

# Outdoor Oklahoma

MARCH/APRIL 2022 - ONLY \$10 A YEAR

**Anglers' Guide 2022**  
**You Game**  
**For Some**  
**Nongame?**

**Turkey Season**  
**Sees Changes**  
**This Spring**

**Duck Season**  
**Habitat Takes**  
**Yearlong Effort**

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION





# Panoramas

**W**e could surely use a mental-health break these days. Be it the weather, social media, politics, your job, your bank account, or the worst public

health crisis in a century, any number of things could have you feeling not so spectacular these days.

Luckily for all of us there's a simple, affordable "medicine" to help us heal, and it's available 365 days a year: fishing!

Peer-reviewed studies have shown that fishing, and moreso spending time in nature, creates a great sense of relaxation, which lowers stress levels and leads to improved cardiovascular and emotional well-being.

Also, wild-caught fish is a sustainable and healthy boost to your diet, providing beneficial nutrients such as Omega 3, vitamin B12, vitamin D, good cholesterol, and protein.

Participating in fishing and sharing the opportunity to participate with others is a win-win toward a healthy lifestyle.

There was a time not so long ago when human existence relied a great deal on hunting and fishing. Our planet willingly provided that bounty as long as we were willing to respect and embrace it.

What a difference a few generations can make, for better and for worse.

I believe the notion that "this whole world's gone crazy" is a by-product of our ever-distancing ourselves from nature. We are biological beings with an inherent calling to the water and wilderness.

Burying our heads in screens, laboring away in cubicles, and wasting natural resources through needless consumerism is destroying us. We are like algae covering a pond, and no amount of new tech is going to change

things as long as we continue on our current path.

This may all seem like doom and gloom with no hope in sight. But it's our behavior that created this destructive countdown clock, and fortunately our behavior is something we each have the ability to take control of and change.

We can't fix all our wrongs overnight. But by working to build back the Earth through small rewarding gains, we will inevitably produce positive changes and renew the planet for our

family trees to grow.

Fishing can be the first board in a bridge to brighter tomorrows. Changing habits to improve our behavior can be incredibly difficult. But when it provides joy and a sense of self-worth along the way, it is well within our grasp.

Find yourself some peace and relief this spring by hitting the water to fish, and help change the world by introducing someone new. Check out this year's Anglers' Guide in this magazine to learn about some Close to Home fishing spots to start your journey!



**Skylar St.Yves**

*Skylar St.Yves*

Skylar St.Yves,

Communication and Education Specialist



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**ON THE COVER:** These girls know how to have fun — by catching a mess of fish down at the pond! Whether you are a veteran angler or wanting to learn how to wet a line, you'll find some inspiration in the 2022 Anglers' Guide, starting on Page 10. (Photo by Ben Bickerstaff/ODWC)



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outdooroklahoma

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# Off the Beaten Path

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



## BEST OF READERS' PHOTOS TO APPEAR IN MAGAZINE

Imagine the pride you could feel when you open the July/August issue of Outdoor Oklahoma magazine and show your friends the remarkable photograph that you took! For the chance to have your work published in a high-quality, award-winning magazine, we invite you to enter the annual Readers' Photography Showcase competition!

Entries are being accepted online through April 15, and every entry is considered in the judging. We ask you to share up to three of your best original photos related to fish and wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation, or just nature's beauty, preferably all taken in Oklahoma in recent years.

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 photos, and hitting the "submit" button. It's easy!

There's still plenty of time to get those images in front of the judges. Go to the entry page online at [www.tinyurl.com/enterRPS](http://www.tinyurl.com/enterRPS) or click the code. ☛☛



## WATERFOWL STAMP ART CONTEST ENTRY DEADLINE AUG. 1

The green-winged teal is the subject for the next Oklahoma Waterfowl Stamp design competition, which is now accepting entries. Artists have until 4:30 p.m. Aug. 1 to submit artwork for this prestigious contest that has been conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation since 1980.

The winning artwork will grace the 2023-24 Oklahoma Waterfowl Stamp, which is purchased by waterfowl hunters in the state and by collectors nationwide. The winning artist will receive a \$1,200 purchase award.

This contest is open to any artist nationwide regardless of residency, and the winner is selected using votes received online from the public and from internal Wildlife Department judges.

Because the Wildlife Department receives no general state tax appropriations, revenue from the Oklahoma Waterfowl Stamp and the Oklahoma Waterfowl License are important

sources of funding for in-the-field habitat work that benefits waterfowl and other wetlands wildlife.

