

Outdoor Oklahoma

MARCH/APRIL 2020 – ONLY \$10 A YEAR

OUR
75TH
YEAR

In This Issue:

2020 Angler's Guide

**Follow the Trail
To Great Fishing**



A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



Panoramas

Remember the days when you'd come in from the woods and go to your local check station? Hear everyone's stories and share yours? Tell of the huge buck you just barely missed? Check stations and hunting camps are becoming memories. Nowadays, there is less community and more individualism.

The next generation's hunters are venturing out by themselves to chase that Boone and Crockett buck they've watched for three years. Many leave their kids behind because they're squirmy and loud, and they think they would rather play video games. Truth is they are waiting to be asked to go, but they really want a buddy to come along as well.

There are hunters who fell out of the sport because the folks that let them hunt now have their property leased. Then there are hunters who got too busy with life, work and kids to get into the woods anymore.

The sad fact is we're losing hunters at a steady rate. Participation as a whole is declining. Currently 60 percent of license holders actively participate. Just 30 years ago, that number was 78 percent. Why? Mostly because the largest cohort of hunters (Baby Boomers) is aging out. Within 10-15 years, most will have dropped out. Our hunter numbers will plummet.

Current hunters are not replacing themselves by introducing new people to the outdoors. That's probably the last thing current hunters want to consider, because the woods are crowded as it is. But more 40-and-younger hunters is exactly what is needed! Hunting supports conservation. What will happen without hunters?

State agencies and nongovernmental organizations have been trying to combat this problem. In the past decade, the push has picked up steam. The label "R3" was coined, standing for Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation. Many pro-

grams across the nation were R3-focused, but mostly on the Recruitment segment, and mostly using one-day events. Experts now encourage Retention and Reactivation, because if we keep current sportspeople from lapsing, they can be the natural recruiters of the next generation. State wildlife agencies are restructuring programs such as Controlled Hunts and implementing marketing strategies to keep our sportspeople engaged.



ODWC's newest program, Learn to Hunt, is a true recruitment program and will debut in July. We will pair a mentor with a novice and a family member for a yearlong mentorship. Mentors will come from groups like National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, and Ducks Unlimited. Each month, the mentor, novice and family member will enjoy an exercise or hunt. These sessions will build on each other to give the novice a

well-rounded experience.

ODWC, NWTF and all our partners are very optimistic about Learn to Hunt. We believe that multiple exposures combined with the social support of a mentor and family member will help to ignite a passion and establish a tradition for the outdoors that can last a lifetime!

A stylized, handwritten signature of Kasie Joyner in black ink.

Kasie Joyner, NWTF, R3 Coordinator

P.S. Make it a point to take someone hunting this year!

Editor's Note: Joyner's position as hunting R3 coordinator was made possible through a partnership of ODWC and NWTF

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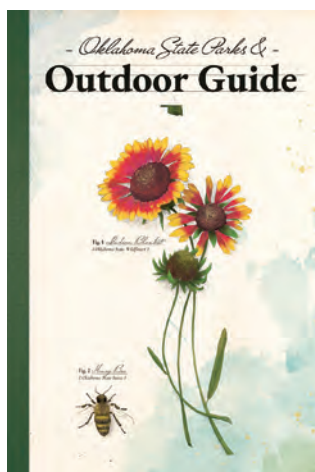
Off the Beaten Path

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

FIND OUTDOOR ADVENTURE IDEAS IN FREE GUIDE

Looking for outdoor adventure opportunities? The 2020 Oklahoma State Parks & Outdoor Guide contains more than 200 pages of ideas to help everyone enjoy the Oklahoma outdoors. It is free to order at www.TravelOK.com/Brochures.

"The Oklahoma outdoors provides so many one-of-a-kind experiences," said Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell, also the state's Secretary of Tourism & Branding. "Visitors can snag a paddlefish at Grand Lake, hike to the top of Black Mesa or play a round of golf at Beavers Bend's Cedar Creek Golf Course. We want travelers to read this guide and find out all they can do in Oklahoma, and we want Oklahomans to read it and be reminded of all the incredible adventures they can have



without leaving our great state's borders."

This year's guide is styled like a vintage field guide with colorful, watercolor-style illustrations of flora and fauna found throughout the state. The cover features the state wildflower, the vividly colored *Gaillardia pulchella*, commonly known as the Indian blanket.

Readers will find stunning photos of Oklahoma's most beautiful places along with information on each of the Oklahoma State Parks and other popular outdoor destinations. There are also directories of outdoor activities, RV and tent camping locations, and cabins and lodges across the state.

The Oklahoma Fishing Trail brochure is another of the many guides available for order at TravelOK.com. ☛☛

There are many ways to get a free 2020 Oklahoma State Parks & Outdoor Guide:

- Visit www.TravelOK.com/Brochures.
- Call (800) 652-6552 and press 1.
- Visit a Tourism Information Center.
- Visit an Oklahoma State Park office.

GROUP TEACHES WOMEN ABOUT SKEET SHOOTING

Women are learning about shotgunning thanks to a group called "Chicks Breakin' Clays" based at Oklahoma City Gun Club. There are just a few spots remaining for this year.

The first four weeks will be training for the game of skeet. The second four weeks will be a Chicks skeet league. A "Chick-abration" will be Monday, May 4.

The group can assist women who don't have a shotgun, who have no shooting experience, and who desire one-on-one instruction. Those with little or no experience in shooting a shotgun are required to attend the FIRST Steps Shotgun Class.

"Shooting with other chicks is a blast!" said Paula Tate, group organizer.

The program offers several choices of when to attend. Sessions will be offered for eight weeks on Monday evenings starting March 9 and on Tuesday mornings starting March 10 (weather permitting). Two evening sessions will be from 4 to 6 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. Two morning sessions will be from 9 to 11 a.m. and 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Anyone wanting to attend must pre-register. The cost for club members and nonmembers is \$25 plus the current cost for targets (around \$4 per round of 25). Participants provide their own



ammunition, at least two boxes per session.

If you are interested in joining the "Chicks" or have questions, contact Tate at (405) 250-0607 or email her at skeetpair@gmail.com. ☛☛

CONTROLLED HUNTS: CHANCE TO SHARE THE HERITAGE

KELLY ADAMS/DOWNG



Frequent exposure and a committed mentor is needed to help a new hunter progress from curiosity to confidence. The Controlled Hunts program offers unique hunts often outside the regular statewide season dates, such as this muzzleloader hunt at McGee Creek WMA, that potentially serve as the perfect opportunity to support someone new on their journey as a hunter.

By Michael Bergin, Senior Information Specialist

Sometimes \$5 is all it takes for a chance at a priceless memory. That's how it is for hunters who enter the Controlled Hunts drawing conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The program offers the chance to hunt big game and wild turkeys in prime locations at prime times, often outside the regular season and for game that never counts in a hunter's statewide annual limit. High-quality hunts, high-quality game and just \$5 to enter — there really is no reason not to apply!

But there's more. While the chance for a legendary deer or elk hunt in the Wichita Mountains or the many extra antlerless deer hunting opportunities offered through this program may be tempting enough, consider also that someone close to you might be interested in learning to hunt. And you might be the only person who can teach them. Some of these highly sought-after opportunities are held outside the regular statewide seasons and often can be applied for in groups of up to four friends or family members.

It's well-known social science that frequent exposure and a helpful mentor can go a long way in helping newcomers become committed hunters. And committed hunters are precisely what is needed to ensure wildlife conservation for the future. The Oklahoma Wildlife Department and wildlife conservation are funded primarily by sportsmen and sportswomen through their purchase of hunting and fishing licenses, as well as by taxes on certain sporting goods. Quite literally, if active hunters and anglers don't share their heritage, conservation suffers.

The Controlled Hunts program is a great starting point for inviting someone along this year.

The Controlled Hunts application period will open in early April through the Wildlife Department's Go Outdoors Oklahoma online system. Applicants will simply log in to their profile at license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com, click on the "Controlled Hunts" tile at the top right, apply for the hunts of their choosing, then pay their \$5 application fee. A party application can be used to apply in groups for many of the hunts, and hunters can also view their preference points while logged in. Successful applicants will be notified via email this summer. ☘

My Licenses	Effective Date	Expiration Date	Auto Renew
HIP	08/31/2018	06/30/2019	
Lifetime Resident Fishing	12/31/2012	12/31/2212	
Lifetime Resident Hunting	06/30/1981	06/30/2181	

Apply through your Go Outdoors Oklahoma profile, as shown above.

WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM

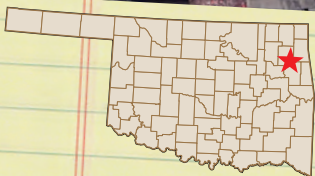
TWO LAKE RECORDS SET FOR SMALLMOUTH BASS

New state- or lake-record fish have been added to the Wildlife Department's official database in recent weeks. Here is a snapshot of the big ones that didn't get away!



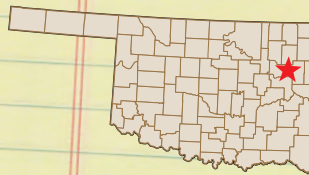
Hudson Lake Record Smallmouth Bass

Weight:
6 pounds, 0 ounces.
Length:
21.75 inches.
Girth:
15 inches.
Angler:
Cory Conley of Catoosa.
Method of Catch:
Baitcasting rod and reel.
Date Caught:
Jan. 6, 2020.
Area Caught:
Salina Creek.



Fort Gibson Lake Record Smallmouth Bass

Weight:
6.2 pounds.
Length:
20.51 inches.
Girth:
15.5 inches.
Angler:
Clifton J. Light III
of Tahlequah.
Method of Catch:
Spinning rod and reel.
Date Caught:
Jan. 8, 2020.
Area Caught:
Below dam.



What's the biggest fish you've ever caught? A 7-pound largemouth, a 2-pound crappie or a 45-pound blue catfish? While your fish might not be a new state record, it possibly could be the biggest fish ever caught from your favorite lake. Thanks to a network of record-keepers at lakes across the state, your next trophy could qualify as a lake record.

The Lake Record Fish Program was established as a way to serve anglers and recognize big fish and the lakes they come from. To find out more, go to www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/state-and-lake-records. ❧❧



ENTRIES DUE APRIL 15 FOR PHOTO SHOWCASE ISSUE

Imagine the pride you will feel when you open the July/August issue of Outdoor Oklahoma to show your friends the remarkable photograph that you took! Your dream of being published in a high-quality magazine could come true if you enter the annual Readers' Photography Showcase competition.

April 15 is the deadline for submissions in this year's contest. We hope you will consider sharing your four best original photos, preferable all taken in Oklahoma.

The Readers' Photo Showcase issue is always the most popular Outdoor Oklahoma magazine of the whole year! And you can be a part of it just by going online, uploading your digital photo, and hitting the "submit" button. It's easy!

Go to the entry page online at www.tinyurl.com/enterRPS. ❧❧



DEBBIE PECK/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2019

Outdoor Calendar

FOR NEW UPDATES TO THE OUTDOOR CALENDAR,
PLEASE VISIT THE DEPARTMENT'S
WEBSITE: WWW.WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM/CALENDAR.HTM

MARCH 2020

1	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.
2	Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City.
7	Oklahoma City free fishing day, no city permit required. Adult fly fishing class, 9 a.m.-noon, H.B. Parsons Fish Hatchery, Oklahoma City.
8	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA. Daylight Saving Time begins.
15	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.
17	Okla. Striped Bass Assn. meeting, 7 p.m., Zebco, Tulsa, (918) 639-8114.
22	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.
28	Trout Unlimited OK Chapter 420/Tulsa Fly Fishers banquet, 5:30 p.m., Ruckers Event Center, Tulsa, speaker Bob Clouser, www.tu420.com . Hunter education class, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., McLoud Public Library, register at license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com , (405) 850-8546.
29	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.

