

Outdoor Oklahoma

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2025 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR

A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



PANORAMAS



Tammy St. Yves

Here's a question for all the deer hunters out there: Wouldn't it feel good if you could go hunting, enjoy a successful harvest and know that you are helping your fellow citizens in need?

That's exactly what happens when you participate in the Wildlife Department's **Hunters Against Hunger** (HAH) program!

HAH is a cooperative program involving you, your local deer processor, the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation (OWCF) and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC). Hunters who legally harvest a deer during any Oklahoma deer season can donate the meat to feed the hungry.

It's easy, and it can play a role in helping ODWC manage the state's wild deer herd in the form of antlerless deer harvest. Feeding the hungry and helping manage the deer herd are both important goals. It's hard for me to imagine somebody not wanting to get involved.

Participation by hunters and meat processors is the key. Hunters simply deliver any E-checked deer to the nearest participating meat processor. To help with processing costs, each donor is asked to contribute a tax-deductible \$10 to assist with the program, which is optional. The ground venison is then distributed to the needy through a network of qualified, charitable organizations.

For hunters, the rewards are many. Some will still have deer remaining for their combined season bag limit after they have harvested what they need. They can go enjoy some more hunting and fill their remaining bag limit to donate to HAH. And they don't need to worry about processing the deer; they only need to drop it off at the nearest HAH processor.

Some hunters might not realize that the Holiday Antlerless Deer Gun Season allows any licensed deer hunter to take two antlerless deer as a bonus in addition to their combined season bag limit. To me, that's a perfect fit for someone who wouldn't normally hunt that late-December season but will do so to help the hungry. It's just a great opportunity for many hunters to support HAH!

It's also convenient. Hunter don't need to worry about processing their harvest; they simply drop it off at the nearest of the 40 or so HAH processors. And it can also be an opportunity to get new people involved in deer hunting while at the same time helping out the local community.

Last year, HAH generated almost 45,000 pounds of ground venison for local food banks across the state. That's invaluable to people in need.

We are always looking for more meat processors to add to our network. For each deer donated and processed, the producer gets \$100 from HAH to help defray expenses along with the knowledge that you are giving back and helping to feed the needy in your local area.

The OWCF has stepped up the past several years to provide funding for HAH, which is matched 3-to-1 by ODWC using Pittman-Robertson federal grant funds. So, yet another way to help HAH is to donate to the Wildlife Foundation.

HAH is greater than hunting and greater than deer management. It's putting food in somebody's belly that otherwise wouldn't have it. And to me, that's the greatest benefit. ♥

Tammy St. Yves,
Executive Assistant

To learn more
about Hunters
Against Hunger,
scan the code:



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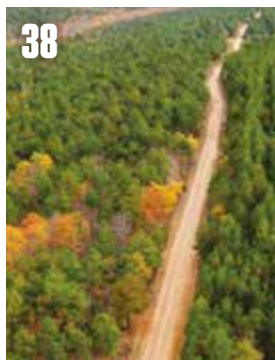


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ON THE COVER: Autumn colors emerge across the 185,000 acres of Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area in southeastern Oklahoma. The area is included with two other WMAs — Honobia Creek and Herron Family (for Oklahoma residents only) — along with scores

of sites enrolled in the Oklahoma Land Access Program that become accessible to outdoor recreationists with the purchase of a Land Access Permit from the Wildlife Department. All of these hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing areas are privately owned lands leased by ODWC. Revenue from the Land Access Permit is used to leverage federal funding to pay for these leased properties. (Photo by Darrin Hill/ODWC)

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OKLAHOMA



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

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

NONRESIDENTS MUST NOW CHECK-IN TO MOST PUBLIC LANDS

All nonresidents who enter specified hunting and/or fishing properties owned or managed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation are now required to check themselves into and out of the property when they enter and leave.

The Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission recently established this check-in procedure to better understand how public hunting and fishing areas are used. As a result, the Commission aims to make decisions about hunting and fishing regulations and future land purchases that are better informed with current user data.

Check-in and check-out will be completed using the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app or at GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com.

There is no cost associated with checking in or out of a property. And there is no limit to the number of check-ins for anyone.

Residents are not required to check in to Wildlife Management Areas, however residents and nonresidents are required to check in to Oklahoma Land Access Program limited access areas.



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC

Dove hunting on a wildlife management area.

WHY IS CHECK-IN AND CHECK-OUT A REQUIREMENT?

Oklahoma's public lands are vital for the Wildlife Department to fulfill its conservation-minded mission. Not only do these lands provide quality habitat for native fish and wildlife species, they also provide more than 1.5 million acres for recreational use. And, the hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts who access these areas support conservation through their purchase of a hunting license, fishing license or conservation passport.

These license and passport funds may then be leveraged to receive federal grant dollars, often resulting in conservation funding many times greater than the original funding amount, and allowing ODWC to enhance the ability to carry out its mission for the state's natural resources and the people who use them.

MARK CROMWELL/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2015



Drummond Flats Wildlife Management Area, Garfield County.

Learn more about ODWC's data and privacy at wildlifedepartment.com/about/accountability-initiative/complete-transparency.

HOW TO CHECK IN AND CHECK OUT

Note: Checking in to a property is recommended ahead of time to avoid possible lack of cellular reception. Check-ins can be completed days before your visit. Users must check in and check out through GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com or the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app.

Procedure:

- Open the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app or visit GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com.
- Log in to your customer account, or create one.
- If required, verify your account information is correct.
- Click "OLAP Check-in" and select "Wildlife Management Area," or enter the area's name in the search bar.
- When the area is selected, click "Sign In" and enter date of visit, reason for visit, and other requested information.
- Click "Submit." This creates your "event."
- After visiting an area, return to Go Outdoors Oklahoma, locate your "event," and click "Sign Out." Visitors may be checked-in to only one area at any time. To check in to a different area, visitors must first check out from the area visited earlier. 📍

JENA DONNELL/ODWC



Wildlife watching on a wildlife management area.

WHICH AREAS REQUIRE CHECK-IN AND CHECK-OUT?

Most wildlife management areas and some other areas managed by ODWC are included on the list of areas that require nonresident check-in and check-out. For the current list of areas, scan the code.



DARRIN HILL/ODWC



Doc Hollis Lake Public Fishing Area, Greer County.

DON P. BROWN/ODWC



Sans Bois Wildlife Management Area, Haskell County.

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:



Caley Smith, white-tailed deer, Creek County.



Peyton Abbot, white-tailed deer, Pontotoc County.



Kaley O., dove hunt, Comanche County.

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.

NOVEMBER 2025

- 1 OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required
 - 2 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 6 Public hearing on proposed Title 800 proposed changes, 7 p.m., ODWC headquarters, Oklahoma City.
 - 8 OKC's Youth Hooked on Fishing, 10 a.m.-noon, South Lakes Park. Register: www.okc.gov/departments/parks-recreation/lakes-and-fishing/fishing-regulations.
 - 9 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 11 Veterans Day (state offices closed).
 - 16 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 23 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 26 Thanksgiving (state offices closed Nov. 26-27).
 - 30 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- Hunter Education class location (date) in Omega (15).
 - Ducks Unlimited events (date) in Seminole (1), Norman (4), Tulsa (6), Guthrie (7), Bixby (7), Roland (8), Stillwater (11), Elk City (13), Durant (18), Ardmore (20). Info: www.ducks.org/events.
 - National Wild Turkey Federation event (date) in Vian (1). Info: <https://your.nwtf.org/members/events>.
 - Quail Forever events (date) in Enid (3), Tulsa (5), Atoka (6), Laverne (11). Info: events.pheasantsforever.org/events.