Judges will consider each artwork in terms of anatomical accuracy, artistic composition and suitability for printing. Any background habitat depicted must be typical of an Oklahoma locale.

Entries are limited to one artwork per artist, and a \$20 nonrefundable entry fee and entry form are required. Mailed entries should be sent to Duck Stamp Competition Coordinator, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152. Ground deliveries should be made to 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, 73105.

For complete contest rules, go to [www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/species/waterfowl/duck-stamp-program/rules](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/species/waterfowl/duck-stamp-program/rules). For more contest information, call (405) 521-3855. ☛☛





# Welcome to the Dock!

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



George Davidson, paddlefish, Dec. 17, 2021, Grand Lake.



**NEW STATE RECORD!**  
Dayton Weber, gizzard shad, 2 lbs 2.6 oz, Dec. 21, 2021, Sooner Lake.



Kim Winton, black bass, Nov. 27, 2021, Pottawatomie County.



Sophie Kladky, rainbow trout, Dec. 7, 2021, Route 66 Park (Yukon).



Cecil Crittenden, paddlefish, Dec. 16, 2021, Grand Lake.



Sparky G., catfish, Dec. 13, 2021, Lake Texoma.



# NEW COLLECTIBLE LICENSE CARDS FOR 2022 UNVEILED!



ODWC's collectible durable license cards for 2022 are now on sale!

The new designs feature a largemouth bass from Nora Hall's "Oklahoma Animal Series," and a group of white-tailed deer from Carolyn Mock's painting "Morning Chatter."

These stylish collectible cards allow you to carry up to nine of the licenses you hold, encoded on one long-lasting card that fits in your pocket.

Anyone can order these durable cards, whether getting a new license, renewing, or simply having current paper licenses encoded onto a card that's easier to carry. Even lifetime license holders can order one of these classy artistic cards.

New cards with different artwork are issued periodically, usually every year, and are sure to become your badge of support for Oklahoma's outdoor heritage.

Be sure to harvest one — or both — of these cards today! To order, log on to [license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](https://license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com) and click "Print Licenses." Proceeds from collectible card sales help fund the Wildlife Department's mission to conserve and protect the state's fish and wildlife resources and habitat. ♦♦✕

## Outdoor Calendar

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES, GO ONLINE TO LICENSE.  
[GoOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/Event/Events.aspx](https://GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com/Event/Events.aspx)

**NOTICE:** Events listed were scheduled at press time; events are subject to change.

### MARCH 2022

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 1  | Rack Madness 2022, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., ODWC Headquarters, Oklahoma City.   |
| 5  | Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.<br>Quail Forever: Cherokee Strip Chapter 8th annual banquet, <a href="http://www.oklahomafqf.org">www.oklahomafqf.org</a> .<br>Youth Hooked on Fishing clinic, ages 5-15, 8 to 10 a.m., Dolese Park, <a href="http://www.okc.gov/departments/parks-recreation/calendar">www.okc.gov/departments/parks-recreation/calendar</a> .<br>Lower Illinois River Trout Clinic, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., near Gore, register: <a href="https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx">https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx</a> .<br>Lower Illinois River Trout Clinic, 3 to 6 p.m., near Gore, register: <a href="https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx">https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx</a> . |
| 6  | Lower Illinois River Trout Clinic, 9 a.m. to noon, near Gore, register: <a href="https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx">https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx</a> .<br>Lower Illinois River Fly Fishing Clinic, 1 to 4 p.m., near Gore, register: <a href="https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx">https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx</a> .<br>"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.  |
| 7  | Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City.  |
| 13 | "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.   |
| 20 | "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.   |
| 27 | "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.   |

- **Ducks Unlimited** events set in Wagoner, March 5; Ponca City, March 10; Poteau, March 25; Miami, March 25; Tulsa, March 25.  
Info: [www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events](http://www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events).
- **Friends of NRA** event info: [www.FriendsOfNRA.org](http://www.FriendsOfNRA.org).
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events set in Pryor, March 4; Glenpool/Tulsa, March 5; Muskogee, March 10; Idabel, March 11; Wagoner, March 12; Duncan, March 19; Claremore, March 19; Westville, March 26.  
Info: [www.nwtf.org/events](http://www.nwtf.org/events).