- **Ducks Unlimited** events set in Enid, March 7; Wagoner, March 7; Miami, March 20. Info: www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events.
- **Friends of NRA** events set in Guymon, March 7; Ada, March 19. Info: www.FriendsOfNRA.org.
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events set in Poteau, March 5; Pryor, March 6; Glenpool, March 7; Tahlequah, March 7; Seminole, March 7; Stroud, March 12; Muskogee, March 12; El Reno, March 13; Tahlequah, March 14; Ardmore, March 19; Wagoner, March 20; Woodward, March 27; Idabel, March 27; Talihina, March 27; Duncan, March 28; Oklahoma City, March 29. Info: www.nwtf.org/events.
- **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation** event set in Tuttle, March 21. Info: events.rmef.org.
- **Quail Forever** event set in Claremore, March 28. Info: OklahomaQuailForever.org.

APRIL 2020

4	Oklahoma City free fishing day, no city permit required.
5	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.
6	Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City.
12	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.
15	Readers' Photo Showcase entry period closes.
18	Adult fishing class, 8-11 a.m., Metro Tech Springlake Campus, Oklahoma City.
19	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.
21	Okla. Striped Bass Assn. meeting, 7 p.m., Zebco, Tulsa, (918) 639-8114.
24	Open House, H.B. Parsons Fish Hatchery, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Oklahoma City.
26	"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, TBD, 8 a.m., OETA.

- **Ducks Unlimited** events set in Ponca City, April 2; Kellyville, April 11; Tulsa, April 23. Info: www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events.
- **Friends of NRA** events info: www.FriendsOfNRA.org.
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events set in Guthrie, April 3; Claremore, April 3; Walters, April 11; Tishomingo, April 23. Info: www.nwtf.org/events.

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

WESTERN RANCHERS CAN HAVE BEEF AND BOBWHITES

An eight-page online publication from the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) details how western beef producers can increase bobwhite populations on their ranches with minimal impact on their bottom line.

"Rangeland in the western reaches of bobwhite range, when grazed appropriately, provides tremendous opportunities to support ... population recovery," said NBCI Grasslands Coordinator Jef Hodges. "We believe ranchers interested in increasing bobwhite numbers while not sacrificing their bottom line will find this publication helpful."

"Grazing Strategies for Beef Production and Bobwhites in Western Bobwhite Range" provides numerous strategies for maintaining both beef and bobwhites, noting that "... as a general rule, good range management (for cattle) is paramount to producing quality bobwhite habitat" and ... "there are techniques for grazing that have no or minimal impact on your bottom line, and under some circumstances may actually improve your profit while improving overall health and vigor of targeted native species and habitat for bobwhites."

The publication examines continuous grazing, deferred grazing, deferred rotation, patch-burn grazing and multi-paddock rotational grazing, as well as experimental systems.

The new publication is available for downloading on the NBCI website at www.tinyurl.com/BeefAndBobs. ❧



SIGN UP TO GET THE LATEST WILDLIFE NEWS BY EMAIL

Are you up-to-date with Wildlife Department happenings? The half-million concerned sportsmen and sportswomen who subscribe to receive the Department's news releases and newsletters certainly are!

Anyone can sign up online to get the latest information about various topics of your choosing. The Department's news releases and other types of information arrive periodically via email to your inbox. And the service is completely free!

Subscribers can pick and choose which informational topics they want to receive: Wildlife News, Weekly Fishing Report, Wild Side newsletter, Upland Update, Your Side of the Fence landowner newsletter, OLAP Updates, Outdoor Oklahoma TV and Magazine, and Miscellaneous and Auction Notices. And they can also manage when our releases are sent to them, whether daily upon release or weekly in a combined format.

Sign up now at www.tinyurl.com/ODWCnews. ❧

NEW GAME WARDEN LEARNS EVERY DAY DIFFERS

By Jena Donnell, Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist

Jacob Harriet has been a Game Warden with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation for less than a year and already enjoys the varied schedule that comes with the job.

“I never know what my workday will be like. Every day is different. That’s part of what makes the job so much fun.”

He is currently assigned to work in Lincoln County.

Harriet’s journey to becoming one of the Wildlife Department’s 117 Game Wardens began when he was 12 years old.

“A Game Warden came out to tag the bobcats I had trapped and talked to me about his job. Hearing that I could work outside and in nature — helping people and helping animals — I knew that was the job I wanted.”

Harriet would need a bachelor’s degree with at least 12 credit hours in wildlife-related courses and be at least 21 years old before he could join the ranks of those sworn to enforce the fish and wildlife laws of our state. Nearly a decade after his first encounter with a Game Warden, he met those requirements and received his dream job offer from the Wildlife Department.

“The first six months of the job were filled with training.”

All Game Wardens must complete 576 hours of training with the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET) and months of field training with other Game Wardens.

“It’s a dangerous job. A lot of times you’re your own backup, so officer safety has been an important lesson. But I’ve also learned how to better navigate and read the land, and how to successfully communicate with people from all walks of life.

“I was assigned to a county two days before the opening day of deer gun season, so it got busy quick.” In addition to check-



Jacob Harriet

ing hunters and anglers for valid hunting and fishing licenses, deer licenses and waterfowl stamps, Harriet has spent his time investigating wildlife violations and assisting the public by answering questions and responding to calls.

“I always have my phone with me when on patrol in case the public or a local landowner calls in with a concern or would like to report a violation. We really rely on those calls. We’re actively patrolling. But most counties only have one assigned Game Warden, and we can’t be everywhere at once.”

Beyond enforcing Oklahoma’s laws and ensuring our hunting and fishing traditions continue, Harriet sees his job as being a mediator. “I’ve heard it said that Game Wardens protect people from people, animals from people, and people from animals. We’re here to monitor and mediate the balance of those interactions.”

Learn more about becoming an Oklahoma Game Warden at www.wildlifedepartment.com/odwc-careers. ➦



Firearms training is a core activity for a new Game Warden, and such training continues throughout his or her career.



Game Warden's Journal

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



Late Saturday, Jan. 25, three antlerless deer were shot with a rifle and left in a Major County wheat field. Game Warden Phillip Cottrill, based in Major County, was notified promptly by the property owner. The crime occurred east of Mosier Station on State Highway 412 and a little more than a half-mile north on the west side of County Road 263. Anyone with information about this crime is asked to contact Cottrill at (580) 227-0393 or Operation Game Thief at (800) 522-8039. There is a cash reward for information leading to arrest, and callers can remain anonymous.



Oklahoma Game Wardens had a busy day serving search warrants in Oklahoma and Cleveland counties on Jan. 9. The warrants resulted in evidence including deer antlers suspected of being taken illegally, as well as firearms in possession of a felon. Investigation continues.



On Dec. 20, members of the Oklahoma Game Warden Honor Guard traveled throughout the state to honor their fallen brothers and place wreaths at their gravesites. The wreaths were provided by the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Memorial and the Wreaths Across America Project. Through this project, wreaths were provided for nearly 500 fallen Oklahoma law enforcement officers. The Game Warden Honor Guard placed wreaths at the gravesites of Deputy Game Warden Charles W. Estes (shot and killed near Tulsa in 1911); Game Warden Melvin L. Garrison Jr., (drowned at Hoffman Bottoms near Lake Eufaula in 1971); and Game Warden Johnny Maisano based in Latimer County (died of Lyme Disease in 1990).



(Reports from the Oklahoma 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.

2019 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

"THE FIRST COLD MORNING"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Each year, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Oklahoma Station Chapter Safari Club International join to sponsor a creative writing competition for Oklahoma middle and high school students. A boy and a girl from two age divisions are selected winners. Students were required to write essays using the theme "Hunting: Sharing the Heritage" or "Archery: What I Like About Archery in the Schools and Bowhunting." Winners in the age 15-17 category receive a guided antelope hunt in the Texas Panhandle, and winners in the 11-14 age category receive a hunting trip at the Circle P Pogue Ranch (or similar) and a scholarship to the Outdoor Texas Camp. In this issue, Outdoor Oklahoma honors junior category female winner Jesse Hardy, 13, from Maple Public School.



HUNTING: SHARING THE HERITAGE

By Jesse Hardy



I studied hard and finally gotten my youth hunter safety card. Rifle season was finally here. Dad said that I better brush my teeth and get to bed as we had to get an early start and there was a cold front coming in. That night, I could hardly sleep! I heard dad's alarm clock sound and was dressed by the time he knocked on my door.

We left the house and drove to the spot where we would park. We'd have to walk the rest of the way to our blind that we built together a couple months earlier. It was still very dark. Dad gave me a green light to see when I walked, but I stayed close to him so he could see too. We got to the blind and felt much colder than the day before. The sun finally started to come up, and I could see patches of light fog rolling across the meadow.

The morning light began to cast shadows over the field, and it seemed that everything looked like a deer. I had my binoculars up and looking everywhere. I could see my dad occasionally chuckle. He told me, "Don't look for vertical line, like a tree up and down. Look for horizontal lines, like a deer's back". That helped me see further into the woods right away.

"I think I hear something coming," I told Dad. He smiled and pointed to an old raccoon making his way back to the hollow tree near our blind. After a while, Dad tapped my leg and pointed off to the right side of the field. I saw two does, a fawn, and a small spike.

"Not the ones we're looking for," Dad said, "but they're still fun to watch." My anticipation grew as I watched them silently graze for what seemed like hours. Dad told me watching the deer would give me good practice with my binoculars. They finally moved on, I guess to bed down for the day. We spent a while watching squirrels play, and an occasional crow looking for some corn. Dad nudged my shoulder with his elbow. This time something

was different. He kept staring out the window, never looking over at me. He nodded his head toward the field. I looked out and saw a big deer across the meadow. It had its head down and was moving fast. Its tail was straight back. The deer would stop, run a little further, and then stop again.

Finally, the deer raised its head. I didn't need binoculars to see that it was a large buck with wide, tall horns. Suddenly, I felt a shortness of breath. My heart was pounding so loud. I just knew he would hear us. Dad leaned over to me and whispered, "This is what we came for. Remember your practice, you'll be fine." His words help me settle down a little. I shouldered my rifle and found the buck in the scope. I thought he would never stop moving. Dad said, "Take your time, be patient." The buck finally stood still and was looking back at the woods from where he came. I took the safety off my gun and slowly moved my finger toward the trigger.

Heart still pounding, I took the shot. I knew I fired my gun because I heard the report of the rifle but never felt the kick of the gun that had bruised my shoulder many times before in practice. The deer hunched up then kicked like a rodeo horse. He took off running back the way he came. I thought I missed until dad whispered with excitement, "You got him son!"

I saw the white underbelly of the deer as he went down. Dad said, "He just crashed. Remember to secure your rifle." "Yes sir," I said, with a deep breath. I unloaded my rifle. I sat my gun on the wall of our blind. Dad took my hand and knelt down to give thanks.

After our prayer, we left the blind to retrieve the buck. I was so excited. I wanted to tell the world what I had done. Then I heard my dad say, "I'm proud of you son," and put his hand on my shoulder which was enough for me.