DECEMBER 2025

- 6 OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 7 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 8 Okla. Wildlife Conservation Commission meets, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/@Okwildlifedep](https://www.youtube.com/@Okwildlifedep).
- 13 OKC's Trout Fishing Derby, noon-2 p.m., Edwards Park. Register: www.okc.gov/departments/parks-recreation/lakes-and-fishing/fishing-regulations.
- 14 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 21 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 25 Christmas Day (state offices closed Dec. 24-25).
- 28 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.

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

GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

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



Trae Taylor



Phillip Cottrill



Jeremy Bersche

Game wardens **Jeremy Bersche** (Osage County), **Jake Bersche** (Pawnee County), **Larry Green** (Osage County), **Rylee Rolling** (Tulsa), **Spencer Grace** (Kay County), **Dartanion Tilly** (Nowata County), and Capt. **Hank Jenks** served a search warrant at a house north of Barnsdall after an individual was observed running a gill net and checking fish traps in Bird Creek. Nets, fish, and a john boat were seized as evidence. Osage County sheriff's deputies and agents from the Attorney General's office and Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority assisted with the warrant as there was a large marijuana grow on the property. Agents collected almost 160 pounds of illegal, untagged, sealed marijuana. Sixty-two charges were filed against five people, all with New York driver's licenses.

August (Gus) from Pacifica, Calif., was recently in Oklahoma visiting family, and his grandma took him to Canton Lake to try fishing for the first time. Game warden **Phillip Cottrill** (Garfield County) noticed they were using a hook that was too big for the bluegill. Cottrill found a small hook and pulled a big yellow grasshopper off the grill guard of his pickup to use as bait. Gus helped Cottrill put the grasshopper on the hook, and then they let it sink. Shortly after that, Gus caught his first fish: an Oklahoma channel cat.

Game wardens **Trae Taylor** (Hughes County), **Clayton Johnson** (Pontotoc County), and Lt. **Garret Harley** (Seminole County) responded to a call from Nomads Animal Encounter in Strother about a fire that spread into their property and burned their fox enclosure. Wardens assisted with finding, trapping and returning foxes to their enclosure and assisting Nomads employees and other individuals who helped. All foxes and other animals were found and returned safely.

Game warden **Trae Taylor** (Hughes County) apprehended an individual who had warrants out for his arrest on bail jumping charges. Taylor had previously charged this individual with selling hunting opportunities on private property that he didn't have permission to hunt. The individual allegedly took money for turkey hunts through online payment apps then provided hunters a pin to the location where they were supposed to hunt. Several hunters were caught

hunting without permission by landowners of these properties, which prompted Taylor's investigation.

Game warden **Rylee Rolling** (Tulsa County) has recently investigated and filed charges related to noncommercial breeder licenses, offer for sale, illegal possession of wildlife, and illegal importation into the state. The wild animals involved in these cases included a red fox, red-eared sliders, raccoons, skunks and opossums. These animals were either seized or willfully abandoned to ODWC. Game wardens from the Northeast Region including **Austin Jackson** (Craig County), **J.D. Stauffer** (Rogers County), and **Tracer Wagner** (Creek County) assisted in the cases.

Game wardens **Brian Meskimen** (McClain County) and **Chad Strang** (Cleveland County) visited with students in a Purcell Junior High hunter education class to answer questions. This is just another example how game wardens show up and have a positive impact in their communities.

(Reports from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Director's Report to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission.)

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

IT'S THE LAW:

Federally approved nontoxic shot must be used when hunting ducks, geese, mergansers and coots anywhere in Oklahoma, or when hunting any species with a shotgun while on state wetland development units and state waterfowl refuges. Possessing lead shot in either of those situations is prohibited.

Lead shot is allowed when using a shotgun to hunt other migratory game birds, including dove, crow, sandhill crane, woodcock and snipe, unless hunting in areas where lead shot is prohibited. Lead shot is also allowed when hunting bobwhites, turkeys and pheasants.

Also, shotguns must be plugged to hold no more than three shotshells when hunting migratory game birds, unless otherwise provided. 🦅

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 Sid Tabor (wildlife biologist) and Eric Suttles (Southeast Region wildlife supervisor),

I wanted to share my gratitude for your efforts in securing Honobia Creek and Three Rivers wildlife management areas (WMAs) and the work put forth to obtain the new Herron Family WMA.

Three Rivers holds a special place in mine and my family's hearts. I started walking alongside my father as he hunted there when I was 6 or 7 years old. Now, I am 51 years old and have so many years of great memories from numerous deer seasons. There is no other place in the state that is so beautiful and I could not imagine having to spend my deer seasons anywhere else.

What a great resource for all of us. I want to share the beauty and experiences with the younger generations in our family and get them involved in wildlife conservation, mostly due to being able to access these areas myself over the years. Thanks so much for all of your efforts. It is very much appreciated and does not go unnoticed. I hope and pray that you all can keep these areas for many generations to come!



Sid Tabor



Eric Suttles

Kenneth Wilson

EDITOR'S NOTE: The timing of your letter is serendipitous, Kenneth. We actually have a feature story about these three WMAs in this issue, starting on page 38. Enjoy!

Dear Wildlife Department,

I had the privilege of meeting **Lt. Casey Young** (game warden based in Murray County) earlier this week when I was stranded with a flat tire on Interstate 35.

I am a salesperson at a Texas auto dealership and traveled to Norman to retrieve a vehicle for a customer. I had a flat tire and no knowledge of how to change a tire. I was on the side of the road for over an hour and a half and attempted to flag down a state trooper and several police officers and was running out of options.



Casey Young

Casey saw a woman in distress and didn't think twice about pulling over to assist. He showed compassion and kindness you don't see often anymore. I sincerely hope there is some kind of recognition that you can give him going above and beyond and for being an exemplary human being.

My sincere gratitude from my family and myself to you and Lt. Young.

Lauren Braswell, Burleson, Texas

Dear Wildlife Department,

I want to thank everyone who works to keep the Oklahoma Duck Stamp contest alive. These programs not only honor the rich waterfowl heritage of the state but also continue an important conservation tradition that stretches across generations.

Though I was born at Fort Sill in Lawton in 1984, my family moved back to Pennsylvania when I was still an infant. Because of that, I have never truly "known" Oklahoma in the way many do who call it home. Yet, to me, this contest has been a unique and meaningful connection back to the place of my birth.

Participating in the contest has been an incredible honor, and to have won is something I will always carry with deep gratitude. I want to extend my appreciation not only to the judges but also to all those behind the scenes who dedicate their time and effort to making this possible each year.

Thank you for continuing a tradition that celebrates waterfowl, conservation and the bond between people and the natural world.

Michael Kensinger, Altoona, Penn.

Dear Editor,

I had a call today from Glenn Ring of Earlsboro. He told me that he met two "boys" cleaning the gun range at Okmulgee Wildlife Management Area. He said they were so friendly and did a fantastic job -- so much so that even though his family are members of the OKC Gun Club, they still prefer to shoot at Okmulgee because it is so well-kept.

Those two "boys" are Okmulgee WMA wildlife technician **Dalton DeShazer** and wildlife intern **Konner Ingersoll**. Thanks to both!

Jay Rouk, wildlife biologist, Okmulgee and Deep Fork WMAs



Dalton DeShazer



Konner Ingersoll

Errata

In the November/December 2025 issue, Figure 10 on page 19 in the big game harvest report contained an error. The corrected graphic can be seen at wildlifedepartment.com/outdoorok/oj/2024-25-big-game-harvest-report.

WELCOME TO THE DOCK!