### APRIL 2022

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1    | Controlled Hunts online application period opens, <a href="https://tinyurl.com/2p89mhvu">tinyurl.com/2p89mhvu</a> .                             |
| 2    | Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.  |
| 3    | "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.  |
| 4    | Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City.   |
| 9-10 | Youth Spring Turkey Season.   |
| 10   | "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.  |
| 15   | Entry period closes, Outdoor Oklahoma Readers' Photo Showcase contest, <a href="http://www.tinyurl.com/enterRPS">www.tinyurl.com/enterRPS</a> . |
| 16   | Spring Turkey Season Opens.   |
| 17   | "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.<br>Easter Day.   |
| 24   | "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.  |

- **Ducks Unlimited** event info: [www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events](http://www.ducks.org/Oklahoma/events).
- **Friends of NRA** event info: [www.FriendsOfNRA.org](http://www.FriendsOfNRA.org).
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events set in Wagoner, April 1; Seminole, April 2; Weatherford, April 2; Okemah, April 9.  
Info: [www.nwtf.org/events](http://www.nwtf.org/events).

\*\* FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO  
[www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons) \*\*





# Game Warden's Journal

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



Game Warden **Garret Harley**, based in Seminole County, received information from Game Warden **Shane Fields**, based in Pittsburg County, about a man who shot two large bucks in a Texas high-fence ranch and then brought the deer into Oklahoma and checked them in the Oklahoma E-Check system as Oklahoma-harvested deer. Harley spoke with the Texas ranch owner and the local Texas game warden to confirm the information.

Harley gathered more information and photos of the deer. A team of Game Wardens was assembled to interview people at residences. Investigation and multiple phone calls with Texas authorities led Harley and his team to evidence that the man had killed other deer at the same ranch the year before.

Game Wardens Harley, Fields, and **Shay Loudermilk**, based in Hughes County, met the suspect, who confessed to all crimes related to the investigation. The man confessed to killing three large white-tailed deer and one black-buck antelope inside the Texas high fence area with no license or tags, and illegally bringing them to Oklahoma. Five citations were issued for illegal possession of wildlife and falsifying information to an Oklahoma check station.

Wardens also questioned the man about other evidence. The person is a taxidermist who had multiple deer heads at his residence. Recently harvested deer heads were boiling in water. Several recently completed European mounts were observed. The facility did not have proper documentation, including but not limited to confirmation numbers for checked animals, license information, and contact phone numbers.

Harley contacted the man to which the boiling deer heads belonged and obtained a confession. That man had no hunting license, no deer tag, and had failed to check deer



felony Lacey Act violations.

Game Wardens expressed their thanks to the Texas game wardens who helped in this case.

.....

Hunters at McGee Creek Wildlife Management Area reported a sportsman as missing for more than 24 hours on Dec. 30, 2021. Wildlife Department Biologist **Hunter Redden** and Wildlife Technician **Taylor Dealy** immediately began a search and notified Game Wardens **Jay Harvey** and **Jim Gillham**, both based in Atoka County. A comprehensive search began, and the missing hunter was found that evening in good health and in good condition. Among the agencies assisting were Atoka County Sheriff's Office, Choctaw Nation Tribal Police, Pushmataha County Search and Rescue, Coal County Search and Rescue, and fire departments from Atoka, Bentley, Caney, Crystal, Farris, Harmoney, Hopewell, Tushka, and Stringtown.

(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. \*\*X



## CONSERVATION PASSPORT REQUIREMENT

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are public lands owned, managed or leased by the Wildlife Department. Their primary purpose is to provide habitat to Oklahoma's fish and wildlife. WMAs are purchased with funds generated through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. Because ODWC follows a user-pay/public-benefit model, WMA visitors must have a valid Oklahoma hunting or fishing license (unless exempt). People who don't have a hunting or fishing license may buy an annual Conservation Passport, currently priced at \$26, in order to legally visit WMAs. But there's a better deal: an annual resident fishing or hunting license costs \$25 and qualifies the Wildlife Department to receive additional federal funds. And these regular licenses provide WMA access, plus the added privilege of hunting or fishing! \*\*X

— Smokey Solis, Communication and Education Specialist



# Wild About

## ◆ COOKING ◆



## ITALIAN ELK SANDWICHES

By Smokey Solis, Communication and Education Specialist

Put away that cold lunch meat. These Italian Elk Sandwiches will warm you up on any cold day! While we prefer to use an elk roast, this recipe can be made with any type of roast you desire.