That was seven years ago when I harvested the 12 point off the back side of our property. I'm 13 now, and deer season is almost here. While looking out the window of the bus, searching the fields and tree lines for deer, a cold front came through last night. Once again, I remembered my first hunt and first cold morning I spent in the woods with my dad. ❄️❄️❄️



Game Bag

A COLLECTION OF LETTERS TO THE WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

We'd like to hear from you! Send your letters to Outdoor Oklahoma Letters, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152, or send e-mail to donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov.

Dear Dallas Barber, Big Game Biologist,

I would like to thank you and the rest of the staff for a great youth hunt at Fort Reno on Dec. 13-14, 2019. I was fortunate to be able to attend the hunt where two of my grandsons were fortunate to participate. They had a great time seeing many deer including some really nice bucks. They were also able to harvest deer for their families to enjoy. This hunt was the first youth hunt that Dallas Abbott, 12, has been drawn for. Deaken Abbott, 14, has also drawn out twice for the Keystone Lake youth hunt. I have another grandson, Peyton Abbott, 16, who has drawn the El Reno hunt three times. He now puts in with me for the McAlester archery hunt and is ready to put in for other adult hunt.

I grew up in Oklahoma in a time where there were not many deer in most parts of the state. I did not have an opportunity to hunt deer until I was 21. I have been an avid hunter since. Today my favorite hunting is when I am sitting with one of my grandchildren watching the smiles on their faces as they view or harvest deer or turkey. Although they have harvested deer and turkey on private land, some of the most memorable hunting experiences have been on the youth hunts provided by the Oklahoma Wildlife Department. I hope and believe that my grandchildren will continue to hunt as they become adults and pass that on to their children and grandchildren.

Thank you again for the great hunt, and thank you to the Wildlife Department for providing the youth hunts and the adult hunts.

Roger Abbot

Dear Josh Johnston, Fisheries NE Region Supervisor,

I want to thank you for your work on our research project this semester. You went out of your way to help us achieve our goals. Josh came by TCC SE Campus to retrieve our vials of solution. He traveled to two ponds and dissected the fish fins for our study. He then traveled back to TCC to deliver the samples. Amazing service! We were able to extract the RNA from the fish.

We have these samples in the freezer for the next teacher of Molecular Biology and Techniques (I am retiring this semester). I wish that I could say that we were totally successful... We did make some tremendous strides only because Josh made the tissue available. I really wanted ODWC to know how important Josh's work was for us!



Josh Johnston

Diana Spencer, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Tulsa Community College SE Campus

Dear Wildlife Department,

My father is a hunter with physical disabilities, being legally blind the biggest challenge of them all. Despite his disabilities he continues to hunt using legal technology aids and the help of family and friends. We participated in a controlled hunt this year at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. Our biologist/guide was Wildlife Technician Brian Powell. He went above and beyond to help my father and I have a wonderful experience during the entire hunt. He helped us load and unload gear from the truck, made room in the cab so my father wouldn't have to climb into the bed, offered advice to hunting areas that were relatively easy to navigate on foot, and just generally made us feel welcome. We recognize that introducing a person with disabilities to a group can create challenges for the leader, but Brian seamlessly stepped up to the challenge as an amazing ambassador for the agency.

Adam Lehmann

Dear Wildlife Department,

I was fortunate enough to draw in to the Beaver River-McFarland Unit WMA controlled hunt this year. I was nervous yet excited to try to harvest a deer on such a large new area to me.

I contacted Wildlife Biologist Weston Storer shortly after I drew in July. First, what a great guy he is. From the first time I talked to him, he speaks to you like you've known each other forever. He was a great help and provided me with a lot of good information.

When I arrived in Beaver the day before the hunt, I met him for check in. He is the same in-person as he was on the phone. He looked over my plan and gave me some more advice.

The Beaver River-McFarland Unit is a beautiful place untouched in many areas, and I observed many deer and other wildlife over the three days. On Sunday morning, I was able to take the biggest deer I've shot to date. To say I was excited was an understatement. However, I was not excited for the tall task of moving the deer nearly a mile back to the parking area.

I messaged Weston, and he told me where to drag the deer and he could get to me. I'm not sure what I would have done without his help.

When it came time to quarter the deer up, I discovered I had left my knives back home. Without hesitation, Weston and Wildlife Technician Cody Crisswell quickly helped me make short work of quartering the deer. Even with my knives I would have struggled as well, as I have never quartered a deer.

Growing up, I didn't go hunting and only got into it out of my own curiosity and interest. Weston took the time to show me what he was doing and why, and I'm forever grateful.

You truly have two excellent employees up on the Beaver River WMA who take the time to help from the very beginning of the draw process and until the very end. They truly want you to be successful. We are blessed in Oklahoma to have the opportunities on public land that we do. I for one would not be able to hunt without them.

Glenn Cocherell



Weston Storer

The background of the top half of the page is a silhouette of a fisherman wading through water, carrying a large fishing net. The scene is set against a warm, orange-hued sunset sky. To the left of the fisherman, there is a graphic of a fishing lure with a long, curved hook and a red spiral line trailing behind it.

Oklahoma

FISHING TRAIL

TRAILWATERS

2020 Anglers' Guide

**By Skylar St.Yves, Information
& Education Specialist**

Welcome to the Oklahoma Fishing Trail! A place anglers of all stripes can find those spots that make Oklahoma a premier fishing destination. Oklahoma's vast resources make it a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts, especially anglers. The state's waters are home to a diverse number of fish species, including favorites like bass, crappie and catfish along with unique specimens like paddlefish and alligator gar. Oklahoma has more miles of shoreline than both the East and Gulf coasts combined and plenty of attractions along the way that make each trip unforgettable.

The Oklahoma Fishing Trail is a collaborative ini-

tiative of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department. The goal is to provide anglers with information and opportunities to find a fishing spot that is perfect for them.

The Oklahoma Fishing Trail is designed to highlight the best of Oklahoma fishing. It's organized into six loops covering the entire state. Each loop is organized by lake and species, so no matter your fishing ambitions, you'll find a loop that's perfect for you.

The Trail began in June 2019 with a launch party at Lake Thunderbird near Norman. There are 38 bodies of water included on the Trail with more to come.



ODWC Director J.D. Strong and
Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell

Brainchild of Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell, the Oklahoma Fishing Trail is a collaborative effort of the ODWC and the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department.

One of the benefits of being an angler in Oklahoma is that you're never far from a great place to fish. The Oklahoma Fishing Trail is not only a terrific roadmap of where to fish, but also a fantastic guide about what species to catch, where to stay and good local eateries to indulge yourself after a fun day on the water.

In this edition of the Anglers' Guide, we'll explore the "trailwaters" of each loop, providing you with tips to make your next fishing trip a success, along with other interesting points of interest.

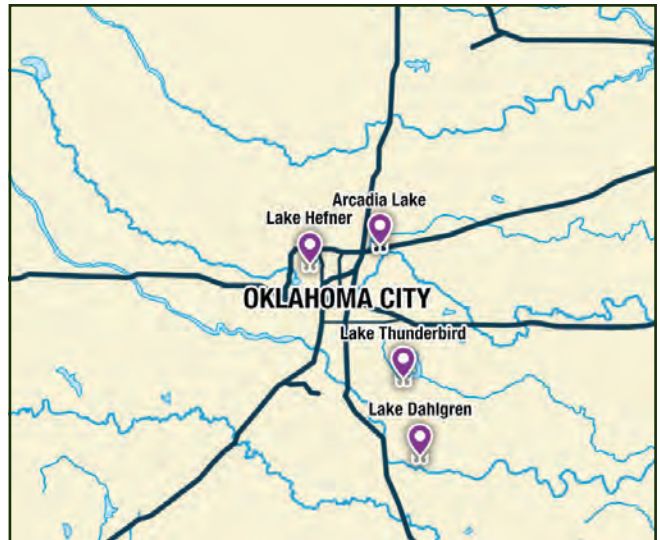
Just as those who settled the Sooner State did, let's blaze a trail across Oklahoma's best fishing hotspots.



Professional angler, TV personality and Oklahoma native Jimmy Houston served as the fishing ambassador for the Trail's launch at Lake Thunderbird.

Central Loop

Don't let the urban landscape of central Oklahoma deter you from exploring the excellent fishing opportunities found in and around Oklahoma City. From large lakes right in the middle of the city to tiny lakes off the beaten path, the Central Loop offers excellent largemouth bass, catfish, saugeye and crappie fishing.



LAKE THUNDERBIRD

What to catch: Largemouth bass, catfish and saugeye

Where to gear up: Calypso Cove Marina, Little River Marina

Where to stay: Norman's hotels or B&B, campsites at Lake Thunderbird State Park

Where to eat: Ted's Cafe Escondido, Hideaway Pizza, Victoria's Pasta Shop, Das Boot Camp

Fun stuff: Riverwind Casino, Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art



ANDREA CREWS

DAHLGREN LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth Bass

Where to stay: Sage Cottage at Oaklore Forest

Where to eat: Jo's Famous Pizza, Sonny's Cafe, Bravo's Mexican Grill

Fun stuff: Canadian River Vineyards & Winery, Spider VW Bug



SKYLAR STYLES



LAKE HEFNER

What to catch: Catfish

Where to gear up: Lucky Lure Tackle

Where to stay: Oklahoma City hotels

Where to eat: Louie's Bar & Grill, Mama Roja Mexican Kitchen, Redrock Canyon Grill and Hefner Grill

Fun stuff: Riversport Adventures at Lake Hefner, Lake Hefner Golf Club, East Wharf lighthouse at Lake Hefner

ARCADIA LAKE

What to catch: Crappie

Where to gear up: Rusty Store

Where to find a guide: Chris Baldwin's Guide Service

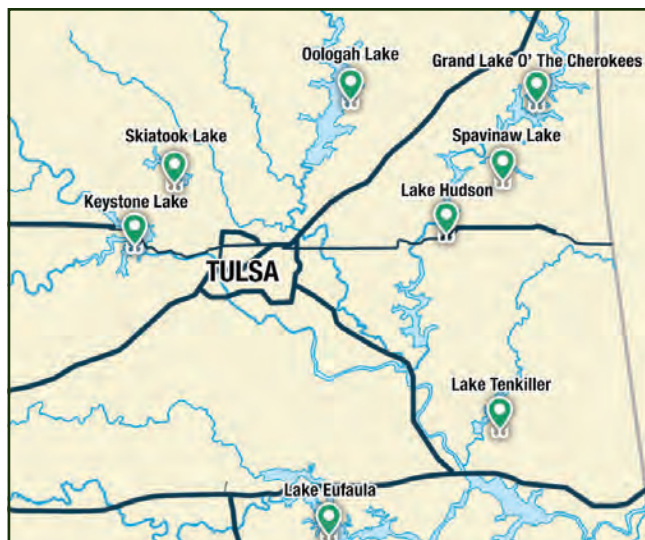
Where to stay: Arcadia Lake campsites

Where to eat: POPs, Signature Grill, Zarate's Latin Mexican Grill

Fun stuff: Round Barn, Clauren Ridge Vineyard & Winery, Pelican Bay Aquatic Center

Northeastern Loop

Northeastern Oklahoma lakes offer plenty of fishing opportunities near outdoor recreation adventures and amazing restaurants. Cast a line on the Oklahoma Fishing Trail's Northeastern Loop in search of several bass species, crappie, catfish and paddlefish, and discover bonus attractions along the way.