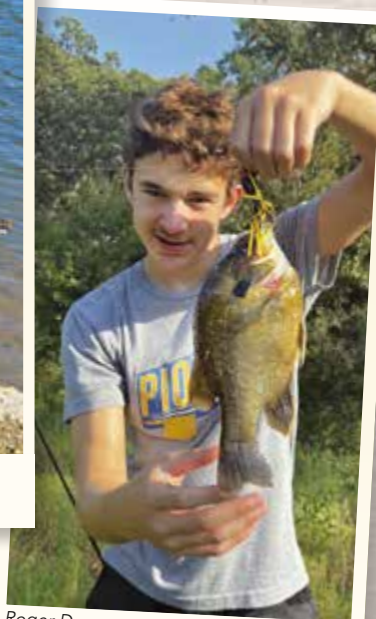
Are the fish biting? You bet! Step onto The Dock and take a gander at some great catches made recently by Oklahoma anglers. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To see more or submit a photo of your catch, go to www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the_dock or scan the code:



Lewis Letton, paddlefish, Sept. 5, 2025, Lake Texoma.



NEW STATE RECORD!
Charlie Conway, spotted gar, 10.56 pounds, Oct. 10, 2025, Lake Texoma.



Roger D., green sunfish, Aug. 9, 2025, Okfuskee County.



Cassidy Borders, smallmouth bass, Aug. 27, 2025, Lake Thunderbird.



Trish P., freshwater drum, Sept. 7, 2025, Canton Lake.



Alex Scoggins, blue catfish, Aug. 8, 2025, Robert S. Kerr Reservoir.

WILD ABOUT COOKING

VENISON VEGETABLE STEW

Ladle up a bowlful of comfort with this soul-warming stew that's teeming with nutrition.. As the air get chilly and the freezer starts to fill with this season's venison, now is a perfect time to enjoy this savory stew. This recipe makes nine servings.



INGREDIENTS

2 pounds roast venison, cubed
1 large can (28 ounces) no-salt-added diced tomatoes
3 cups low-sodium beef broth
1 cup tomato juice
2 bags (12 ounces each) frozen mixed vegetables (beans, peas, corn, carrots)
1 cup potatoes, diced
1 cup onion, diced
1 cup celery, diced
1 can (15 ounces) lima beans, drained
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon thyme
2 bay leaves
1/4 cup cold water
3 Tablespoons cornstarch

INSTRUCTIONS

- Wash fresh produce under cool running water, using a vegetable brush to scrub veggies with firm surface.
- Place cubed venison in a slow cooker (at least 6-quart size cooker recommended).
- Add beef broth and tomato juice.
- Add mixed vegetables, potatoes, onion, celery and lima beans.
- Sprinkle in salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, thyme and bay leaves.
- Mix all contents in the slow cooker.
- To thicken, in a small bowl, combine 1/4 cup cold water with 3 Tablespoons of cornstarch. Slowly add to stew, stirring to incorporate. Stew will continue to thicken upon standing.
- Cook on low for 5 to 6 hours. Serve and enjoy!
- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours.

Nutrition facts per serving: 320 calories; 17g total fat; 4.5g saturated fat; 0g trans fat; 130mg cholesterol; 370mg sodium; 15g carbohydrate; 2g fiber; 11g sugars; 28g protein; 0% Daily Value of vitamin D; 4% Daily Value of Calcium; 40% Daily Value of Iron; 10% Daily value of Potassium

SOURCE: Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service via Kentucky Nutrition Education Program

WONDERING ABOUT WINTER? PLUCK A PERSIMMON

BY DON P. BROWN, COMMUNICATION
AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

How's this winter's weather going to treat us? Will it be bitterly cold? Will it bring lots of snow? Or maybe a mild winter is coming.

Modern meteorology can reliably predict the weather about a week out. And in a broad, general sense, today's computerized forecast models can even offer outlooks a month or more in advance.

But there are many folks who still consult nature for clues about future weather. And one of those traditional methods is to look into the seeds of the persimmon.

For those of you who haven't heard of this before, allow me to set the table.

When persimmon seeds are cut open, a tiny embryonic "tree" called a cotyledon is revealed. The shape of the cotyledon can look like either a spoon, a knife or a fork. And each shape has a different meaning in terms of the coming winter's forecast.

SPOON

You'll be scooping up plenty of wet snow.

FORK

Sporadic cold snaps but generally a mild winter.

KNIFE

Frigid winds will cut through you as bitter cold takes hold.

There are at least two ways to make a seed forecast. One is to pick a ripe persimmon off the tree, eat it, and slice one of the seeds longways to find out which shape is visible. Another method recommends taking seeds from 10 persimmons, cut open the seeds, and whichever shape occurs the most determines the winter forecast.

But there is a large degree of subjectivity in how each person might interpret the shapes. This ambiguity introduces a degree of uncertainty into the prediction process. Furthermore, factors like seed maturity and regional variations in environmental conditions during fruit development could influence cotyledon shape, potentially confounding any predictive accuracy.



We gathered 10 local persimmon seeds and here is what we found: four spoons, two forks, and four knives. According to lore, we can look for some bitter cold and heavy snow this winter.

DON P. BROWN/ODWC



Persimmon trees growing together at Arbuckle Springs Wildlife Management Area.



Average size for persimmons is about the same or slightly smaller than a golf ball.



A persimmon with a seed that has been cut in half. Which shape do you see?

This method of “forecasting weather” has been passed down through generations mainly by oral tradition, especially in rural communities. Seed-reading results might influence decisions regarding which crops to plant for the following season, livestock management practices, or home preparation such as stockpiling firewood or storing more food in the pantry.

While the connection between cotyledon shape and winter weather remains within the realm of folklore, its continued practice underscores the enduring human fascination with predicting natural phenomena and the cultural significance of traditional knowledge.

There is no scientific validation for persimmon seeds weather forecasting. Controlled studies have not established

a statistically significant correlation. Still, it was reported that the Jefferson County (Mo.) Extension Office has checked seeds in fall for 17 years and compared the winters that followed. The forecasts were accurate 13 out of 17 years! Although there is neither science nor research behind any of this, it’s still fun to speculate.

Two types of persimmon trees can be found in Oklahoma: the American persimmon and the Texas persimmon. The fruit is actually the largest native true berries that grow in Oklahoma.

American persimmons are normally in the northern and eastern parts of the state, while the Texas variety is mainly in the southwestern areas.

The Texas variety fruits ripen to an almost black color. American fruits turn from green to bright orange as they ripen in September through November, becoming soft, slightly wrinkled, and deliciously sweet. When ripe, they often fall to the ground, although some ripe fruits remain on trees after they have dropped their leaves and can be dislodged by shaking the tree.

Until persimmons are fully ripe, they have a beyond-bitter flavor and a mouth-drying astringency due to the rupturing of tannin cells in the unripe fruits. These chemical compounds cause extremely unpleasant puckering of mouth tissues.

Persimmon pulp can be used to make preserves, breads, cookies, puddings, custards, ice cream, and fruit leather. Historically, it was used to make wine and beer, the latter nicknamed “possum toddy.” During the Civil War, persimmon seeds were used as buttons and, in a pinch, the seeds were roasted, ground, and used as a coffee substitute. Leaves were used to make tea.

Perhaps most importantly, persimmons are favored dining for deer, opossums, foxes and other small mammals, which kindly spread the seeds in their scat. Turkeys, quail and some songbirds are fond of the fruit. Additionally, persimmon trees are a host plant for several moth species including luna and royal walnut moths, whose caterpillars dine on the trees’ leaves. ♡

2026 OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT CALENDAR

INDIGOBUNTING/PIXABAY.COM.CC0



Outdoor
Oklahoma

SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION





NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*)

JANUARY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Operation Game Thief: Anonymously report game and fish law violations by calling toll-free (800) 522-8039.				New Year's Day 1	2	3 ☉
4	5	6	7	8	9	10 ☾
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18 ☿	Martin Luther King Jr. Day 19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 ☾	27	28	29	30	31

December 2025							February 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
28	29	30	31										



JENA DONNELLY/ODM

MANAGING FOR TURKEY ROOST SITES

Roost trees are as tall or taller than most surrounding trees. They have a number of large horizontal branches that make for good perches as they roost and the understory of these trees are thin. Shorter vegetation under and around roosting trees allows turkeys to identify threats or predators easier. A dense and taller understory can make a roosting turkey more susceptible to threats from below. As the understory around favorable roosting sites begins to fill in, these sites become less desirable to turkeys.