### Ingredients

4 lb elk roast  
2 Tbsp toasted fennel seed  
2 Tbsp toasted coriander  
2 Tbsp paprika  
2 Tbsp chile flakes  
2 Tbsp garlic powder  
2 Tbsp onion powder  
2 Tbsp beef bouillon paste  
6 cups beef broth  
6 cups water  
8-12 brioche rolls  
Giardiniera  
(optional, for topping)  
Jarred sweet peppers  
(optional, for topping)

### Directions

- Preheat oven to 350°F.
- Add 4 Tbsp of neutral cooking oil to an oven-safe pot on stovetop. Heat for about 5 minutes on medium-high.
- Carefully place roast into hot oil and sear on each side, making sure to create a brown crust around the whole roast, about 2 minutes on each side. The goal is to create an outside crust, not to cook the meat internally.
- Stir all spices into beef broth, then carefully add beef broth to pot.
- Cut a piece of parchment paper to the size of pot and place on top of roast.
- Put pot into oven and bake roast until a meat thermometer shows an internal temperature of 145°F.
- Remove roast, carefully wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for two hours to firm up the roast.
- Meanwhile, in roasting pot, heat broth on stove over medium heat. Add 4 to 6 cups water and stir, scraping bottom of pan to remove crust (fond) left from searing. The fond adds flavor to the broth.
- Reduce heat and simmer about 30 to 45 minutes, watching carefully to keep from burning.
- Remove roast from refrigerator and cut slices as thinly as possible.
- Bring broth to a light boil and add enough meat to broth for as many sandwiches as you want. After 15 to 20 seconds, use a fork or tongs to pull meat from broth and place on a roll. Repeat with remaining meat and rolls.

Once you have your basic sandwiches made, you can add toppings of your choosing. I enjoy jarred sweet peppers. Ladle some broth into a bowl for dipping, and enjoy this masterpiece of a sandwich!





2022

# WILDLIFE YOUTH CAMP

**THE 2022 YOUTH CAMP IS JUNE 12 - 17 AT LAKE TEXOMA.  
THE DEADLINE TO APPLY IS APRIL 15TH, SEE DETAILS BELOW ON HOW TO APPLY.**

• FISHING • SELF-DEFENSE • WILDLIFE LAW ENFORCEMENT • ARCHERY  
• WILDLIFE IDENTIFICATION • RIFLE/SHOTGUN SHOOTING • ROPES COURSE • WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

**OPEN TO YOUTH 14-16 YEARS OLD  
APPLICATION DEADLINE IS APRIL 15, 2022**



**APPLY HERE**





# 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](mailto:donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov).*

Dear Darrin Hill, ODWC Communication Specialist,

Thank you for coming to speak with my kids about wildlife conservation. They had the coolest experience with games and props. (Here are notes from the students.)

- Thank you for letting us touch the animals' skin and teach us about it. — **Dennis**
- Liked the animal skull. — **Jackson**
- Thank you for taking time to come talk to us. — **Ethan**
- My favorite part was guessing the animal. — **Reja**
- Thank you for coming and showing science to us. — **Addi**
- My favorite part was when you showed us different types of scientists. — **Angel**
- Thank you for telling us the cool facts about the animals. — **Harley**

Ashley Johns, teacher, Central Middle School, Lawton

## TAX TIME CAN GET A LITTLE WILD

With all the receipts and schedules and stress, tax time can get a little wild. But Schedule 511-H of Oklahoma's income tax return allows citizens to put that wild energy to good use when they donate a portion of their refund to ODWC's Wildlife Diversity Fund. The Wildlife Department can then turn those donations into field surveys of our state's rare and declining species, including the rough and tumble **swift fox**.

Forms can be found at the Oklahoma Tax Commission's website, [oklahoma.gov/tax](http://oklahoma.gov/tax). Income taxes may also be filed online for free. The deadline for tax year 2021 returns is April 18.

The Wildlife Department does not receive general state tax appropriations. License sales and federal Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program grant revenues are the main funding sources. Every license dollar spent by sportsmen and sportswomen in Oklahoma is used to fund the Wildlife Department's user-pay/public-benefit conservation efforts. ♦♦✕



LARRY D. BROWN/READERS PHOTO SHOWCASE 2020

## CITIZEN SCIENCE CONTINUES WITH BIOBLITZ! OK 2022

In 1910, a group of Oklahoma bird watchers created and shared a log of their sightings near Tonkawa, launching a tradition of citizen science in the Sooner State. That spirit of sharing has continued for more than a century, growing beyond the initial Christmastime bird count to now include a full celebration of Oklahoma's biodiversity known as BioBlitz! OK.