GRAND LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass, crappie, catfish and paddlefish

Where to gear up: Cedar Port Marina, H2O Sports Rental, Southwinds Marina, Grand Lake Sports Center

Where to launch: Bernice Area boat ramp/ fishing pier, Cherokee Area lighted boat ramp, Disney Area lighted boat ramp, Honey Creek Area fishing dock/boat ramp, Snowdale Area lighted boat ramp, Twin Bridges Area lighted boat ramp

Fun stuff: Sail Grand Waterfront, Har-Ber Village Museum, Hogan's Off Road Park, Paddlefish Research Center, Peoria Ridge Golf Course, Darryl Starbird's National Rod & Custom Car Hall of Fame Museum, Lendonwood Gardens, Shawnee Tribe Cultural Center, Grand Lake Queen



LAKE HUDSON

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to gear up: Hudson Lake Marina, Mazie Landing Marina

Where to launch: Lake Hudson boat ramp

KEYSTONE LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to gear up: Keystone State Park Marina, Pier 51 Marina, Salt Creek Marina



OOLOGAH LAKE

What to catch: Catfish

Where to gear up: Redbud Marina & RV Park

Where to Stay: Hawthorn Bluff Campground, Blue Creek Campground

SKIATOOK LAKE

What to catch: Smallmouth bass, hybrid striped bass

Where to gear up: Crystal Bay Marina & Resort

Where to find a guide: Weekend Duty Guide Service

Fun stuff: Antique Depot, Cedar Crest Golf Course, Gander Way Vineyards & Winery, Healing Rock, Skiatook Museum, Skydive Airtight

SPAVINAW LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Fun stuff: Pensacola Dam tours, Gourds Etc., Sharky's Bar

LAKE TENKILLER

What to catch: Crappie

Where to gear up: Cherokee Landing State Park ADA accessible fishing dock, Tenkiller State Park Marina, Barnacle Bills Resort & Marina, Clear Water Rentals, Pine Cove Marina & Clearwater Café, Summers Ferry Park

Where to Stay: Bending Waters, Pettit Bayside Resort, Fin & Feather Resort, Marval Family Camping Resort, Blue Doors at Tenkiller, Cherokee Landing State Park campsites/group RV camp, Tenkiller State Park lodge/campsites

Fun stuff: Cherokee Springs Golf Course, John Ross Museum, Cookson Wildlife Management Area

Southeastern Loop

Whether you're looking to polish your fly fishing skills or are searching for a guided excursion in hopes of your next big catch, these seven prime southeastern Oklahoma fishing areas are sure to increase your chances of success. Get back into nature with trips to the region's finest fishing spots from the Ouachita Mountains' sparkling lakes to the Kiamichi Mountains' cypress-lined bayous. It's easier than ever to go fishing — even if you're a newbie — with convenient rental and guide services available.



BROKEN BOW LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass, walleye, hybrid striped bass and trout downstream on the Lower Mountain Fork River

Where to gear up: Beavers Bend Fly Shop, Beavers Bend Land & Water Park, Beavers Bend Marina, Beavers Bend River Floats, WW Trading Post & Canoe

Where to find a guide: Beavers Bend Fly Fishing Guide Service, Broken Bow Trout Guide Service, Broken Bow Lake Guide Service, Broken Bow Lake Duck Tours

Fun stuff: Beavers Bend Mining Company, Forest Heritage Center, Beavers Bend Depot & Trail Rides, Body Harmony Day Spa, Girls Gone Wine, WhipPoorWill Resort & Fudge Factory, Mountain Fork Brewery Cultural Center, Grand Lake Queen

LAKE EUFAULA

What to catch: Crappie, white bass, catfish and striped bass

Where to gear up: Eufaula Cove Marina, Area 51 Marina

Where to stay: Arrowhead Area at Lake Eufaula State Park, Lake Eufaula State Park yurts, Carlton Landing, American Cabins, Ra's Eufaula Treehouse Tree-sort, South Beach Cabin Rental, Xtreme RV Resort, Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp

Fun stuff: Arrowhead Area at Lake Eufaula State Park Trail System, McAlester Arboretum, Lake Eufaula Damsite ATV Trail, Fountainhead Creek Golf Course, Eufaula Farmers Market, Eufaula Flower Shoppe & Café, Hoepfner Kiwi Farm, Lake Eufaula State Park Trail System, Our Favorite Place, Re-New U Med Spa

McGEE CREEK RESERVOIR

What to catch: Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, channel catfish, crappie and sunfish

Where to gear up: Moreland's McGee Creek Store & Cozy Cabins

Where to stay: Boggy Depot Park, McGee Creek State Park, Circle P - Pogue Ranch, Little Pine Cabins & RV Park

HUGO LAKE

What to catch: Catfish, white bass and crappie

Where to stay: Virgil Point Campground, Hugo Lake State Park, Hugo Lake Group Camp, Frisco Depot RV Park, Kiamichi Park Campground

Fun stuff: Endangered Ark Foundation, Frisco Depot Museum, Hugo Farmers Market

WISTER LAKE

What to catch: Crappie, bluegill, channel catfish, flathead catfish and largemouth bass

Where to stay: Lake Wister State Park, Days Inn & Suites by Wyndham, Poteau

SARDIS LAKE

What to catch: Channel and blue catfish, largemouth bass and walleye

Where to stay: Clayton Lake State Park, Potato Hills Campground, Sardis Lake Cabins, Clayton Country Inn

CEDAR LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Fun stuff: Talimena National Scenic Byway, Beech Creek National Scenic & Botanical Area Trail System



South Central Loop

From the sprawling waters at Lake Texoma to the rushing rapids at Blue River, south-central Oklahoma offers a diverse range of fishing options where you can score stripers, largemouth bass, crappie and rainbow trout in droves. Keep reading to discover four fishing hotspots where you can reel in the big one by day and explore top dining and attractions by night.



LAKE TEXOMA

What to catch: Striped bass, largemouth bass, catfish, crappie

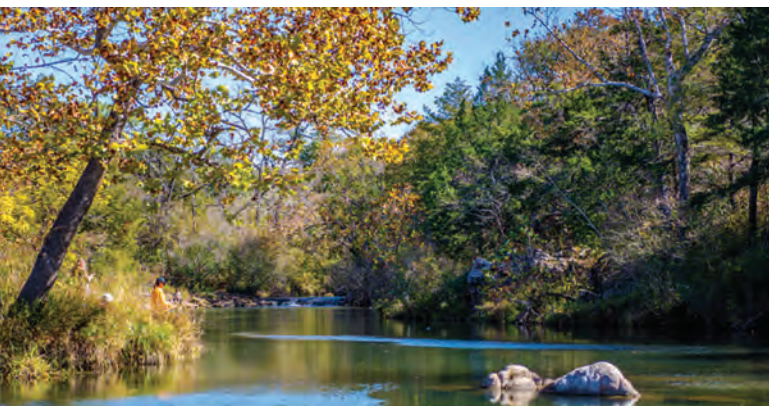
Where to gear up: Alberta Creek Resort & Marina, Bridgeview Marina & Resort, Buncombe Creek Resort Marina, Catfish Bay Marina, Little Glasses Resort & Marina, Marina Del Ray

Where to find a guide: Blue Water Striper Guide Service, Cowboy's Guide Service, Lake Texoma Guide Service, Scarberry's Guide Service, Southern Oklahoma Guide Service, Sparky's Guide Service, Striper Country Guide Service

Where to stay: 60 Miles North, Cabin Fever Adventures, Harbor Inn Bed & Breakfast, Lake Texoma State Park



SKYLAR STYLES



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC

BLUE RIVER

What to catch: Trout

Where to gear up: Scotty's Blue River One Stop & RV Park

Fun stuff: Ole Red Tishomingo, Chickasaw Nation Capitol Building, Tishomingo National Fish Hatchery



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LAKE MURRAY

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to gear up: Lake Murray Marina

Where to find a guide: Get Hooked Fishing Guide

Where to stay: Lake Murray State Park. Lake Murray Floating Cabins

Where to eat: Lake Murray Lodge's Blue Heron Restaurant, Two Frogs Grill

Fun stuff: Lake Murray State Park, Lake Murray State Park Golf Course, Lake Murray Riding Stables, Lake Murray Nature Center, Lake Murray Water Sports & Mini Golf

LAKE OF THE ARBUCKLES

What to catch: Largemouth bass, crappie

Where to find a guide: Thomas Guide Service

Where to stay: Chickasaw National Recreation Area, Rock Creek Retreat, lodging in Sulphur and Davis

Where to eat: Smokin' Joe's Rib Ranch, Arbuckle Mountain Fried Pies, Las Cascadas Mexican Restaurant

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Southwestern Loop

Southwestern Oklahoma offers exciting diversity in nature, adventure and culture, donning a distinctive Old West appeal. Reel in a wealth of largemouth and white bass in this area, along with crappie and catfish. Swim at sandy beaches, hike on rolling hills, learn about Native American landmarks and feast on authentic German cuisine. This loop's rich ecosystem, excellent eats and crowd-pleasing attractions will enrich any fishing trip.



LAKE LAWTONKA

What to catch: Striped bass, largemouth bass, catfish, crappie

Where to gear up: Alberta Creek Resort & Marina, Bridgeview Marina & Resort, Buncombe Creek Resort Marina, Catfish Bay Marina, Little Glasses Resort & Marina, Marina Del Ray

Where to find a guide: Blue Water Striper Guide Service, Cowboy's Guide Service, Lake Texoma Guide Service, Scarberry's Guide Service, Southern Oklahoma Guide Service, Sparky's Guide Service, Striper Country Guide Service

Where to stay: 60 Miles North, Cabin Fever Adventures, Harbor Inn Bed & Breakfast, Lake Texoma State Park

LAKE ELMER THOMAS

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to stay: Lake Elmer Thomas Recreation Area, The Medicine Park Cabin, Medicine Park Rentals, White Horse Lodging

Fun stuff: Red Door Gallery, Discovery Outpost, Comanche Spur Casino, Fort Sill Golf Course



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DUNCAN LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to stay: Shady Oaks Lakeview RV Park, Lindley House Garden Cottages

Fun stuff: Duncan Golf & Tennis Club, Rhythm & Routes Mural, Chisholm Trail Arts Council Gallery, Duncan Little Theatre, The Foreman Prairie House

CLEAR CREEK LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to stay: Days Inn by Wyndham Duncan, Holiday Inn Express & Suites Duncan

Fun stuff: Territory Golf and Country Club, Stephens County Historical Museum, Stephens County Genealogical Society Library

FORT COBB RESERVOIR

What to catch: Crappie

Where to stay: Easter's Lakeside Motel, Deckboat Motel, Backwoods Bison RV Park

Fun stuff: Fort Cobb State Park, Kiowa Tribal Museum, Liberty Theatre, Fort Cobb State Park Golf Course, Horn Canna Farm

LAKE FUQUA

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to stay: Hat Top Mesa, Hidden Hills Hideaways

Fun stuff: Mansfield's Candy Shop, Chisholm Trail Casino

LAKE HUMPHREYS

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to stay: Hampton Inn Duncan, Duncan Inn, Duncan's Grove RV Park

Fun stuff: Twin Oaks Golf Club, Marlow Area Museum, Redbud Park

FOSS LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass, white bass

Fun stuff: Foss State Park, Warrior Trail, Capt'n Jon's Marina, Washita National Wildlife Refuge, Elk City Golf & Country Club

TOM STEED LAKE

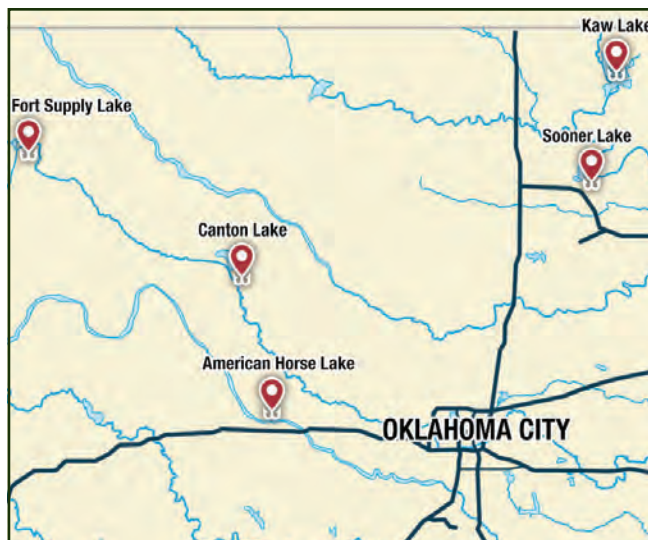
What to catch: Catfish

Where to stay: Hampton Inn & Suites Altus, Days Inn by Wyndham Altus, The Fowler House

Fun stuff: Great Plains State Park, Granite Hills Trail System, Tire Man

Northwestern Loop

Northwest Oklahoma offers some of the state's most diverse fishing opportunities, from a warm water reservoir to a remote, 100-acre lake that's well off the beaten path. Pack your rod and reel, then use this guide to discover where to find the best catfish, largemouth bass, crappie and walleye in Kaw City, Geary, Red Rock, Fort Supply and Canton.



