

McCurtain County Wilderness Area



Red-cockaded
Woodpecker by
G.M. Sutton

Department of Wildlife Conservation
1801 N. Lincoln
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
405/521-2739

Location

Situated in the Kiamichi-Ouachita Mountain region of southeastern Oklahoma, the McCurtain County Wilderness Area is the last sizable expanse of old growth oak/shortleaf pine forest in the nation. It is located 25 miles north of Broken Bow, Oklahoma, and eight miles east of Highway 259.

Visitors may enter from the west and leave their vehicles at the nature trail parking lot between the area entrance and the manager's headquarters. From this point, they may explore the primitive west side ridges and slopes along the nature trail or, under the direction of the area manager, travel across a narrow channel of Broken Bow Reservoir to the rugged east side.

History

The McCurtain County Wilderness Area was set aside by an act of the Oklahoma Legislature in 1918. These 14,087 acres made up the first large tract of land assigned to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Within its fenced and marked boundary lies the only expansive virgin forest under state stewardship.

The Environment

The McCurtain County Wilderness Area lies in the southern portion of the Ouachita Uplift. The terrain is characterized by a series of steep and narrow wooded ridges. Elevations vary from about 575 feet above sea level at Broken Bow Reservoir, to 1,363 feet on Pine Mountain. The preserve is located in the area of Oklahoma which receives the highest annual rainfall, an average of 47.5 inches per year. Temperatures range from an average high of 93 degrees (F.) in July to an average low of 28 degrees (F.) in January.

The McCurtain Wilderness supports a rich and diverse community of plants and animals. On the lower slopes, sugar and red maple, blue beech, sweet gum, red and white oak are prevalent. In the upland areas, shortleaf pine, hickories, post and blackjack oak are the dominant trees. Dogwood and redbud are also common trees and produce a brilliant floral display in early spring. Shrubby vegetation includes sumac, huckleberry,

elderberry, beautyberry, hawthorn, buckbrush and others. A variety of wildflowers, ferns, mosses, mushrooms and lichens enrich the many woodland habitats.

The wildlife which live as an integral part of the forest community include white-tailed deer, coyote, bobcat, red and gray fox, raccoon, striped skunk, opossum, armadillo, gray fox, flying squirrel, cottontail and swamp rabbit, as well as many bats and rodents. Birds include resident species such as wild turkey, bobwhite quail, various raptors and woodpeckers as well as a wealth of migrant species. At least 110 species of birds have been recorded within the wilderness area boundaries. The red-cockaded woodpecker, a federally endangered species, has its last toehold in Oklahoma within the wilderness area. Here, this species is on the northwest extreme of its present continental range.

A host of reptiles, amphibians, insects and other arthropods round out the natural forest fauna. Linson Creek, the major stream course within the area, supports several species of sunfish, darters, minnows and bass.

The region's natural balance is complex and dependent upon continued protection. Oklahomans today demand careful management of this area which was so wisely set aside by people whose vision and foresight far exceeded their own short lifespans.

The Wilderness Area is a living yardstick which can be used to measure natural undisturbed processes of ecological succession or change. The quality of this environment can be used as an index standard for many parts of Oklahoma and other states in future restorations and reclamation.

To the Visitor

The west side parking lot and nature trail is open to the public on a year-round basis. Here visitors may explore the primitive west side ridges and slopes along with the Broken Bow Reservoir shoreline from the nature trail. For excursions into the rugged east side, visitors must obtain a permit by writing: Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, 1801 North Lincoln, Oklahoma City, OK 73105.

Rules and Regulations

Because of the unique features of the Wilderness Area, certain activities must be controlled. The following are not permitted:

1. Trespass of off-road vehicles, including motorcycles and ATVs.
2. Fireworks or any noisemaker.
3. Pets.
4. Removal of any natural

object.

5. Litter and waste of any kind including abandonment or prolonged storage of property.
6. Smoking or any other type of fire.
7. Camping.
8. Fishing or boating except on Broken Bow Lake waters.
9. Unlawful or disorderly conduct.