Oklahomans can share their plant and wildlife sightings during weeklong seasonal BioBlitz! inventories using the free platforms iNaturalist and eBird. In addition to logging as many of our state's species as possible, participants can also join field trips, online presentations and download free nature activities. The 2022 Spring BioBlitz! OK is set for April 22-29. For more information, go to Oklahoma's BioDiversity Learning Center, [okbiodiversity.org](http://okbiodiversity.org), or scan the code. ♦♦✕

2022  
**BIOBLITZ! OK**  
Celebrating BioDiversity  
for over 20 years!





# 2021 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

## "DRAWN TO THE WOODS"

**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 with Rack Attack Outfitters of Fairview (or similar) and a scholarship to the Outdoor Texas Camp. In this issue, Outdoor Oklahoma honors junior category male winner Gage Graham, 14, an eighth-grader from Owasso Eighth-Grade Center.



By Gage Graham

When the weather begins to turn cold and the crisp leaves start to fall from the trees, I know it is time to start preparing for hunting season. Every year, in the fall crisp air, my dad and I gather all of our hunting gear and we make sure our guns are sighted in. As we are prepping and talking of our season, my grandpa is preparing his things as well. As we haul our campers, gear and four wheelers to my grandpa's land and set up camp around the aged fire pit, my mind is flooded with memories. Those memories are of the first time I ever went hunting.

The first time I went hunting, I was 5 years old. I remember the excitement in the air as we hung around the campfire. As I poked the fire with a stick and roasted marshmallows, my dad, grandpa, and great-grandpa chatted about the fields of clover they planted. All of the laughter between them in that moment in the woods, I knew I would want to hunt every year. For the first time ever, I willingly went to bed early and woke early the next morning. At dawn, all bundled up in camouflage, we walked over crisp leaves, quietly crunching our way



to our deer stand. I knew, without being told, that being quiet would help guide the deer close to us.

I sat with my dad for what felt like an eternity, a peaceful eternity that I wanted to do forever. That year, I didn't shoot any deer, but that didn't end my days hunting. I became a part of the men that sat around the fire talking about the good ol' days. I did eventually shoot my first deer, a doe, when I was 8 years old. We processed the meat ourselves ... and had the hide tanned. I finally felt as if I earned my place around the campfire.

The seats around the campfire aren't full of the men I called grandpa anymore. My great-grandfather's seat remains empty but his wisdom still rings loud in my ears. I learned a lot from a quiet man. My grandpa from my dad's side brought his chair to the campfire and taught me many things until he passed away. My dad, grandpa, and I still hold the traditions that were started the first year I went hunting. I continue to make memories every year and learn new things. I hope that I am still sitting at the campfire until I can no longer, passing on the memories, laughter, and knowledge that I learned from the first time I poked that fire when I was 5 years old. ••x



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## 2022 ANGLERS' GUIDE

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# BEST FISHING GAME IN TOWN MIGHT BE

# **Nongame!**

PROVIDED THE DOCK



***Game Fish Aren't the Only  
Source of Angling Excitement***

---

BY SKYLAR ST.YVES, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

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While most anglers only concern themselves with a dozen or so different types of game fish to catch, at least 183 fish species have been documented in Oklahoma. These fish come in all shapes and sizes, each playing a valuable role in its ecosystem.

For regulatory purposes, Oklahoma categorizes fish into a few categories. The first and most well-known is the game fish category. It includes 14 fish: largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, spotted bass, white bass, striped bass, channel catfish, blue catfish, saugeye, walleye, sauger, white crappie, black crappie, rainbow trout and brown trout.

Game fish most often have special restrictions when it comes to where, when, how, and how many you can catch. Game fish are not only important to their respective ecosystems, but to the economic and spiritual benefit of people.

Nongame fish, however, play just as vital a role in the grand scheme of fishing and can be split into three broad categories: species of special concern, baitfish and sportfish.