Kaw Lake

What to catch: Catfish, largemouth bass and crappie

Where to gear up: Hideaway Marina, Pioneer Cove Marina

Where to find a guide: Weekend Duty Guide Service

Where to stay: Camp McFadden, Osage Casino Hotel

Where to eat: Enrique's Restaurant, Rusty Barrell Supper Club

Fun stuff: Marland Mansion & Estate, Conoco Museum, Poncan Theatre

Canton Lake

What to catch: Walleye

Where to gear up: Gilchrist General Store

Where to stay: Big Bend Campground, Canadian Campground, Fairview Campground, Longdale Campground, Sandy Cove Campground, Roman Nose State Park

Where to eat: Roman Nose State Park Lodge Restaurant, Noble House Restaurant

Fun stuff: Lucky Star Casino, Longdale Speedway





SOONER LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth bass

Where to find a guide: Fish On, Weekend Duty Guide Service

Where to eat: Eskimo Joe's, the original Hideaway Pizza, Granny's Kitchen

Fun stuff: Oklahoma State University sporting events, Lost Creek Safari, OSU Botanic Garden

AMERICAN HORSE LAKE

What to catch: Largemouth Bass

Where to stay: Campsites at American Horse Lake, Base Vines & Cattle

Fun stuff: Stafford Air & Space Museum, Heartland of America Museum, Weatherford Wind Energy Park

FORT SUPPLY LAKE

What to catch: Crappie

Where to stay: Supply Park Campground

Where to eat: Diarti Italian Cafe, Al's Steakhouse, PollyAnna Cafe

Fun stuff: Fort Supply Historic Site



Grand Slam



Fishing Grand Slammers Finding the Strike Zone

Since the Oklahoma Fishing Trail was launched in June 2019, 13 anglers have earned accolades for finishing the Trail's Grand Slam Challenge.

To complete the Grand Slam, anglers must catch five different species of fish native to Oklahoma, from any state waters, snap a picture of each one and then submit the images on FishinOK.com. Those who complete the Grand Slam will receive an exclusive Grand Slam decal.

The five types of fish needed to complete the Grand Slam are bass, catfish, crappie, sunfish and a bonus fish that can be any other species found in Oklahoma, including trout, paddlefish and saugeye. For more details, anglers can visit FishinOK.com.

Gabriel Davison, 22, of Muskogee, was the first to complete the slam. Davison, who is stationed at Fort Sill Army Base, received an Oklahoma Fishing Trail hat, shirt and sticker in addition to the Grand Slam decal. Davison said he learned about the fishing trail from a friend.

"I think it's pretty cool because a lot of people don't know what there is to do in Oklahoma," Davison said.

Davison said his favorite Oklahoma lakes are Eufaula and Tenkiller, but while at Fort Sill he frequently fishes at a pond on post.

The youngest angler to complete the Grand Slam so far is Wesley King, 10, of Norman. Wesley has been fishing with his parents for a year. His first fishing trip was to Oklahoma City's Kitchen Lake, one of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's "Close to Home" fishing destinations.



Gabriel Davison



Kevin Nunnelee

Wesley said his favorite place to fish right now is Lake Hefner. Asked if he is looking to try out more Oklahoma Fishing Trail lakes, he said, "Oh, heck yeah."

Q&A With Grand Slammer Wesley King

Q: Was Kitchen Lake your first fishing destination?

A: Yeah. I didn't catch anything there. It was only my first day.

Q: Are you going to go see some more Oklahoma Fishing Trail lakes?

A: Oh definitely. I think we're planning on taking a trip to Arbuckle and Murray.

Q: Who do you usually go fishing with?

A: My mom and my dad.

Q: Do you like to watch fishing on TV?

A: Oh, yeah, I have a few of them recorded ... a few hundred. I have saltwater fishing, Major League Fishing recorded. I have books on fishing. I wish I could get more books on fishing.

Q: Do you have a favorite fisherman?

A: Mike Iaconelli. He's funny. One tip: He says go with your gut. Always go with your gut.

Q: Were you excited to get your Grand Slam sticker?

A: Oh, heck yeah. When I found the envelope was, like, to me, it felt like I had just won the Bassmaster championships!

Q: What else do you like to do besides fish?

A: I like to shoot. I really want to go hunting. I do karate. I used to do hockey. I'm probably going to get back into hockey.



Wesley King



Austin Lafave

GRAND SLAM CHALLENGE FINISHERS

(Through February 2020)

Gabriel Davison, Muskogee

Skylar St.Yves, Edmond

Randall Gradwohl, Tulsa

Luke Wisdom, Tulsa

Wesley King, Norman

Dane Kaylor, Oklahoma City

Ed Trumbull, Grove

Austin Lafave, Locust Grove

Mike Rogers, Ponca City

Scott Hood, Broken Arrow

Clayton Huff, Newcastle

Kevin Nunnelee, Ardmore

Ronald Burnett, Wheat Ridge, Colo.

Find out more at www.FishinOK.com.



Scott Hood



Clayton Huff

Fishing May Be Closer Than You Think!

TAKEME2FISHING.ORG



By Michael Bergin, Senior Information Specialist

The state's Close to Home Fishing (CTHF) Program was designed as a partnership between the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and municipalities across the state to provide urban angling opportunities. Small bodies of water are stocked with fish and managed with special regulations, ensuring opportunities exist for anglers who may only have a little time on their hands and nowhere to go.

But these special "honey holes" of the CTHF Program can contribute to an even grander purpose than providing casual urban fishing locations. That goal is passing along the fishing tradition to a new wave of sportsmen and women whose willingness to adopt this cherished pastime is key to sustaining fisheries management as we know it.

Fish conservation is funded by anglers when they purchase fishing licenses. In addition, their purchase of certain fishing equipment includes federal excise taxes that are then redistributed to states by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and those funds must be used for conservation. While Oklahoma fishing traditions are currently strong, it's critical that today's anglers help newcomers adopt the sport. But that's more than simply taking someone fishing one time.

It can be difficult for urban dwellers who are fond of fishing to find time to go, let alone take someone. But that time and mentorship is exactly what it takes to pass along the fishing tradition. And even then, newcomers need frequent exposure to learn what equipment to purchase, bait to use, knots to tie, and regulations to follow. These things tend to be learned over time and with experience. The Close to Home Fishing Program addresses another important need: a place to go.

For those mentors dedicated to seeing their heritage thrive, efforts such as Oklahoma's Close to Home Fishing Program can be an outstanding resource. And carrying the fishing pastime forward is a goal that local anglers should embrace or risk losing this valuable heritage.

Close to Home waters exist in Oklahoma City, Choctaw, Del City, Edmond, Enid, Guthrie, Harrah, Jenks, Lawton, Moore, Mustang, Norman, Tulsa and Yukon. Oklahoma fishing license requirements apply (unless exempt), and some municipalities require daily or annual city fishing permits. Check with local officials for details. 🌿



CLOSE TO HOME FISHING SITES

Oklahoma City: (405) 297-1426

- Crystal Lake (6625 S.W. 15th)
- Dolese Youth Park (5105 N.W. 50th)
- Edwards Park (1515 N. Bryant Ave.)
- Kids Lake (3200 W. Wilshire Blvd.)
- Kitchen Lake (5501 S.E. 119th)
- Route 66 Park (9901 N.W. 23rd)
- South Lakes Regional Park (4210 S.W. 119th)
- Zoo Lake (2101 N.E. 50th) east shoreline only
- Southern Hills North (2710 Faith Ave.)
- Southern Hills South (2810 Faith Ave.)

Choctaw: (405) 390-8198

- Choctaw Creek Park (2001 N. Harper Road)
- Ten Acre Park (N.E. 10th Street and Choctaw Road)

Del City: (405) 671-2868

- Eagle Lake (3405 E. Reno)

Edmond: (405) 216-7641

- Mitch Park (1501 W. Covell Road)
- Bickham-Rudkin Park (450 E. 33rd St.)

El Reno: (405) 262-4070

- Legion Park (620 S. Reno Ave.)

Enid: (580) 554-1536

- Meadowlake Park (1200 W. Rupe)
- Government Springs North Park (300 S. 5th St.)
- Crosslin Park (1520 W. Oxford Ave.)
- City of Enid Water Works (1400 block W. Chestnut Ave.)

Guthrie: (405) 282-2773

- Mineral Wells Park (901 S. Division)
- Highland Park (1102 E. Warner)

Harrah: (405) 454-2951

- Heritage Park (1374 N. Church Ave.)

Jenks: (918) 299-5883

- Veterans Park Pond (E. 101st and Elm)

Lawton: (580) 581-3400

- Medicine Park - Medicine Creek
- Elmer Thomas Park - Lake Helen (Interstate 44 and N.W. Cache Road)

Moore: (405) 793-5090

- Little River Park (700 S.W. 4th) (Closed for repairs)
- Buck Thomas Pond (1903 N.E. 12th)

Mustang: (405) 376-3411

- Wild Horse Park (1201 N. Mustang Road)

Norman: (405) 366-5472

- George M. Sutton Urban Wilderness Area (12th Avenue N.E. and Rock Creek Road)
- Norman Lions Northeast Park (1800 Northcliff Ave.)
- Griffin Community Park (1001 E. Robinson)

Yukon: (405) 354-7208

- City Park (2200 S. Holly St.)
- Welch Park (615 Annawood Road)
- Robertson Activity Center (1200 Lakeshore Drive)

Keeping Oklahoma Wild For Generations To Come



The Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation's Commitment

The Foundation is a nonprofit organization formed to work exclusively alongside and provide support for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

The Foundation provides citizens an outlet to show their passion for the outdoors by investing time and money in projects that will make a difference for generations to come.

Donate By Mail

P.O. Box 53465
Oklahoma City, OK 73152

Donate In Person

1801 N. Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK

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Insights From Decade of Wildlife Studies

By Jena Donnell, Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has long been dedicated to the discovery of what makes our fish and wildlife populations thrive. Sometimes that discovery starts with a search of the state to find where the animals are living, and sometimes the search leads to more questions. As we prepare to enter a new decade of wildlife study, we checked in with the Wildlife Department's Wildlife Diversity staff for insights into research and surveys that have been completed in the past 10 years.