Scan the QR Code for details.

JANUARY HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Strip disk to encourage native food resources.
- Prepare ground for tree/shrub plantings for wildlife cover.
- Mow to remove brush encroachment as needed.
- Half-cut trees for loafing cover as needed for small game species.

JANUARY POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Consider a winter drawdown to control excessive aquatic vegetation.
- Check pond overflow pipe to make sure it is clear of debris.



PRESCRIBED BURN, PACKSADDLE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

FEBRUARY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 ○	2 Groundhog Day	3	4	5	6	7
8	9 ●	10	11	12	13	14 Valentine's Day
15	16 Presidents' Day	17 ●	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 ●	25	26	27	28

January 2026							March 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30	31				



JEREMIAH ZURENDA/COURTESY

PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATIONS

The Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Association (OPBA) was created in 2010 to support local burn associations and develop more across Oklahoma. The OPBA website has detailed information for landowners wishing to start a new burn association in their county or find information on existing associations to join. The website also has numerous resources that provide education and training on weather and smoke, local PBAs, laws and regulations, fire planning, and equipment vendors.



Scan the QR Code for details.

FEBRUARY HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Strip disk to encourage native food resources.
- Plant native trees and shrubs as needed for wildlife cover.
- Mow to remove brush encroachment as needed.
- Half-cut trees for loafing cover as needed for small game species.

FEBRUARY POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Remove trees from pond dams and spillways. Check spillway for erosion and repair if needed.
- Use cut eastern redcedar trees to create fish habitat. Attach concrete blocks to the trunk and sink the trees into your pond or lake.
- If turtles are a nuisance in your pond, build turtle traps and install them in the spring.
- Seek the advice of the Natural Resources Conservation Service on design and construction of new ponds or the renovation of old ponds and check if there is financial assistance available.



AMERICAN BLACK BEAR (*Ursus americanus*)

MARCH 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3 ○	4	5	6	7
Daylight Saving Time Begins 8	9	10	11 ●	12	13	14
15	16	St. Patrick's Day 17	18	19 ●	Spring Begins 20	21
22	23	24	25 ●	26	27	28
29	30	31	For free technical assistance on wildlife and habitat management, landowners may call: Northwest Region: Brett Cooper, (405) 740-9830 Southwest Region: Jason Smith, (405) 397-1599 Central Region: Kyle Johnson, (405) 590-2584 Northeast Region: Lauren Johnson, (918) 607-1518 Southeast Region: Leah Lowe, (405) 206-7720			

February 2026							April 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				1	2	3	4
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
							26	27	28	29	30		



EARLY SEASON WETLAND DRAWDOWN

A drawdown that is well-timed and of proper duration is one of the most effective tools in wetland management. It can allow a wetland manager to directly influence the composition and production of moist-soil plants, optimize food production, and provide a nutrient-rich habitat for the exhausted and depleted migrants come fall.



Scan the QR Code for details.

MARCH HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Plant native grasses, forbs or legumes.
- Plan and monitor livestock grazing this month to prevent overuse. This will help ensure adequate nesting cover as spring approaches.
- Monitor/fluctuate water levels in wetland areas.

MARCH POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Start filamentous algae control with Cutrine Plus® if needed.
- Clean debris from around pond overflow structures.
- On muddy ponds, put out a small row of hay bales above your pond to trap and limit sediments from entering your pond during early spring rains.



MONARCH (*Danaus plexippus*)

APRIL 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2 ○	3	4
Easter 5	6	7	8	9	10 ◐	11
12	13	14	15	16	17 ●	18
19	20	21	Earth Day 22	23	24 ◐	25
26	27	28	29	30	Operation Game Thief: Anonymously report game and fish law violations by calling toll-free (800) 522-8039.	

March 2026							May 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7							1 2
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
29	30	31					24	25	26	27	28	29	30
							31						



WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM

FARM POND PROGRAM

Need help getting your half-acre to 5-acre pond ready for family members and friends? Send an application to the Farm Pond Program by May 31 for a chance to receive fish. Applications received June 1 or later will be eligible for next year's program. Eligible ponds cannot have an existing fish population, the owner cannot charge a fee for fishing at the pond, and game wardens must be allowed to check for fishing licenses (if required) at that pond. Receiving fish from the program does not require the landowner to offer fishing access to the public.



Scan the QR Code for details.

APRIL HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- If conditions permit, disk wetland areas to promote moist-soil plants as needed.
- Plant native grasses, forbs or legumes.

APRIL POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Start harvesting undersized bass and bluegill and keep records (continue all season).
- If aquatic vegetation is a problem, initiate a control program; either chemical or biological (grass carp).
- Inspect the dam and spillway for washes and fill them with suitable material and compact it thoroughly.
- Create and sink artificial structure for fish attractors.



WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

MAY 2026

April 2026							June 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4	5	6
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
26	27	28	29	30			28	29	30				

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
For free technical assistance on wildlife and habitat management, landowners may call: Northwest Region: Brett Cooper, (405) 740-9830 Southwest Region: Jason Smith, (405) 397-1599 Central Region: Kyle Johnson, (405) 590-2584 Northeast Region: Lauren Johnson, (918) 607-1518 Southeast Region: Leah Lowe, (405) 206-7720					1 ○	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9 ●
Mother's Day 10	11	12	13	14	15	16 ●
17	18	19	20	21	22	23 ●
24	Memorial Day 25	26	27	28	29	30
31 ○						



HEMI-MARSH

Simply put, a hemi-marsh is a patchwork of about 50 percent open water and 50 percent emergent vegetation or wetland plants. This ratio can fluctuate within and between years, but the goal is to manage for the mix to be about equal. The overall, simplified concept of hemi-marsh management is to manage the water for the highest quality and diversity of food plants for wildlife.



Scan the QR Code for details.

MAY HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Monitor tree and shrub plantings.
- Control weed competition around new trees.
- Monitor livestock grazing program to provide nesting cover for next spring if needed.

MAY POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Inspect dams and dikes for leaks, seeps or animal burrows and repair as necessary.
- Add one round bale of hay per every 1-3 acres of water for slow release of nutrients in new ponds.
- Document fishing success in your pond by recording numbers, weights and lengths of fish caught. These records help biologists when you seek pond management recommendations.
- Inspect and clean out spillway, overflow tubes or pipes and remove any debris or blockages.



AMERICAN BISON (*Bison bison*)

JUNE 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	Oklahoma Free Fishing Days 6
Oklahoma Free Fishing Days 7	8 ●	9	10	11	12	13
Flag Day 14	15 ●	16	17	18	Juneteenth 19	20
Father's Day Summer Begins 21 ●	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30 ○	Operation Game Thief: Anonymously report game and fish law violations by calling toll-free (800) 522-8039.			

May 2026							July 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2				1	2	3	4
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	26	27	28	29	30	31	
31													



TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT (TSI)

Although a TSI project can sound daunting, it simply involves removing undesirable trees, thinning to relieve overcrowding, and using prescribed fire to rejuvenate the habitat and maintain the open canopy. Desirable deer and turkey foods are already hidden within the soil in the form of roots and seeds. All that is required is sunlight to stimulate their emergence.



Scan the QR Code for details.

JUNE HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Spot spray to control sericea lespedeza, an undesirable weed that competes with desirable grasses and forbs.
- Before mowing, walk out hay meadows to reduce wildlife mortality, and consider leaving unmowed strips.
- Spot spray salt cedar to restore riparian areas.

JUNE POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- If your pond is lacking aquatic vegetation (less than 20 percent), June is the month to harvest and transplant aquatic vegetation. Consult a biologist for adaptable plant species for transplanting.
- If aquatic vegetation exceeds 20 percent of your pond, seek technical assistance on plant identification and recommended treatment method.