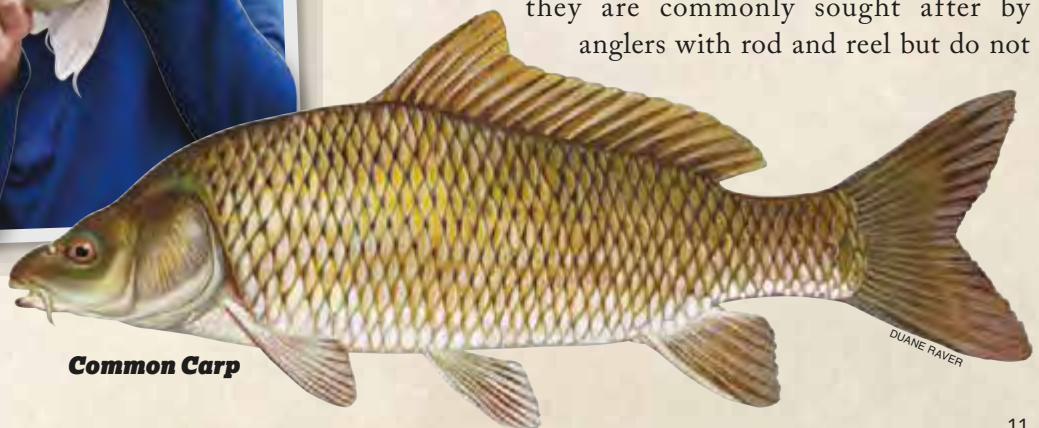
Species of special concern, like black buffalo



and shovelnose sturgeon, are rarely encountered by anglers. When they are, it is usually a result of unintentional catching. There is a daily limit of one for species of special concern, and harvest is required to be reported to the Wildlife Department.

Baitfish make up the most robust portion of nongame fish. Baitfish is a relative term and has different meaning for different anglers, but most consider them minnow-like fish such as shad and shiners that do not routinely obtain lengths greater than 6 inches. Baitfish are usually caught by using nets or fish traps, but there is a blossoming segment of the fishing public who attempt to catch these fish with rod and reel, referred to as microfishing.

The last category of nongame fish contains the most-recognized species, such as bluegill, hybrid striped bass, flathead catfish, buffalofishes, drum, carp and gar. We call these species sportfish because they are commonly sought after by anglers with rod and reel but do not



**Common Carp**



typically have the same restrictive regulations as game fish.

Local lakes and rivers are plumb-full of nongame fish, making them great places to share your love of fishing with someone who has never fished before!

Targeting nongame sportfish such as carp and drum can be exhilarating for new anglers because the average size is typically more than 3 pounds. These fish are incredible fighters and are sure to light up the eyes of any angler privileged enough to hook into one.

Unlike many game fish that require an array of lures and tackle, the fishing setup for nongame fish is as simple as it gets!

All one needs is a sturdy rod and reel spooled with 10-pound test line, some weights, swivels, hooks and a cup of worms. Manufactured prepackaged dough baits, a can of corn, or a bag of white bread are also suitable baits.

Now that you've got the gear, where do you go? For starters, you don't need a boat to have success. Bank fishing is ideal for pursuing nongame species. Public use areas at your local lake or river are perfect starting points.

These areas are great safe places for families to fish and usually have other park amenities like walking trails, restrooms, picnic tables and playgrounds. Some will also have fishing piers and covered docks.



**Freshwater Drum**



But the main thing about these areas is that they always have easily accessible shoreline.

Once you've found your spot to set up, try these basic tips.

Cut a 2-foot piece of line from your main line and set aside (this is your leader line). Place a half-ounce casting egg or bottom-bouncing weight on your main line and then tie the end of the main line to one side of a barrel swivel. Take the 2-foot piece of line that you cut and tie one end to the other side of the barrel swivel. Then tie on a



Boe Daniel Meehan holds the unrestricted state-record bigmouth buffalofish he shot April 15, 2020.