To Everything a Season

One of the first wildlife projects completed in the 2010s was also the first of its kind. In 2010, surveyors with the Oklahoma Biological Survey wrapped up the Oklahoma Winter Bird Atlas, the first statewide win-

ter-season bird distribution atlas in the nation! More than 550 2-square-mile parcels were surveyed across the state, yielding information about 183 wintering bird species.

"Most bird atlases are focused on the breeding season, but Oklahoma has a suite of birds that are only found in the state in winter," Senior Biologist Mark Howery said. "And surveys of some year-round residents like the brown-headed nuthatch were more successful in the winter than in the breeding season."

It Takes a Team

Surveys often take weeks or months in the field to apply different survey methods and test various techniques. With Oklahoma's incredible diversity in its wildlife and habitat, the Department regularly looks to our community of research partners for help. In 2011, a survey team with the University of Oklahoma com-

pleted a five-year study of five Wildlife Management Areas: Packsaddle, Atoka, Cookson, Sandy Sanders and Pushmataha WMAs. The team documented 99 species of reptiles and amphibians. The survey not only confirmed expected species but also documented species that had not yet been reported on the area and recorded substantial range extensions for some species.

"Many of our state's reptiles and amphibians are secretive or only active during short windows of time, so it requires a lot of effort at the right time to really understand their distribution or abundance," Wildlife Biologist Matt Fullerton said. "Partnering with dedicated survey teams is the only way we can gather this much data about so many species across such a large area."

This project was funded in part by ODWC's State Wildlife Grants Program Grant T-35-P-1 and the University of Oklahoma.

Uncovering the Unexpected

A study initially focused on invasive Asian carp in the Kiamichi River didn't reveal many bighead or silver carp but did uncover an unexpectedly large population of native blue suckers. In 2013, researchers with Oklahoma State University followed-up on the find with a study of the suckers, a species of greatest conservation need, which answered a lot of questions about the fish's population and demographics.

"We were all blown away by the number of fish they documented," Fisheries Biologist Curtis Tackett said. "In addition to shedding light on the different age classes and sex ratio of the fish, researchers also tagged more than 100 blue suckers and tracked their spawn in three Red River tributaries."

What started out as a fact-finding mission for an invasive species turned into a positive breakthrough about a native fish.

This project was funded in part by ODWC's State Wildlife Grants Program Grant F13AF01214 and Oklahoma State University.

Only Scratched the Surface

In 2013, the Oklahoma Biological Survey began compiling existing records for three rare dragonflies and then launched a search that effectively doubled the number of records and added dozens of new locations for the species. And while the project shed light on these fierce insects, a mystery remains.

"We've never documented the larvae of the Ozark emerald dragonfly in Oklahoma," Fullerton said. "So, we are following this project with an in-depth look at the life history and ecology of this rare species."

"There are a lot of unknowns in nature, especially in the insect world. Without experienced surveyors taking time to extensively study these species, we may only have just a handful of records to shape our understanding."

This project was funded in part by ODWC's State Wildlife Grants Program Grant F13AF01188 and the University of Oklahoma.



OLAF NELSON/NAF



JENN DONNELL/ODWC



JENA DONNELL/ODWC

Traditional Meets Contemporary

Caves and streams are important for many salamander species, including the grotto salamander and the Oklahoma salamander, the only vertebrate named for the state. In 2014, University of Tulsa researchers wrapped up a project that tied a traditional survey for the two salamanders with a genetic assessment. The survey team inspected 74 Ozark streams and 26 of the region's caves, and found the target species in most of their study sites and added several new sites for both species.

"Expanding the known range of both of these rare species was a fantastic accomplishment," Howery said. "But their genetic data also served as proof that the Oklahoma salamander has alternative life histories. Before the study, the Oklahoma salamander was thought to be two species, one with a land-dwelling adult and one with an aquatic adult."

This project was funded in part by ODWC's State Wildlife Grants Program Grant F11AF00082 and the University of Tulsa.

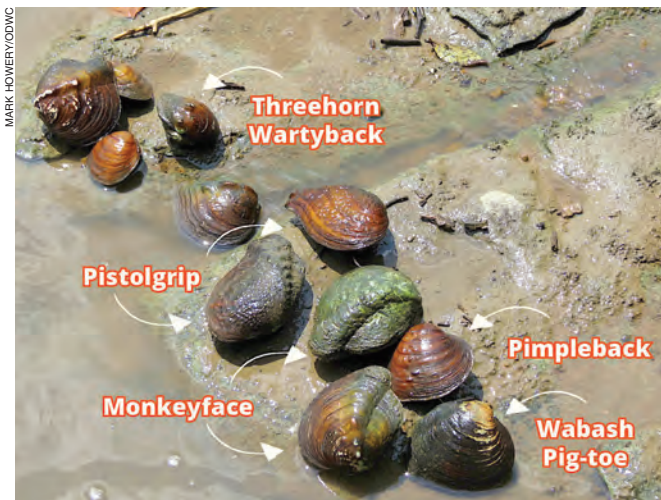
Habitat is Key

Mussels, or freshwater clams, have been the focus of at least four research or survey projects in the past decade. And while each project presents environmental and personnel challenges, these projects have all had a recurring and positive outcome.

"Oklahoma has a lot of rare and declining mussels, and these species need conservation attention," Tackett said. "But I'm routinely surprised by the number of mussels and the diverse assemblages of mussels you can find, when habitat conditions are right. A lot of the large mussel beds we find have more common species coexisting with our very rare and declining mussels."

Survey success often hinges on searching in the right locations.

Mussel surveys were funded in part by ODWC's State Wildlife Grants F10AF00135, F11AF00027, F11AF00030 and F14AF01355, Oklahoma State University and the Oklahoma Biological Survey.



MARK HOWERY/ODWC

No Success Is Still Success

Even though surveyors with the University of Oklahoma were specifically targeting Texas kangaroo rats, a species that hasn't reliably been found in Oklahoma since the early 1900s, they increased understanding of the small-mammal community in seven southwestern Oklahoma counties. Intensive surveys of more than 250 locations surrounding the rat's historic records may have been unsuccessful, but 2,178 individuals of 18 other mammal species were trapped.

"This project gave us the best evidence to date that the Texas kangaroo rat is likely extirpated from our state," Howery said. "This project is still a huge success even though the target species wasn't found."

This project was funded in part by ODWC's State Wildlife Grants Program Grant F14AF01224 and the University of Oklahoma.



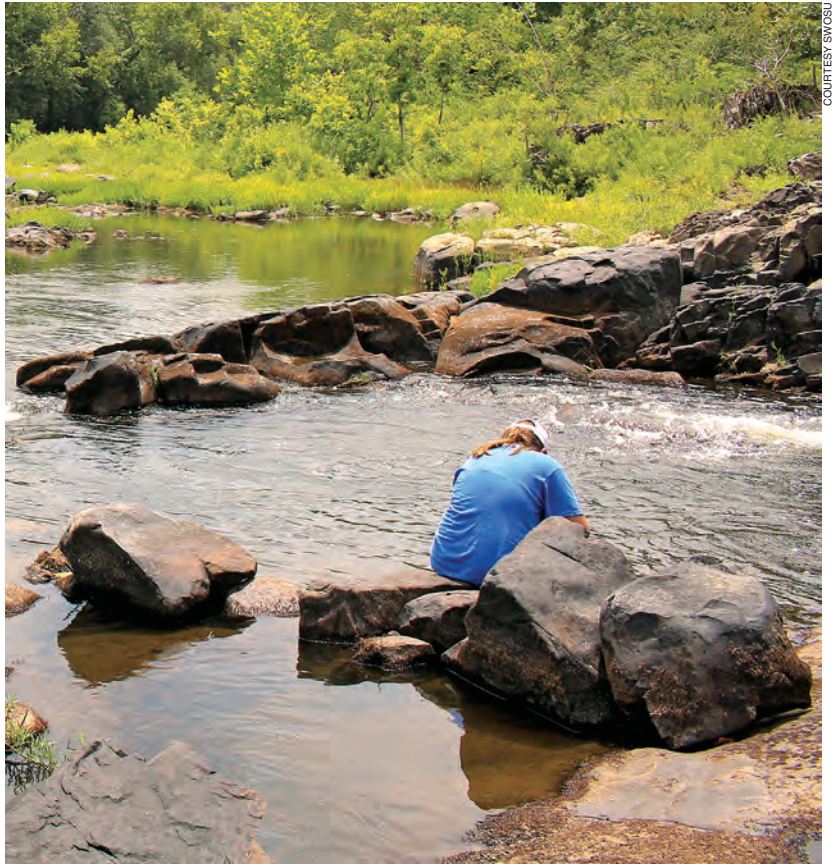
JENA DONNELL/ODWC

Rare Species, Complex Challenges

In 2017, survey teams from Southwestern Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma set out to learn more about our state's diverse collection of mayflies and caddisflies, aquatic insects that are a major part of the food chain. Though they did not discover the primary target, the rare three-toothed triaenodes caddisfly, they were able to update where many species can be found.

"This project is a great example of how difficult and complex it can be to collect and identify rare aquatic insects," Research Supervisor Kurt Kuklinski said. "The small size and rarity of the target insects presented a distinct challenge. Beyond that, these species are incredibly similar to one another and can only be identified by very complex anatomical features, which is a completely different challenge."

This project was funded in part by ODWC's State Wildlife Grants Program Grant F16AF01215, SWOSU and OU.



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When the young paddlefish reach about 12 inches, they are ready to be stocked in Oklahoma waters. Larger fish will have a greater chance of survival to breeding age, which ultimately defines the success of these restoration efforts.

Paddlefish Propagation

Repopulation Efforts Targeting Waters They Once Wandered

By Kelly Adams, Information Specialist and
Jason Schooley, Senior Fisheries Biologist

Inhabiting the rivers and bayous of the Mississippi River Basin for about 65 million years since the late Cretaceous Period, paddlefish are among the oldest living species on the North American continent.

Paddlefish (*Polyodon spathula*) were once abundant throughout their range, but dam construction has interrupted their migratory breeding and feeding patterns, resulting in population declines. These habitat losses, paired with commercial and recreational overharvest, have caused concern for the future of the species.

While some Oklahoma reservoirs and tributaries host robust paddlefish populations, managing these populations to be self-sustaining has been a key



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC

At the Tishomingo National Fish Hatchery, the broodstock are collected from holding ponds, and transferred to tanks where they can be closely monitored. Biologists frequently check the fishes' readiness to spawn, and when the timing is perfect, eggs and milt (fish sperm) are collected.

focus for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Jason Schooley, Senior Fisheries Biologist for the Wildlife Department, has spent most of his career working to better understand these shark-like fish. "The scientific order Acipenseriformes, which includes the sturgeons and paddlefishes, has the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most imperiled groups of fishes on Earth. Oklahoma's paddlefish are not immune from threats of habitat loss and overharvest, and require careful and thoughtful management informed by research," Schooley said.

Over the evolutionary history of this unique group of fishes, six different types of paddlefishes have inhabited Earth. But only two survived to modern times. Unfortunately, scientists recently declared the Chinese paddlefish (*Psephurus gladius*) extinct, leaving the American paddlefish as the lone



SAM STUKEL/USFWS

In about two weeks, young paddlefish will begin to externally feed, which poses a unique challenge. Paddlefish are planktivores and are filter feeders. While zooplankton is present in the hatchery's water system, biologists pellet-feed the paddlefish to ensure they will be hardy and healthy before they are stocked.