BULLSNAKE (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*)

JULY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
For free technical assistance on wildlife and habitat management, landowners may call: Northwest Region: Brett Cooper, (405) 740-9830 Southwest Region: Jason Smith, (405) 397-1599 Central Region: Kyle Johnson, (405) 590-2584 Northeast Region: Lauren Johnson, (918) 607-1518 Southeast Region: Leah Lowe, (405) 206-7720			1	2	3	Independence Day 4
5	6	7 ☾	8	9	10	11
12	13	14 ●	15	16	17	18
19	20	21 ☾	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29 ◯	30	31	

June 2026							August 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6							1
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
28	29	30					23	24	25	26	27	28	29
							30	31					



PREVENTING FISH KILLS

Adding some form of aeration to your pond can help with oxygen depletion issues. This can take the form of fountains, underwater diffusers, or agitators. Aeration not only provides an immediate supply of oxygen for fish, but also reduces stagnation, facilitates aerobic breakdown of organic materials on the pond bottom, and prevents wintertime freezing.



Scan the QR Code for details.

JULY HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Seed Japanese millet along mud flats for ducks.
- Continue spot-spraying for sericea lespedeza, an invasive plant.
- Consider conducting a prescribed burn this month, during the growing season. It can encourage new growth leading into autumn, which can benefit wildlife.

JULY POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Check for fish at the surface of the pond at daylight or early morning. This could be the early sign of low dissolved oxygen that results in a fish kill. Contact local Wildlife Department office for assistance.
- Keep records on types and numbers of fish harvested by anglers. This information is helpful when considering fisheries management plans.



CARPENTER BEE (*Xylocopa* spp.)

AUGUST 2026

July 2026							September 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4			1	2	3	4	5
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
26	27	28	29	30	31		27	28	29	30			

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
For free technical assistance on wildlife and habitat management, landowners may call: Northwest Region: Brett Cooper, (405) 740-9830 Southwest Region: Jason Smith, (405) 397-1599 Central Region: Kyle Johnson, (405) 590-2584 Northeast Region: Lauren Johnson, (918) 607-1518 Southeast Region: Leah Lowe, (405) 206-7720						1
2	3	4	5	6 ●	7	8
9	10	11	12 ●	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20 ●	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28 ○	29
30	31					



KYLE JOHNSON/ODWC

EDGE HABITAT

The value of edge habitat for wildlife has been advocated for many years, but these transitions between two habitat types are not always suitable for quail and other species. All too often, the borders that exist between grasslands and woodlands or croplands and woodlands are abrupt and lack the diversity required to attract and hold wildlife.



Scan the QR Code for details.

AUGUST HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.

- Complete wetland dike repair.
- Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover for next spring.
- Before mowing, walk out hay meadows or install flush bars to equipment to reduce wildlife mortality, and consider leaving unmowed strips.

AUGUST POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Cut back or suspend supplemental feeding of catfish during the "dog days of summer" to reduce the chances of oxygen depletion.
- Check for fish at the surface of the pond at daylight or early morning. This could be the early sign of low dissolved oxygen that results in a fish kill.
- Stock fingerling catfish and bluegill, if desired.
- Consider supplemental aeration in August if visibility from green algae is less than 18 inches.
- Check sunfish and largemouth for black and yellow grub problems. If a problem exists, stock 3- to 4-inch redear sunfish for snail control.



AMERICAN ALLIGATOR (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

SEPTEMBER 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4 ☾	Oklahoma Free Hunting Days 5
Oklahoma Free Hunting Days 6	Labor Day 7	8	9	10	11 ●	12
13	14	15	16	17	18 ☾	19
20	21	22	Autumn Begins 23	24	25	National Hunting and Fishing Day 26 ◯
27	28	29	30	Operation Game Thief: Anonymously report game and fish law violations by calling toll-free (800) 522-8039.		

August 2026							October 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1						1	2
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
30	31												



BAT BOXES

Bats are extraordinary insect eaters that feast on moths, beetles, and even biting insects like mosquitoes using echolocation, a mixture of active sonar and special ear features that allow bats to "see" with sound. While some of the insects hunted by bats are considered a mere nuisance, others can cause damage to crops or landscapes. With the "free pest control" bats can offer, many landowners install bat boxes to welcome bats to their properties.



Scan the QR Code for details.

SEPTEMBER HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Begin to flood wetland areas. Many water control structures require "boards" to be installed to prevent water from draining.
- Prepare ground and plant winter food plots if needed.
- Cut and remove eastern redcedar trees.

SEPTEMBER POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Spray cattails along pond banks now, before the first freeze.
- If feeding catfish, discontinue feeding when water temperatures fall below 65°F.
- Start fall drawdown if crowded bluegill conditions exist or summer vegetation problems occur.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK (*Cervus canadensis nelsoni*)

OCTOBER 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Operation Game Thief: Anonymously report game and fish law violations by calling toll-free (800) 522-8039.				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	Columbus Day 12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	Halloween 31

September 2026							November 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
27	28	29	30				29	30					



MANAGING NATIVE WILDFLOWERS FOR MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

Whether traveling through Oklahoma during the spring or fall, monarch butterflies are in search of two primary things – plenty of milkweeds and plenty of wildflowers. Without them, few, if any, monarchs are likely to be seen. However, Oklahomans managing for an abundance of both are in for a treat each year when these fascinating insects pass through.

OCTOBER HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Flood green-tree reservoirs only after the first frost.
- Begin planning for prescribed burn program.
- Plant wildflower seeds this month.
- Begin to flood wetland areas.
- Construct brush piles for winter cover as needed.

OCTOBER POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Stock new ponds with fingerling catfish (100/acre) and bluegill (200-500/acre).

Scan the QR Code for details.

JENA DONNELLODWC



NOVEMBER 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Daylight Saving Time Ends 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	Veterans Day 11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	Thanksgiving Day 26	27	28
29	30	<p>Operation Game Thief: Anonymously report game and fish law violations by calling toll-free (800) 522-8039.</p>				

October 2026							December 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3			1	2	3	4	5
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	27	28	29	30	31		



DAVID BANTA/ODWC

GAME BIRD HABITAT IMPROVEMENT IDEAS

November through early February is the best time to strip disk for game birds including dove and quail. It will create brood-rearing habitat and food sources the following summer. Plowing or disking turns the ground and stimulates growth of forbs or weeds quail love and need. Disking a few strips next to grasslands or low-growing shrubs mimics the once-abundant patchwork of small crop fields mixed with grassy and weedy strips that produced high numbers of upland game birds.



Scan the QR Code for details.

NOVEMBER HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Flood green-tree reservoirs only after the first frost.
- Begin to flood wetland areas.
- Cut and remove invasive eastern redcedars to improve habitat.
- Evaluate forage resources and plan dormant season phase of grazing.

NOVEMBER POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Harvest crappie from farm ponds to ensure more balanced populations.
- Fence desirable fishing ponds to restrict livestock and build alternate livestock access points for a water source.
- Make repairs to fishing docks and boat ramp areas during drawdown.



BOBCAT (*Lynx rufus*)

DECEMBER 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9 	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17 	18	19
20	Winter Begins 21	22	23	Christmas Eve 24 	Christmas Day 25	26
27	28	29	30 	New Year's Eve 31	Operation Game Thief: Anonymously report game and fish law violations by calling toll-free (800) 522-8039.	

November 2026							January 2027						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7						1	2
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
29	30						24	25	26	27	28	29	30
							31						



FISH STRUCTURES FOR HABITAT

Shelter, or structure, is an important habitat component for fishing ponds or lakes. Artificial structures like tire reefs, wooden pallets, broken concrete, sections of large diameter pipe and PVC trees are all good substitutes [for natural structure]. You can construct your own artificial brush piles at low cost.



Scan the QR Code for details.