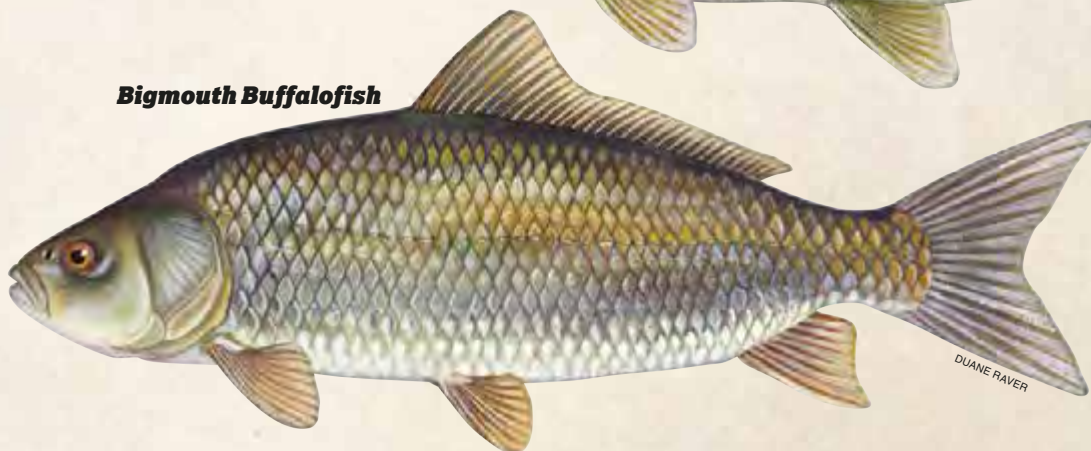


Jeff Olinger holds the state-record black buffalofish he caught Nov. 17, 2013.



**Smallmouth Buffalofish**

DUANE RAYER



**Bigmouth Buffalofish**

DUANE RAYER



bait-holding or octopus hook to the end of the leader line.

Small thick wire hooks work the best as they won't straighten out on a big fish.

Next, thread your bait onto the hook and cast straight out. Let the weight fall to the bottom and then reel up any slack in the line until the line is tight with the rod tip and wait for a bite.

Red worms and nightcrawlers tend to catch the most variety of nongame fish.

Target shallow sandy areas near vegetation, drop-offs or rip rap.

Most associate introducing someone new to fishing with bobber fishing for sunfish in small ponds, but large water bodies can be just as rewarding and offer the opportunity to catch larger fish. Hooking a big fish could hook a new angler for life!

If you want to go the bobber route for sunfish, try any of our Close to Home Fishing areas throughout Oklahoma's major metro areas.

Close to Home Fishing ponds are great for introducing a child to fishing for the first time.

Equipment needs for a Close to Home fishing adventure include a medium- to light- action rod(s), 4-pound to 8-pound line spooled on a spincasting or spinning reel, small plain shank bait hooks (size 6-10), split-shot weights, small round or stick bobbers, and a cup of worms.

WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM



**Flathead Catfish**







WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM

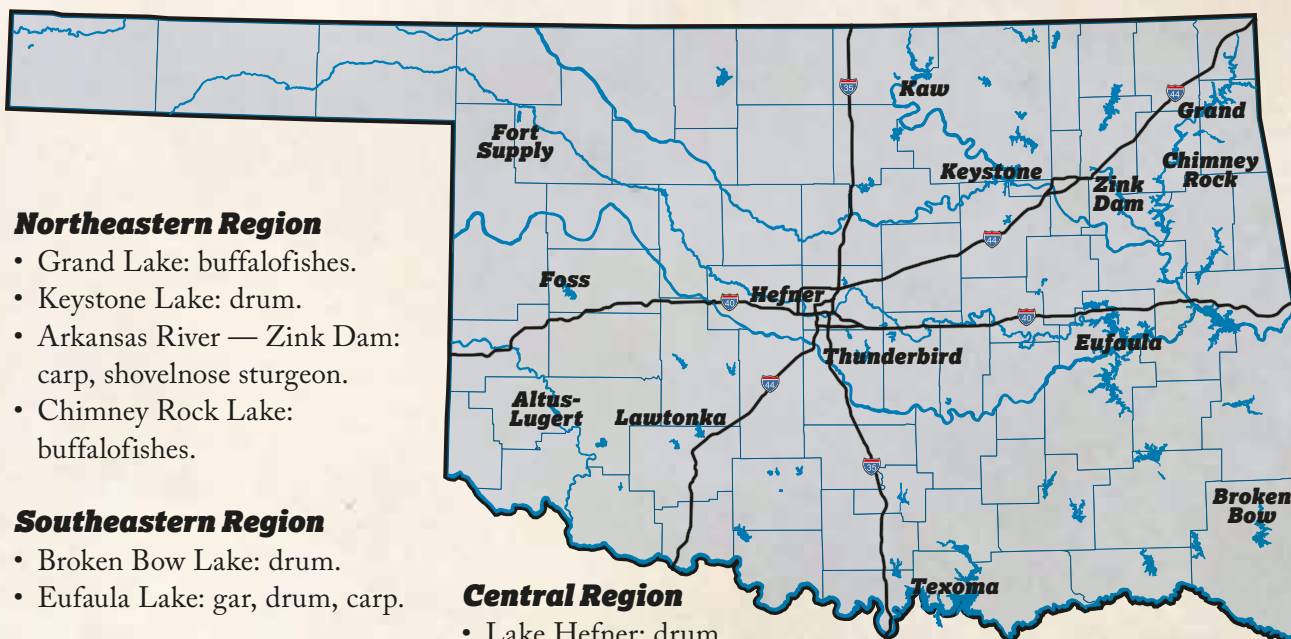
Tie a hook to the end of your line. Place a split-shot weight on the line an inch above the hook. Place a small bobber on the line 1-3 feet above the split-shot weight. Thread a small piece of nightcrawler onto the hook and cast your line straight out. When the bobber submerges below the water's surface, quickly reel up the slack and set the hook.