Oklahoma Wildlife Department Senior Fisheries Biologist Jason Schooley travels upstream with Sarah Spangler and Brian Filmore of the USFWS to collect paddlefish broodstock for restoration efforts in John Redmond Reservoir on the Neosho River in Kansas.

Oologah in particular has seen high catch rates of adult paddlefish since restoration efforts began in the late 1990s.

survivor. Fortunately, responsible management of American paddlefish became a focus long before the species reached a critical decline, and it is not currently regarded as threatened or endangered.

Since the early 1990s, the Department has been collecting paddlefish broodstock to produce young fish through artificial spawning, and restoring paddlefish populations in areas where they once inhabited. These areas include Kaw Lake, Lake Texoma, Lake Eufaula and Oologah Lake. But so far, only two lakes — Kaw and Oologah — have shown successful natural recruitment, where reproduction is actually adding to the number of breeding adults.

The specific reasons for the success or failure of paddlefish restoration in Oklahoma are not fully understood and are currently being investigated through a research grant with Oklahoma State University. The goal of the study is to not only examine the primary reasons for success or failure of restoration in Oklahoma, but also to

help in future decisions about sites for additional restoration efforts in eastern Oklahoma.

Oologah in particular has seen high catch rates of adult paddlefish since restoration efforts began in the late 1990s. Various size and age classes of paddlefish have been observed during paddlefish surveys, indicating natural recruitment is happening in the upper Verdigris River. Simply put, biologists are not just catching fish that were stocked, they are also catching the progeny of those stocked fish, which is promising. In fact, biologists were pleasantly surprised to find the Oologah population to be quite abundant, and this stock now supports a growing snag fishery.

Much like the migratory journeys of the paddlefish, efforts to restore native paddlefish populations don't stop at the Oklahoma border. Together, the Wildlife Department and the USFWS collect, spawn, hatch and raise paddlefish to restore native populations in Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas. Paddlefish are truly a resource shared



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC

Setting gill nets allows biologists to collect more than enough paddlefish so that they can select the healthiest individuals for spawning.



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC



Paddlefish are collected before they naturally spawn, so females are more difficult to catch as they aren't quite ready to run upstream. Males, however, are abundant and eager.





KELLY ADAMS/ODWC

by all states in the historic range, which calls for collaborative efforts in management and restoration.

Due to population declines in Texas, the paddlefish is considered a protected species, where regulations prohibit catching, killing or harming them in any way. Department and USFWS biologists also collect paddlefish broodstock on the Red River for restoration projects in Texas.

In Oklahoma, the situation is much different. Compared to surrounding states, Oklahoma hosts abundant paddlefish populations and is known worldwide for its paddlefish snagging opportunities. Many factors contribute to Oklahoma's paddlefish success, but perhaps none more than a staff of fisheries biologists dedicated to paddlefish research, management and conservation.

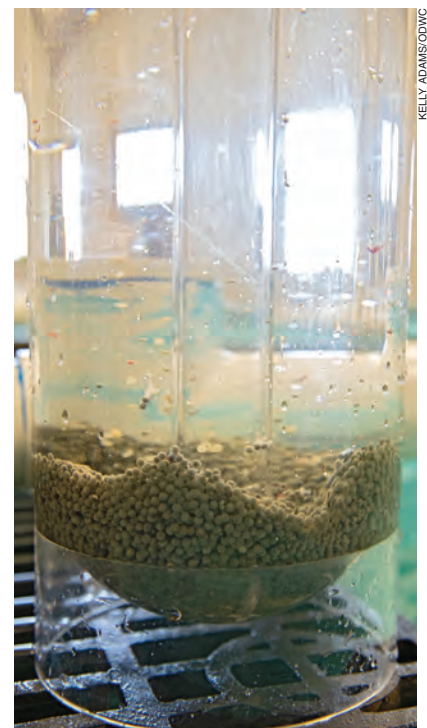
The Department's Paddlefish

Research Center (PRC) near Miami, Okla., uses angler-harvested specimens to collect data for stock assessment while providing funds for conservation and research through paddlefish caviar sales. The PRC has allowed the Department to collect volumes of biological, ecological, physiological, genetic and sociological data on paddlefish and paddlefish anglers, which would have been next-to-impossible through any other means.

The PRC is just one piece of the puzzle, however. Much of Oklahoma's paddlefish success can be attributed to collaborative efforts between state and federal government agencies, and their efforts to reintroduce this species throughout its range.

Producing young paddlefish for redistribution and restoration is quite a process and no easy feat.

Every spring, Department and



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC

Eggs and milt are mixed, and water is added to activate the milt so the eggs will be fertilized. The fertilized eggs are added to jars and are "rolled" with water and oxygen. In about five days, the eggs hatch.

USFWS biologists collect female and male paddlefish from Oklahoma waters. Selection of the collection site is informed by statewide genetics research completed by the Department, with the goal of matching or maximizing the genetic integrity of the source and destination waters. Once captured, the fish are weighed, sexed and tagged, then are carefully transported to the Tishomingo National Fish Hatchery in a special truck equipped with a large tank, water and oxygen. From the moment the fish are collected, biologists work diligent-

ly to ensure their survival, said Sarah Spangler of USFWS.

"We collect broodstock during the coldest month of the year because the colder the temperature, the more oxygen is in the water, and that is better for the fish. We also add salt to the transportation tanks to replace some of the electrolytes the fish may have lost due to stress."

At the Tishomingo hatchery, the collected paddlefish are placed in outdoor ponds, and a waiting game begins. Paddlefish spawn when specific environmental conditions





After the paddlefish collected from Northeast Oklahoma are spawned, they are released into John Redmond Reservoir in Kansas, where a long-term paddlefish restoration project is ongoing. This reservoir is on the Neosho River and some of the fish eventually travel downstream into Oklahoma, contributing to the fishery in Grand Lake. It is truly a shared resource.

are met, conditions that don't exist in a hatchery pond. The wait time between fish collection and spawning is usually a couple of weeks as the eggs mature, the water warms, and the fish reach biological readiness for spawning. In the wild, spawning is motivated by water temperature, length of daylight, and river discharge from spring rains. Of course, the latter of these is absent in a hatchery pond, therefore egg maturation is prompted artificially through injection of hormones to induce ovulation (or egg release).

Techniques for artificial spawning and culture of paddlefish were developed in the late 1960s and, with some modifications, are still used today. Eggs and milt are delicately mixed and then divided into an array of hatching jars for the eggs to incubate. Individual fish are crossed, and the fertilized eggs are kept separate with an intent to maximize the genetic diversity of the progeny. The eggs hatch into fry, and

fry grow into fingerlings.

The young fish are initially fed brine shrimp, but hatchery staff eventually train them to eat a highly-nutritious pellet diet to encourage rapid growth. The little paddlefish can be observed to "capture" the pellets from the surface by turning in their side much like an Olympics swimmer grabbing a breath of air. Eventually, tens of thousands of young paddlefish (also known as "teaspoons") are released into reservoirs such as Oologah Lake, where they quickly adapt to using the full potential of their electrosense to find zooplankton prey and continue growing rapidly, which is critical to their long term survival and to the success of these restoration efforts.

Schooley said that because of unified efforts across multiple agencies, the future of paddlefish in Oklahoma looks promising. "Fortunately, the paddlefish themselves have made our jobs a lot easier by demonstrating successful recruitment across the state." 🌿



WATCH ON TV!

For a detailed look at these paddlefish restoration efforts, tune in during March for the Outdoor Oklahoma TV show at 9 a.m. Sundays on OETA, the state's public television network. Watch episodes anytime online at youtube.com/OutdoorOklahoma.

A black and white photograph of a man in camouflage clothing and a hat, carrying a large turkey on his back. He is holding a rifle. The background is a natural, wooded area.

Pages From the Past

Outdoor Oklahoma magazine is turning 75 years old this year. Many memorable stories have graced the pages of the nearly 650 issues that have been printed since 1945. In each issue of 2020, we will take a look back at some of those stories, just to reminisce. Here we feature a couple of articles from 1971.



CLIFF KING

BY TOM LOGAN
GAME BIOLOGIST

Spring Turkey Hunt

MANY SPORTSMEN accept the onset of spring as nature's signal to put the old shotgun in the corner. For the dyed-in-the-wool turkey hunter, however, this can be the most rewarding and fascinating season of the year.

Spring is usually viewed as a period of sanctuary for most game species. It's the time of year when many wild creatures mate and raise young to perpetuate their numbers. Mated pairs must be undisturbed in preparation for the forthcoming young, and clutches of eggs and newborn young should not be deprived of the parental care that they require.

Wild turkeys participate in the reproductive functions of the season, as do other animals. But, because of their very unique courtship and reproductive habits, they may be hunted at this time of year with great success, and without detrimentally affecting their reproductive efforts.

Oklahoma has experienced a very successful wild turkey restoration program which began in the early fifties. Statewide turkey populations have grown tremendously, and increasing hunting interests have created a need for an intensive management program.

Recognizing this need, the Department initiated a research program in the fall of 1966 to gather information about turkeys . . . information needed before a program could be designed. Subjects of major interest

the "off-season" season



DEAN G. GRAHAM

Spring Turkey Hunt

were winter activities, courtship and reproduction, brood rearing, mortality and seasonal movements.

A large, well established flock was selected for study in the Sandstone Creek Watershed of Beckham and Roger Mills Counties. During the project more than 300 turkeys were trapped and marked with colored wing and neck tags so that they could be individually recognized.

One of the more specialized methods of study involved the instrumentation of 31 turkeys with miniature radio transmitters.

Every location and movement of these birds could be monitored with directional receiving instruments. The resulting data described daily and seasonal movements and the size of the areas that the turkeys moved within during specific periods.

DEAN G. GRAHAM

Eavesdropping on thirty-one "bugged" turkeys via radio telemetry equipment revealed daily and seasonal movements of the select birds.



Most sportsmen who have hunted Rio Grande wild turkey in western Oklahoma have hunted during the fall season and are familiar with the winter flocks.

These flocks usually are formed in late September as the turkeys begin rejoining after the spring and summer months of breeding and brood rearing.

Turkeys begin arriving at the traditional wintering areas in early August, and by the time flock formation takes place, approximately 40 percent of the winter flock is present. The remainder of the birds continue to move to the winter area to join the flock until mid-February.

Daily activities of the wintering birds consists of a routine of feeding from the roost in early morning, loafing during midday and feeding in late afternoon as they move back to roost, generally in large cottonwood trees.

Favorite feeding sites are grain fields, green forage fields and sites where livestock are being fed.

Wild turkeys are very particular about their wintering grounds. We still know little about these areas. However, three major characteristics were observed. All wintering areas of large numbers of turkeys have an adequate roosting site, a large, available food source and restricted human access. In several areas where these characteristics exist in abundance, flocks have established and grown to numbers of three and four hundred birds.

The first suggestion that wild turkeys are preparing for spring activities may be observed as early as mid-winter. Gobblers first begin displaying and gobbling to each other to establish dominance. Spectacular battles occasionally occur, but an impressive bluff is usually more effective.

By mid-February the gobblers begin courting the hens, and the frequency of displaying and gobbling increases each day. Gobblers become so engrossed with their own vocalizing that they eventually begin gobbling while still on the roost. Any sound from hen yelps to tractors starting often result in all gobblers in a flock gobbling in unison.

By early March, hens begin showing some recognition to displaying gobblers.

No hens are bred, however, until after spring breakup has begun in late March.