DECEMBER HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Construct or inspect firebreaks around your property and evaluate areas that need a prescribed fire treatment in the near future.
- Continue to flood wetland areas.
- Begin planning for prescribed burn program.
- Cut and remove eastern redcedars.
- Evaluate forage resources and plan dormant-season grazing program.

DECEMBER POND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- To help clear a pond of muddy water, spread two bales of good hay per surface acre, every two weeks. No more than four applications per year and not during hot summer months.
- Trap any nuisance beavers.

WETLANDS FOREMOST FOR '25 LANDOWNER OF YEAR, JOHN SANDERS

By Paxton Smith, Wildlife Biologist

McCurtain County farmer John Sanders has been selected as the 2025 Landowner Conservationist of the Year by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Sanders mainly produces corn and soybeans on his 900-plus acres situated close to Red Slough and Grassy Slough wildlife management areas.

His passion is waterfowl — both hunting and developing wetland habitat. This passion originated from his boyhood days growing up in east Texas. Living near the historic Caddo Lake, he learned to take advantage of waterfowl hunting opportunities there and became forever hooked.

Sanders grew up working in the oil and gas industry and has farmed extensively in Kansas and Oklahoma. Now in his mid-80s, his love for waterfowl hunting and managing wetland habitat have increased many times over.

The property has a natural oxbow lake (important for waterfowl roosting) and a riparian area in which the landowner has developed 11 small wetland units. Sanders has designed and installed unique water-control structures. Upstream of these units, he has developed the capability to seasonally flood a portion of his cropland base to create a shallow 50-acre lake. Combined, these habitat types offer a diversity of forage bases and cover important in meeting waterfowl needs.

He is also a “hands-on” fabricator and “seat-of-the-pants” engineer. Through trial and error, he has developed multiple wetland units along Holly Branch Creek, providing quality habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Accomplishments include personally surveying and developing dike systems as well as constructing a weir system on the creek to provide reliable seasonal flooding of this habitat.



Landowner Conservationist of the Year John Sanders

Perhaps just as impressive are his fabrication of unique, multiple water-control structures to help combat and control beaver plugging for each unit. Using common farm materials, he personally came up with a one-of-a-kind design. They are proving to not only minimize work in conducting controlled drawdowns but are also very cost effective in their construction.

To minimize beaver activity around traditional water-control structures (half-round flashboard risers), he has also designed an electrical safeguard to minimize beaver plugging and reduce manpower. Designed to float with changing water levels, he has modified a small solar cell to power the system. Still a work in progress, he continues to refine his beaver barrier and shares these innovations with ODWC and others.

Sanders maintains a willingness to learn and stay active at his age. He seeks information about wetland management and recently went to Canada to participate in waterfowl banding with Ducks Unlimited and state/federal agencies to gain further perspective on the important role of breeding grounds for waterfowl.



John Sanders has devised methods and equipment to help maintain wetlands on his land.



John Sanders with one of his self-created water-control devices.

PAXTON SMITH/ODWC

PAXTON SMITH/ODWC

OKLAHOMA GAME WARDENS

Law Enforcement Headquarters: (405) 521-3719 (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday)

District Chiefs/Captains

Capt. Hank Jenks..... (918) 331-5078
Capt. David Robertson..... (918) 431-2543
Capt. Todd Tobey..... (580) 513-2305
Capt. Tom Cartwright..... (580) 320-2955
Capt. Gary Emmons..... (405) 850-8701
Capt. Mark Walker..... (405) 368-0888
Capt. Jeff Headrick..... (580) 623-0191
Capt. Ben Bickerstaff..... (580) 304-6034

Adair - 2

Lt. Jared Cramer..... (918) 431-2546
Game Warden..... (918) 431-2539

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Lt. James Edwards Jr..... (580) 799-3950

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Billy Bob Walker..... (580) 320-2956
Cody Jones..... (580) 320-2957

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Carter - 5

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Operation Game Thief: (800) 522-8039 for anonymous reports, possible cash awards



DARIN HILL/ODWC

BARGAIN PERMIT UNLOCKS 560 SQUARE MILES OF PRIVATELY OWNED HUNTING, FISHING LAND

BY MICHAEL BERGIN, SENIOR
COMMUNICATION AND
EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Fun fact: As an Oklahoma resident, you can have a year's hunting and fishing access to privately owned wildlife habitat that totals more area than the city limits of Chicago, Denver and Atlanta combined – all for just \$136 or less.

This sizable opportunity is brought to you by your Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and scores of landowners who agree to partner with the state and lease these areas for your benefit.

Specifically, the areas in focus are **Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area, Honobia Creek WMA, Herron Family WMA**, and dozens of sites statewide that are enrolled in the Oklahoma Land Access Program. Altogether, these areas amount to more than 360,000 acres of prime hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities.

All it takes for a resident to hunt or fish within these areas is an annual hunting or fishing license (\$36 or \$31), or a lifetime license, plus an

annual land access permit (\$100). Oklahoma residents age 17 or younger on the first day of the current calendar year are exempt from the land access permit requirements, as are residents 64 or older.

But what if you only want to visit these areas without hunting or fishing? A three-day special use land access permit is available to residents for nonhunting and nonfishing activities (\$20).

Nonresidents with the appropriate license(s) may also hunt and fish most of these areas when they purchase the annual nonresident land access permit (\$200).

Not only is this public access to so much private land provided at an incredible bargain, but it's also more exclusive. Fewer hunters avail themselves of these opportunities because of the extra permit. Many people may not realize that land access permit revenue is necessary to continue offering these private-land leases; it helps offset the Wildlife Department's costs for leasing, managing habitat and enforcing wildlife laws on these areas.

HONOBIA CREEK AND THREE RIVERS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

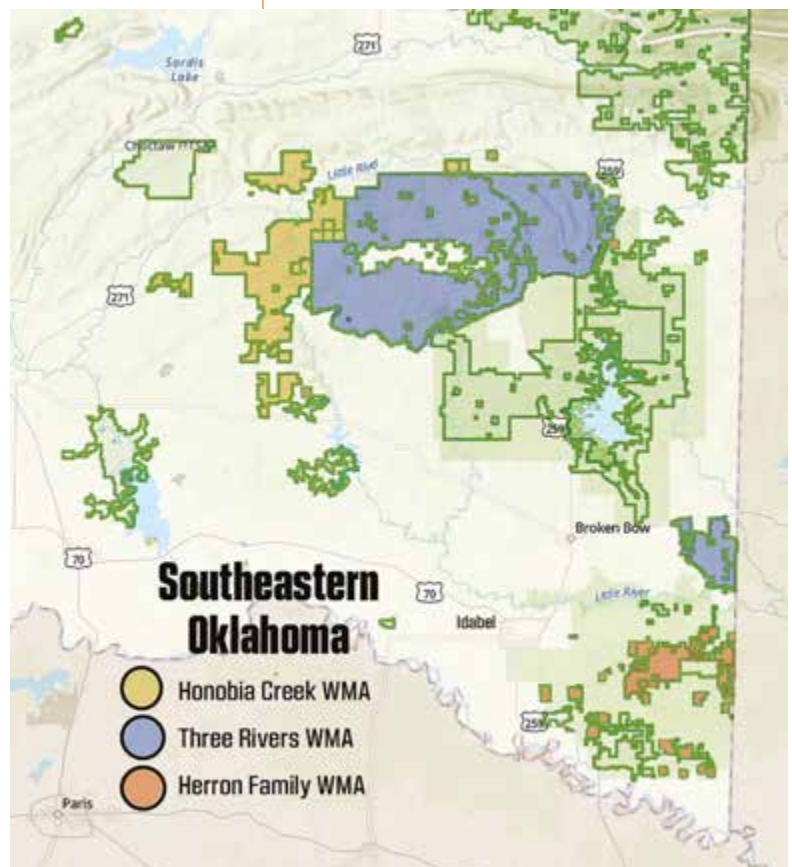
The land within Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs is owned by private timber companies that have working lease agreements with the Wildlife Department to provide public access.

