

## **Predator Hunting on the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs**

The arrival of December often reminds us that the deer gun season is winding down and it's time to begin that holiday shopping. For predator hunters, December 1 brings in a whole different level of excitement- it's time to predator hunt. While deer gun hunters are beginning to clean their rifles, predator hunters are making sure their guns are still sighted in and ready for some intense action. Whether the preferred weapon of choice is a rifle, bow, or shotgun, all predator hunters should consider a visit to southeast Oklahoma and experience a little different type of predator hunt among the diverse forest habitat found on the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).

Coyote, bobcat, gray fox, and red fox, although secretive, are common throughout the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs. The vastness of the two public hunting areas combined with the abundant and diverse habitat and light hunting pressure creates the perfect opportunity for predator hunters to experience some great hunting action. While forest clear-cut areas offer open areas for hunters looking for the challenge of long rifle shots, both young and mature stands of timber provide opportunities for close action for bow and shotgun hunters alike. Many hunting methods and strategies are available to choose from and trying a variety of methods in different types of habitat is the key to learning which method is most enjoyable and rewarding.

One hunting method that is perfect for the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs is referred to as the drop and walk method. Simply put, one vehicle is dropped at a location where the hunt will end while a second vehicle is used to get to the spot where the hunt begins. The hunting party simply walks and hunts between the two vehicles. On smaller public and private land areas, the drop and walk method may be difficult, but because the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs offer more than 280,000-acres of land, the drop and walk method is perfect for allowing a hunter to cover hundreds of acres of habitat in relatively short time. The WMAs offer more than 15,000-acres of walk-in only hunting areas that have many through roads to walk and hunt and use the drop and walk method. In addition, these walk-in only areas have an abundance of deer and turkey as well as predators.

While a little scouting certainly will help when it comes to predator hunting, going after predators blind and on the fly can be just as successful. Learning a little about the biology of each predator including how to identify predator tracks and scat is helpful in determining which predators may be abundant in each specific area. In general, predators tend to use routes which are easily traveled including roads, game trails, fence rows, and creek bottoms. These areas are great places to look for the presence of tracks and scat to help determine set-up locations. Once a great spot is found, knowing how to set-up for the hunt is very important.

A correct set-up can be the difference between a predator coming within shooting range or fleeing the scene before the hunter even knows he was there. Setting up with a clear view of the trail or corridor is important, but other factors are important as well. Whenever possible, remember to set up to allow a full range of motion to maximize shot opportunities. Predators won't always come in from the front. Often, predators will try and circle the scene to wind any potential danger that may be present. For this reason, it is important to consider which direction the wind is from and use a good cover scent or scent killer. Positioning so that the sun is facing

into the predator's eyes will also help to make it a little more difficult for the predator to spot the danger. Wearing camouflage clothing and setting up in some dense foliage will help in blending in with the habitat and keeping even the wariest predator from knowing that something is up. Once set-up is complete, the use of the predator calls can begin.

There are hundreds of different types of predator calls on the market ranging in price from very inexpensive to several hundreds of dollars. Many a predator has been called in with calls that sell for around \$10. Electronic calls, although more expensive, provide many benefits including the ability to be played at high volumes and the assurance that every call will be perfect in sound. Perhaps the biggest drawback of using electronic calls is that they can be bulky and heavy to use. Manual mouth calls are usually inexpensive, versatile, lightweight, and easy to master with a little practice. Whatever the call, viewing some predator hunting videos and learning how often to call, how loud to call, and which sounds to use can be very helpful. In general, distress calls from rabbits, rodents, and birds frequently catch the attention of any predator and should be in every predator hunter's bag when heading afield.

In many circumstances, the use of a decoy in addition to calling can provide that extra little bit of confidence to lure the predator in. A properly placed decoy will help keep the attention off the caller and provide that assurance the predator is looking for that there is a free meal available. In addition, many predators will rush in quickly once the decoy is spotted before another predator can move in and swipe the meal. A decoy won't always guarantee success, but can be the determining factor whether a predator comes in or not, especially bobcats which hunt more by sight than sound.

For bobcats, the best hunting is usually the first few hours after sunrise or two or three hours before sunset since bobcats are primarily night hunters. While a bobcat may come charging in at the first sound of a call, most often a bobcat will sit and rely on its eyesight to catch a glimpse of its next meal. Coyotes, on the other hand, are often considered by predator hunters as the most difficult predator to call in. Certainly, many a coyote has come charging to a distress call fast and furious, but many will spend time circling a hunter to catch the scent of any potential danger. One advantage about going after coyotes is that they can be called in from daylight until dark. A nice warm day after a cold weather system moves out is a perfect day to go coyote hunting. Although still a challenge, both red fox and gray fox are considered easier to call in than other predators.

Great predator hunting and endless scenery are just a little of what the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs offer. For detailed information about the WMAs, including the rules and regulations, be sure to visit [www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com) or contact the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area biologist at 918-527-5308 before planning your next hunting trip to the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs.

The Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs are privately owned by timber companies but open to the public through cooperative agreements between the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and each timber company. Accessing the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs for any type of recreation does require each person to

purchase a Land Access Fee permit. The permit, \$40 for Oklahoma residents between the ages of 18 and 64 and \$85 for nonresidents (no age exemptions for nonresidents), is good for one calendar year and is sold at all locations in Oklahoma that sell hunting and fishing licenses. All revenue from each Land Access Fee permit sold goes not only toward the management of the WMAs, but also to pay the timber companies an annual lease fee to help keep the WMAs open for the public to enjoy. Please, when visiting the WMAs, be sure to leave only footprints. Picking up any trash or litter is a great way for everyone to help keep the WMAs open for all to enjoy.



Bobcats are just one of the three main predators present On the wildlife management areas.



Forest clear-cut areas are good locations to scout for predators especially when the clear-cut borders a mature stand of timber.



A predator call, a decoy, and some camouflage are all that is needed to experience a day of great predator hunting.