During spring breakup the greater majority of the flock leaves the winter area to travel to traditional spring breeding and nesting areas. This usually occurs over a period of less than a week. Turkeys in the Sandstone Creek study flock dispersed in a radius of 9 miles from the winter area over approximately 60,000 acres.

As gobblers follow the hens to spring areas, their courtship efforts intensify and they commence mating.

Hens prepare nest sites and clutches of 12-14 eggs are laid. Hens usually select nest sites in dense clumps of vegetation on brushy hillsides, ravine banks or roadsides.



DEAN G. GRAHAM

The tiny transmitter affixed to the back of this Rio Grande wild turkey broadcasted radio signals, enabling listening biologists to pinpoint her exact location at will.

The onset of major seasonal activities are triggered primarily by progressive changes in day lengths and local climatic factors. Onset of incubation, being affected thusly, usually takes place within 2-3 days.

This has an important effect on hunter success, because as hens begin incubation, most of them become unavailable to courting gobblers as well as hunters.

At this time, the courting activities of gobblers are at a peak, and even though the hens retire to their eggs the gobblers continue searching.

A spring turkey hunter who uses a hen call often experiences rewarding success during this period.

The major question that has been asked about the spring gobbler season concerns the effect that spring hunting has on turkey reproduction and the population in general. This is certainly a valid concern, because most of us think of fall and winter as being the seasons of the year for hunting.

In the winter of 1969-70 the statewide turkey population was estimated at approximately 25,000 birds. Data has indicated that 55-59 percent of the turkey population dies annually as a result of natural mortality and hunter harvest. In 1969-70, hunters harvested 4,550 gobblers, indicating a high natural mortality that season. This points up the fact that our turkeys can certainly withstand a heavier harvest.

As far as disturbance of nesting hens is concerned, the frequency is low. Take the Sandstone flock for example. There was a maximum of 250 hens in this flock each winter.

If 100 percent of them survived to reproduce, by the time they dispersed over the 60,000 acre spring range, nest density would be 1 nest / 240 acres.

But when 50 percent are lost to mortality and less than half the survivors reproduce, nest densities would be closer to 1 nest / 1,000 acres. How many nests would you expect to locate while hunting under those conditions?

In addition, only hens that were disturbed while still laying abandoned their nests. Incubating hens were harassed constantly during the study and none of these abandoned their nest. Nest abandonment during the spring gobbler season is of little concern, since most hens are incubating by the time the season opens.

Spring gobbler hunting can be a fascinating experience. If calls are used properly, those "Romeo" gobblers can be called in as though hypnotized.

An answering gobble and the sound of a displaying tom can certainly create cold chills and cause the heart to pound. You know he's coming in. Then you discover that your gobbler has circled and is standing close behind you.

If you've never tried spring gobbler hunting, buy a call and give it a whirl. The call will increase your chances of success.

The Rio Grande Wild Turkey is one of Oklahoma's most magnificent game species. So, give this season serious thought. You'll likely have one of the greatest hunting experiences of your life.

CLIFF KING

A turkey call is no frill ... it can spell the difference between success and failure during the spring season. Many hunters of these trophy upland game birds would as soon leave their guns at home as neglect to take their pet call along.



BY HORACE GORE

CHIEF, GAME DIVISION

HUNTING OFTEN GETS THE BLAME when wildlife numbers noticeably decline. However, man's overall use of the land has a much greater effect on the number of game animals present than does legal hunting pressure.

Natural self preservation will cause wild game to hold their own in the battle with the gun, as they have for many years but game animals have yet to find a way to combat overgrazing, excessive brush eradication, extremely clean farming, and the various "cides" (pesticides, herbicides, etc.) which destroy their two great necessities—food and shelter.

The Critical Factor

This is not to say that all grazing, brush clearing, clean farming, and chemical aids should be eliminated. But, as applied in many areas today, these activities are greatly reducing the carrying capacity of those areas for wildlife, particularly game species.

Game populations are controlled by the quality and quantity of vegetation. In the natural order of things, this usually is controlled by soil moisture. However, few areas are now in their natural state, and soil and moisture are only two of many controlling factors that affect vegetative growth.

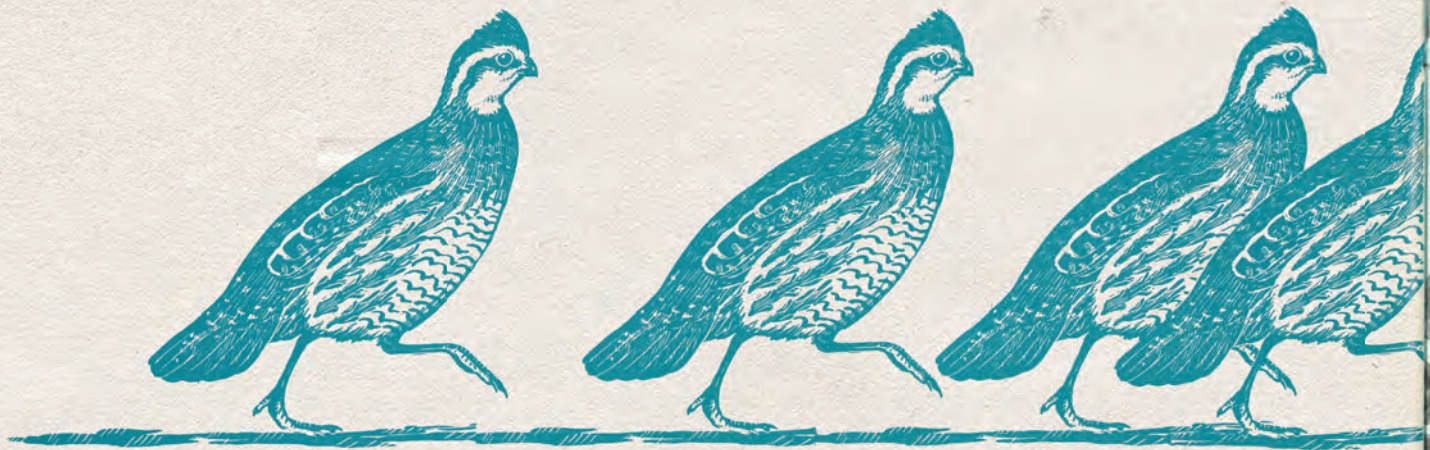
Grazing, plowing, brush clearing, and industrial use also have a marked effect on wildlife habitat.

The size of a combination farm and ranch has a definite bearing on deer populations: smaller tracts must, in most cases, be used to their greatest capacity. Crop land produces the most money per acre, and small acreages are normally farmed to provide a livable family income.

Since larger ownerships are generally utilized less intensively, these are the areas which hold the main deer herds and carry them through drought and severe winters. Thus, when the larger tracts are depleted for any reason, the main deer herds also are depleted, in proportion to the extent of over-utilization of the land. Likewise, a reverse of the situation can occur. When only a scattered deer population is present, any land use practice that will provide more food and shelter will usually increase the native deer population.

Vegetation changes have a much quicker and more noticeable effect on high reproductive capacity species, such as quail, doves, and squirrels, than on large game such as deer.

Observations have shown that brush clearing, overgrazing, and other game habitat destruction may deplete a deer herd slowly, whereas the same factors can spell trouble overnight to smaller game animals. However, small game species recover with equal speed,





thereby causing populations to normally rise and fall from year to year according to habitat conditions.

Many restocking programs with wild-trapped animals fail to replenish former game populations simply because the land environment has been changed too drastically. Although the soil and rainfall may be the same as before, land use may have altered the ratio of occurrence of various important food or shelter vegetation types. Changes in stocking rates in livestock or the introduction of various species of goats and sheep can modify the dominant vegetation to the point that proper wildlife foods and cover are not available.

Simply adding more game animals to an area does not assure reproduction. What caused the previous population to fail is the first question to be answered.

Illegal hunting, or predation may be the cause in some cases, but in most instances across Oklahoma, the odds are the decline is being caused by changes in land use practices. The change is usually so gradual that it goes unnoticed by the average landowner who is not familiar with plant and animal ecology.

Where conditions are suitable for moderate to high game populations, any animals removed will be replaced. The less suitable the habitat and the more struggle the population has for survival, the less chance it will have to replenish itself.

Depletion will cancel the natural increase trend of reproduction. This is the major problem with quail populations in many areas of the State.

Modern game management trends are toward better habitat management and away from put-and-take stocking programs.

Satisfactory results are much more likely if we give consideration to game populations during the growing season of the year, instead of simply evaluating the hunting possibilities prior to open season. ■

*Habitat is
wildlife's basic
requirement*

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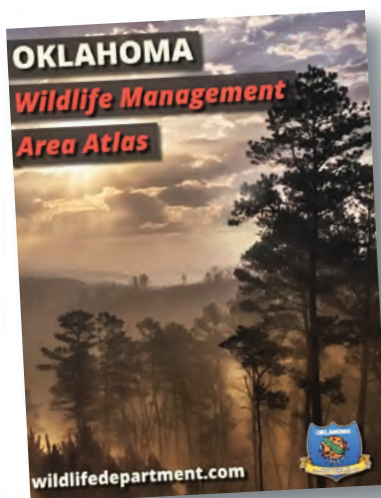
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Oklahoma Wildlife Management Area Atlas

This updated edition has topographical maps of Wildlife Management Areas and now includes Department-owned fishing lakes across Oklahoma. At almost 100 pages, the atlas presents maps showing where to access areas, adds lands that have been acquired since 2010, and shows special features at each area such as parking sites, camping areas and food plots.

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Watchable Wildlife

THE GRAY FOX

BY JUSTIN VEACH, EDUCATION INTERN

Three species of foxes can be found in Oklahoma, and one of them is the gray fox. The others are the red fox and the swift fox.

The gray fox can easily be confused with the red fox, but it can be distinguished by the patch of gray fur along the back and face. The gray fox also has reddish-brown fur on its sides with a long bushy tail that has a black stripe running along the top of it.

Adult male gray foxes can reach a weight up to 15 pounds, while the adult female will usually weigh about 8 pounds. The average lifespan of a gray fox in the wild is six to eight years.

The gray fox is the only species of fox that can climb straight up a tree. They do this to escape predators, search for food, or find a place to relax. They have the ability to jump from branch to branch, and they use their long sharp claws to climb up and down the trunk. Gray foxes prefer to live in heavily wooded areas. Their coloring helps them easily blend in with their environment.

Gray foxes can run at speeds up to 27 mph and can maintain that speed for quite some time; this helps them catch their prey. They eat various foods including rodents, birds, insects, fruit, nuts, and grass. During summer and fall, they will eat a lot of

grasshoppers and crickets to supplement their diet.

The mating season for gray foxes is usually between January and April depending on climate and location.

The male typically pairs with one female in its lifetime unless that female dies. The gestation period lasts an average of 53 days, and a litter will have up to seven kits. The female prepares a den and tends to the kits,

while the male hunts for food. At about 3 months old, the kits are taken out of the den to be taught how to hunt. Within another month, they are able to hunt on their own.

The den is then left until the next year, and the same male and female will come back together to produce and raise another litter. Gray foxes make their dens in crevices, caves, hollow logs, trees, or burrows in the ground.

Gray foxes are able to mate at 1 year of age. This can quickly lead to the population outgrowing the carrying capacity of the environment, resulting in loss of food, loss of habitat, and spreading of disease. To keep this from happening, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has included gray foxes in the furbearer trapping and hunting season from December through February. 🌿

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Springtime: when many hunters' fancy turns to the pursuit of wild turkey! As we celebrate our Golden Anniversary, we reminisce about a turkey hunt from 1971, inside this issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.

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