Both WMAs are in southeastern Oklahoma. Honobia Creek covers more than 65,700 acres in Pushmataha, Le Flore and McCurtain counties. Three Rivers WMA is comprised of more than 184,800 acres leased in McCurtain and Pushmataha counties. Both WMAs are mostly covered with loblolly pine plantations interspersed with stands of hardwood species such as oaks and hickories.

Both areas hold good numbers of game animals including deer, Eastern wild turkeys, squirrels, cottontail and swamp rabbits, furbearers and black bears. Even quail hunters will find birds in moderate to good numbers thanks to special management efforts aimed at improving upland bird habitat.

Honobia Creek includes a walk-in-only turkey hunting area, giving hunters the opportunity to hunt away from vehicular disturbance. Also, two areas are available for non-ambulatory people. Fishing for sunfish, flathead catfish, channel catfish and bass can be found in the Little River.

Three Rivers offers three walk-in-only turkey





Herron Family WMA

hunting areas and two non-ambulatory areas. The Glover River, among few free-flowing streams in Oklahoma, runs through Three Rivers. Anglers can catch smallmouth bass and sunfish using only light spinning or fly-fishing tackle.

Nongame wildlife in these WMAs includes dozens of bird species — including bald

eagles — and even alligators in low numbers at Three Rivers.

Both WMAs are dotted with small ponds and miles of rivers, streams and creeks.

Management efforts for both areas focus on preserving hardwood stands and maintaining travel corridors during clear-cutting. Select roads are closed and managed as forest openings. Small agricultural food plots for wildlife are planted annually.

Primitive camping within 50 yards of an open road during open WMA hunting seasons is allowed in both WMAs. Lodging and restaurants are available in nearby Hochatown and Broken Bow.



Honobia Creek WMA

HERRON FAMILY WMA (OKLAHOMA RESIDENT ACCESS ONLY)

A new land leasing partnership has begun this year with Herron Industries LLC to open the new Herron Family WMA in McCurtain County. The area includes about 17,720 acres that are open this fall to Oklahoma residents after the company agreed to a five-year lease. Herron Industries is a family-owned timber producer with headquarters in Idabel. The area offers hunting for deer, turkey and other game.

Pete Herron, co-manager at Herron Industries and vice president of the Herron Family Tree Farm, said, "The Herron family has been growing Oklahoma's best timber since 1944. We have always been committed to the state of Oklahoma and the good people that reside here."

This new WMA is the first to allow only Oklahoma residents. To see a map of Herron Family WMA, go to wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma/southeast/herron-family-wma.

OKLAHOMA LAND ACCESS PROGRAM (OLAP)

The Wildlife Department's Oklahoma Land Access Program (OLAP) provides financial incentives to landowners who allow public access for hunting, fishing, stream access, and wildlife viewing opportunities on private lands. As such, the Wildlife Department does not own any properties enrolled in OLAP. Rather, the agency leases them annually. While there are some grant funds to help pay these leases, some agency funds are still required as match for these grants. The Land Access Permit helps cover these matching funds.

The end result is roughly 92,000 acres of privately owned lands opened for activities like hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, with even more acres planned in the future. Some of these lands are limited access and require checking in before accessing to ensure the best experience for users and landowners. Full details, including locations and maps, can be found at wildlifedepartment.com/lands-and-minerals/olap.

These lands described above that are offered with the land access permit are part of an even larger offering of about 1.5 million-plus acres at more than 100 sites that ODWC manages statewide for fish and wildlife conservation and habitat — areas that are available for the enjoyment of hunters, anglers, wildlife watchers, and sport shooters on established ranges. For a list of all areas, go to wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma.

To say Oklahomans are blessed with ample outdoor access is an understatement, and with the land access permit, hunters and anglers are able to access even more opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be possible. 🍷

DARRIN HILL/ODWC



Herron Family WMA



HEATHER DEL MORAL/ODWC

Herron Family WMA

Fields Off Bender Road Flush With Birds And Memories

BY DALTON DENNIS



Bender Road in Newkirk, Okla., was no different than any other gravel road in the plains. But in a lineup of gravel roads from across middle America, I could identify it faster than a trigger finger could release a shotshell of game load. The scene before my minivan windshield was a sea of harvested fields and cow pastures. The sky stole everything above the horizon – a vast blue peppered with a handful of cotton-ball clouds.

Rolling down this road was a spiritual experience. It's been 15 years since I had Bender's gravel beneath a set of tires, but she hadn't aged a day.

"This place sucks." I glared through my rear-view mirror at my young daughter, Susan, in the backseat. Her arms were folded, her lip curled as she stared out the window. "Why can't we just go home. There's nothing to do here."

"Yeah, this place sucks, Dad," echoed her sister, June, peering out the other window. I gripped the steering wheel until my knuckles turned white.

"I'm sure they have a couch where you two can slouch all day and scroll on your phones. If that's what you consider something to do, you'll be right at home," I said. They maintained their standoffs with the landscape.

Then Juliana, my wife, made her point.

"Honey, this is going to make us get back really late tonight. The kids have school in the morning, and we both have to work. I know you have talked about wanting one for years, but is this worth it for a stuffed bird in your office?"

"Not a bird. A pheasant. I just told Jared we were in the area, and he invited us to stop by. We might not even go hunting."

Juliana rolled her eyes. "Just make sure we leave before dark."

For the first time, I wasn't met with the Schieber's farm dog when we rolled onto their property. She greeted us from afar as she rested on the front porch with her nose hanging over the last step. Susan and June stepped out of the car and examined the expanse around them. They looked like little astronauts freshly dropped onto an unknown planet.

Jared and his two sons stood in front of a two-story. His wife, Derion, was on her way to the house. They waved us over.



"How was the service?" Jared asked. He wore a tattered flannel jacket with a hood, boots with holes on the sides, and a rough pair of jeans. His hairline, like mine, now rested a little farther from when we wrestled together at the University of Oklahoma.

"It was great to see all our family together. Unfortunately, it takes a funeral to get that done these days," I answered.

Jared dug his hands into his hips. "Don't be rude; are you going to say hi?" Jared looked at his sons. All four kids stood like statues staring at each other. "Go play or something." Jared motioned to the distance. The kids wandered away in silence. "Wanna chase some birds?" he asked me. "Toby is

already out there waiting for us." I placed a pair of wide eyes on my face and shared them with Juliana.

Jared slipped into the barn and returned with two canvas shotgun cases.



We parked Jared's pickup off another dirt road in front of a barbed-wire fence. Jared loaned me a pair of boots and a Carhartt coat. Jared's dad, Toby, was leaning against the flat bed of his truck. Nestled between his weathered, calloused fingers was his signature companion: A Marlboro Gold cigarette.

"About time you girls showed up," Toby said. He took a long draw on his cigarette, sucking the remaining life out of the thin roll of tobacco. He crushed what was left on the bottom of his crusty leather boot. I reached out my hand to shake, but he swatted it away and traded me a tight hug instead.

"Well, it must be 10 years since I've seen myself a Dennis brother," Toby said. "What brings a city slicker like you back here?"

"My grandpa died," I said. Toby's worn and wrinkled face lost expression.

"I figured someone must have died to get you back here."

"Looks like those things haven't killed you yet," I said as Toby eyed his next smoke.

"No, but they are doing their best. The doc found some spots on my lungs last month." My chest tightened. I looked at Jared's face, but it remained unmoved.



"I'll be praying for you." The aftertaste of my words was like the awkward finish of artificial sweetener. I said it without thinking. It felt like something I needed to say. Something I used to say. I remembered when I used to talk to God every night. I hadn't heard from Him in years.

"You can save the prayers. He didn't give me cancer."

