a pretty good sense of the direct impacts of the experimental tournament and develop population models to determine what is sustainable.

Once all samples and measurements were taken and data had been collected from the tournament fish, biologists hauled the fish carcasses to a facility in Missouri where they were salvaged into pet food.

While the Shell Lake tournament provided a unique experiment for biologists, it's not the first attempt to learn more about Oklahoma's native nongame fish and how to best manage the sport of bowfishing in the state.

In 2018, the Wildlife Department partnered with sponsors of the Bass Pro U.S. Open Bowfishing Championship, held that year in Broken Arrow, to collect information on the harvested fish and survey the participating teams. A case study of the event was published in 2020 along with a history of the sport, survey results and summarization of each state's management strategies, and a framework for understanding and proactively managing bowfishing. In 2021 and 2022, biologists conducted trials to better identify the mortality rate of fish that have been shot and released. And in 2023, the Wildlife Department expanded its statewide fisheries management plan to include native nongame fishes like buffalofishes and gars with a goal of providing for a sustainable recreational fishery.

As part of that goal, biologists followed eight of Oklahoma Fish Stickers' tournaments in 2024. Similar to the Shell Lake tournament's catch, fish were collected after each tournament along with data about the individual fish. All told, the Wildlife Department handled more than 5,000 fish totaling more than 20,000 pounds from bowfishing tournaments in 2024.

SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

Mitchell Herron, an Oklahoma Fish Stickers member and Shell Lake tournament participant, summed

up the partnership. "We want to work together to see what we can figure out."

This commitment to cooperation and collaboration echoes multiple sentiments voiced by bowfishing participants who spoke at the January 2024 Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, where some rule changes for nongame fishes and bowfishing were under consideration. Some of the comments at that meeting were:

- "Ultimately, if you really wanted to help the native fish species, do the population studies. Let's figure out what they can support, let's set up a program, work with the bowfishers, work with the giggers. Let's come together, and let's figure out a way to utilize these fish in a better way."

— Peter Gregoire, then president of the Bowfishing Association of America.

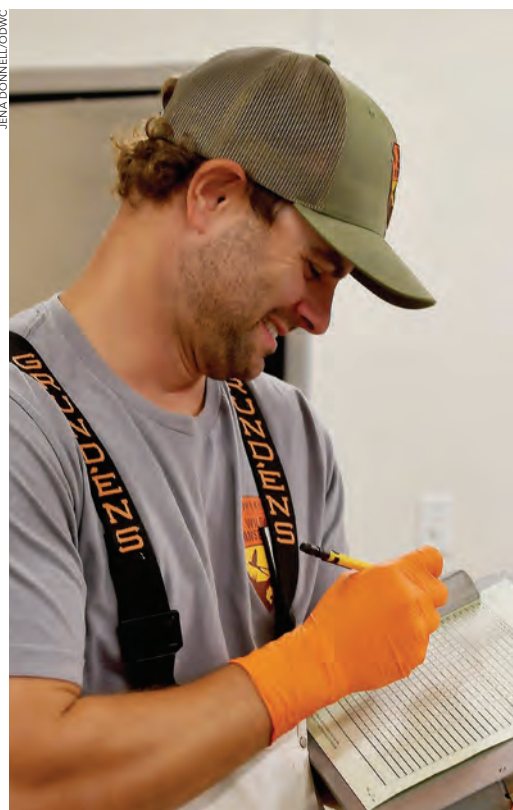
- "I just hope y'all do it right and do the scientific data on this first before you do any of those limits." — Randy Woodward, Bowfishing Association of America Hall of Fame.
- "Please do the science first and get the data and show us that, you know, 'Hey these are the populations, let's monitor them for two years and then we'll come back, meet again. We'll all talk again,' hopefully, and, you know, then we'll have some sort of better understanding." — Steven Whitney, Bowfishing Association State Representative for Missouri.

Oklahoma's efforts to better understand bowfishing and native nongame fisheries management may sound novel, but they are part of a larger movement nationwide.

On the heels of multiple studies demonstrating the conservation value of native nongame fishes, such as buffalofishes and gars, state fisheries managers nationwide are taking a more critical look at populations and the practices that target them. With a greater knowledge in those areas, the Wildlife Department hopes to play a more effective role in managing these resources sustainably. ♡



Fish tissue samples will yield genetic information.



Fisheries technician Matt Pallett collects data about each fish.

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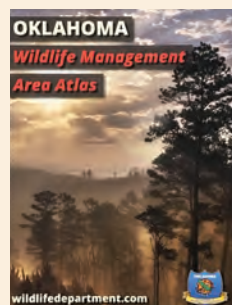


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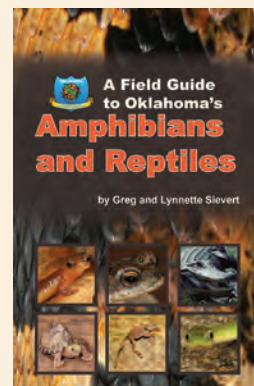
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PRAIRIE KINGSLAKE

BY DANNY RODRIGUEZ, CRISTO REY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

The prairie kingsnake (*Lampropeltis caliginosa*) is a member of a nonvenomous group of reptiles known as the colubrids, which includes the mole kingsnake, yellow baby kingsnake, Mississippi kingsnake, Missouri kingsnake, California kingsnake, and Florida kingsnake. They are all mostly found in the midwestern and southwestern United States.

These snakes spend much of their time in open, grassy areas, forests, or woodlands.

Their diet primarily consists of rodents, small lizards, frogs, and sometimes other smaller snakes. Yet these reptiles are usually quite docile.

When harassed, they will shake their tails as if they are rattlesnakes.

And when threatened, they will exhibit strange, twitchy head movements to scare predators and to bluff other snakes to scare them away.

Prairie kingsnakes are almost always a tan, grayish brown or yellowish-brown color. They also have reddish brown patches running down their back along with alternating patches along both sides. The

dark brown patches are outlined by a narrow black line. The belly is cream to tan in color and interrupted by faint rectangular or square dark markings that extend across several ventral scales.

When fully mature, prairie kingsnakes will sometimes lose all the darker patches on their back and sides.

Adults average 30 to 42 inches in total length. Hatchlings vary in size from about 9 to 12 inches in total length.

Prairie kingsnakes mate once a year. Females reach sexual and reproductive maturity at three years, while males are sexually mature between the ages of 1 to 4 years. When the breeding season from March through August arrives, the female will lay nine to 21 eggs. It takes 50 to 75 days before the eggs hatch. When the young hatch, they will instantly leave the nest to survive on their own.

These snakes are harmless to humans.

Predators of the prairie kingsnake include people, striped skunks, raccoons, opossums, and other kingsnakes in the local area.

Prairie kingsnakes are secretive and difficult to observe in the field even though they are quite common. During spring and fall, they can be found on roads at dusk or at night where they stretch out to gain heat from the road surface. They can occasionally be found crawling around just before dark. ♡

When harassed, they will shake their tails as if they are rattlesnakes. And when threatened, they will exhibit strange, twitchy head movements to scare predators and to bluff other snakes to scare them away.





JOHN WILSON/RPS 2020

Nature's diversity is always amazing to those who take the time to notice. A great illustration is the aptly named neon skimmer dragonfly, with its striking red and amber coloring. Don't let the beauty and variety of the state's flora and fauna escape you as we will celebrate wildlife diversity in the May/June 2025 issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.

Outdoor Oklahoma