Jared opened the passenger door of his truck and drew a shotgun from one of the canvas cases. "That isn't your old 1100," I said.

"No sir, I got this new Browning over the summer." Engraved on the side of swirled black action were the words 'Browning A5'. The stock was a polished light-grain walnut.

"Wow, she is a beauty." Jared grabbed another shotgun from the other case. He handed the gun to me, as if he were handing over a child. It had a deep brown wooden finish and dark patina that ran over the bluing of the barrel.

"Your 1100?"

"She is all yours today."

"You boys walk this here draw between the soybean fields to the end of the property," Toby said, bobbing at the field. "I'll drive down to the end and block the birds. I'm better at shooting birds as a blocker," he said.

"As if you had a choice," Jared quipped.



Tommy, the Schiebers' new German short-haired pointer, ran all over the draw like a

Tasmanian devil. The field, cut low, was soggy from winter rains. Mud caked on our boot soles, layer by layer, until they were awkward and heavy.

"Birds!" Jared shouted. Tommy was drawn like a petrified statue, tail locked behind. Jared and I drew in and readied ourselves. Quail exploded, and we both let off a litany of shots. Jared dropped two birds, and I dropped one.

"Are there still a lot of pheasants up here?" I asked.

"Hardly any these days," Jared said. "Not sure exactly what happened, but we are lucky to see a handful of roosters a season."

"I guess that's how time works. Things just come and go."

We drove a few more miles across a couple different roads, then pulled off by another wide "I'll walk this one with you, boys," Toby said.

"If you get tired, we aren't carrying you out of here," I said.

"Don't worry about me, city slicker."

We walked the field without any blocker. Jared was on the left, I was in the middle, and Toby on the right. We trudged through the thorns and thicket, hollering as we kicked up the brush with our boots. After one of Toby's kicks, a single quail flew up. In one sweeping motion, he shot the quail out of the air while balancing a sizzling Marlboro Gold in his mouth. We cheered like we were at a football game.



Sunset was about an hour away. I pulled out my phone and checked the time. Then I pushed out a heavy breath. "I think it may be time for me to head back."

As we stowed our shotguns, I hollered to Toby. "It's a shame there aren't any pheasants around here anymore. I still kick myself for not getting one mounted. But I guess things just come and go." Toby stopped in his tracks.

"That's because you idiots killed them all." He slid into his truck and shut the door.

As we rattled down the road on our way back to Jared's place, I slipped into a trance staring at the fenceposts as they slipped by. I wondered if this would be the last time I was back in these fields. A flood of orange and purple hues was spilling across the horizon. I could remember everything. Every face from every friend from our covey in college. Years ago, we were huddled together in these draws, unaware time would flush us out. Sometimes it seems like a lesson that I can't learn — to truly savor great seasons of life.

Back at the barn, the late evening set in, and the breeze retreated, allowing the fields to still. The sun was just a glow on the horizon, leaving just enough light to clean our birds without any artificial help. I pressed my thumbs into the birds and began ripping away clumps of feathers and skin. The cleaned birds felt warm against my numb fingertips. And soon, it was time to go.



Jared, Derion, and their kids stood on the porch, waving us goodbye. Again, I was driving down Bender Road without a Chinese ring-necked pheasant to mount.

"Dad, when can we come back?" Susan asked. "Yeah Dad, when can we come back," June followed. Their jeans were covered in dirt.

Within minutes, the chorus of chirping from the backseats dissolved into silence. I glanced into the rearview mirror and spied both girls fast asleep. Juliana squeezed my hand.

"I'm glad I got to talk with Derion," Juliana said. I squeezed her hand back.

My heart was full. What a blessing my covey is. Although, like everything, I knew it wasn't permanent. One day, time would creep up and flush out my little girls. Juliana and I aren't immune, either. One day, time will walk up and flush one of us as well. But for now, each day is a gift.

Leaving Schieber farm was like the bitter finish of black coffee after a slice of cake. As we drove down that gravel road, I couldn't help but think about the rotation of time. The farm dogs that used to nip at our tires could now barely limp toward us. The old man who would toss feed to his chickens was now part of the earth. Everything turns over, like an overnight tide wiping the shoreline for a new slate of footprints in the morning.

Now, young pups nip at the tires. Young hands scatter feed to the chickens. Another rotation.

Except on Bender Road, where for me, time never passes and the memories are immortal. ♡



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dalton Dennis is an Edmond, Okla., writer, musician and outdoorsman who grew up in Clearwater, Fla., fishing and crabbing in Tampa Bay. He began hunting while wrestling for the University of Oklahoma and now enjoys hunting and fishing across the country and writing stories with outdoor themes.

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



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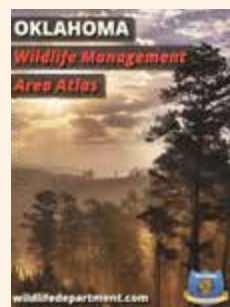
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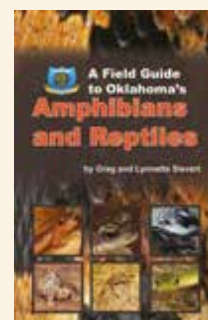
OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA ATLAS

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

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GREATER ROADRUNNER

BY KAYLEEN SUGIANTO, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION INTERN

Zooming by at speeds up to 20 mph and bolting from danger with the iconic sharp call of “meep meep” is none other than the greater roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*).

It seems this bird was born to be a track star — and to outwit wily coyotes.

Males and females have an identical appearance. They sport bold mottled streaks of brown and white over most of the upper body, powerful long legs, a lengthy feathery tail, white undersides, and a ruffled crest on the top of its head. This bird can also have a banner

of colorful facial skin starting from its eyes and moving backward, from pale blue to white, then breaking into a vermilion red-orange.

When they run, the head extends forward and the tail feathers rearward, parallel to the ground. They use the long tailfeathers to act as a rudder to change directions while running.

While they prefer keeping their feet on the ground, glossy

dark rounded feathers of blue and green can be seen when it chooses to fly as a last resort.

Greater roadrunners, also called chapparals, reach lengths of 20 to 24 inches, with females being slightly smaller in size than males. They are members of the cuckoo family, and often look quite comical when shaking their tail in moments of curiosity.

The species’ home range is the Desert Southwest, but it has expanded eastward through Oklahoma and as far as Louisiana. They prefer open areas with a mix of light brush or small trees as found in deserts, brushy country and even some roadsides.

In Oklahoma, roadrunners are more likely to be seen in western and southern parts of the state.

The greater roadrunners take on unique adaptations to combat their extreme climates by lowering their body temperature on cool nights and manipulating their feathers to expose a patch of skin that absorbs the rising sun’s heat in the mornings. Thanks to their long and heavy bills, they don’t have a picky diet and will feed on most anything from snakes to small birds, insects and fruit.

Springtime prompts the males to offer a fine meal — perhaps a lizard or snake — to a potential mate, maybe with the addition of a tail wag display, too. The pair will build a nest in a tree and share incubating duties for three to five eggs laid by the female, then take turns running around to feed the chicks after they hatch.

The young are ready to leave the nest and start their own journey at about 3 weeks old, but the parents will continue to teach them how to hunt for several weeks.

Keep your ears and eyes open when outdoors, and you might catch a glimpse of a roadrunner darting out from a shrub when you least expect it. Look for roadrunners along quiet country roads, and listen for their dove-like coos and clucks. Roadsides present a buffet for roadrunners, with reptiles basking or rodents and birds hanging around seed-bearing plants.

The greater roadrunner is the state bird of New Mexico, and is also the mascot of several high schools and colleges in the United States. ♡

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JERRY SPEARS/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2023

Breathtaking hues of orange, red and purple dance across a vivid wintertime sky as the fading day welcomes another crisp, dark night across beautiful Outdoor Oklahoma.

Outdoor Oklahoma