All of these items are sold at area sporting goods stores. Many fishing gear manufacturers offer rod and reel combos already spooled with line (price range \$10-\$40).

It's always the right time to share your love of fishing with someone new! If you have questions about what to use, where to go, or getting started, contact ODWC's Aquatic Education/R3 Fishing Coordinator Skylar St.Yves at (405) 990-9753 or [skylar.styves@odwc.ok.gov](mailto:skylar.styves@odwc.ok.gov).

Tight lines and happy fishing!

## TOP SPOTS FOR NONGAME FISH



### Northeastern Region

- Grand Lake: buffalofishes.
- Keystone Lake: drum.
- Arkansas River — Zink Dam: carp, shovelnose sturgeon.
- Chimney Rock Lake: buffalofishes.

### Southeastern Region

- Broken Bow Lake: drum.
- Eufaula Lake: gar, drum, carp.

### South-Central Region

- Lake Texoma: carp, gar, drum, buffalofishes.

### North-Central Region

- Kaw Lake: drum, buffalofishes.

### Central Region

- Lake Hefner: drum.
- Lake Thunderbird: drum.

### Northwestern Region

- Foss Lake: carp, drum, buffalofishes.
- Fort Supply Lake: carp, drum.

### Southwestern Region

- Lake Lawtonka: drum, buffalofishes.
- Altus-Lugert Lake: drum, buffalofishes.



# FOR 20 YEARS, ODWC PROGRAM BRINGS FISHING...



## *Close to Home!*



BY SKYLAR ST.YVES,  
COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST



The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation joined 13 other state fish and wildlife agencies in 2002 to create an urban and community fishing program. The driving force behind the program was a need to create more fishing opportunities for urban residents.

ODWC fisheries staff created the Close to Home Fishing Program (CTHP) at Dolese Lake, a 19-acre pond in northwestern Oklahoma City. A cooperative agreement between ODWC and the City of Oklahoma City listed responsibilities for both parties, and the CTHP was underway. The program quickly grew to eight sites by 2007.

Benefits to municipalities that join the program include patrols by ODWC Game Wardens, preference for boating and fishing access funds, access to aquatic education materials and equipment, technical assistance, and preference for stocking fish when needed.

The majority of the cooperating municipalities are in the greater Oklahoma City area, including Oklahoma City, Edmond, Guthrie, Moore and Norman. The Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department contributes a great deal of support for the program. The H.B. Parsons Oklahoma City Fish Hatchery staff manages 10 CTHP ponds and raises fish for stocking. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department conducts a minimum of 12 aquatic education events each year at many of the ponds.

The program has expanded in recent years to include waters in the northwestern, northeastern and southwestern parts of the state. In total, there are 43 CTHP waters statewide. Each CTHP area is required to have adequate facilities to accommodate families, including restrooms, picnic areas, parking and fishing piers, before being selected by ODWC to participate in the program.

While the primary fish stocked in CTHP waters over the years have been channel catfish and hybrid sunfish, many different species can be found in each body of water, including black bass, crappie, flathead catfish, trout (at seasonal CTHP waters) and carp.

Fisheries management activities for all CTHP waters involve providing put-grow-take fisheries by stocking low to moderate numbers of juvenile fish that will grow to a more desirable size to please anglers. This approach



REBECCA FILMORE/ODWC



WILDLIFE/DEPARTMENT.COM

*Hybrid sunfish, above, and channel catfish, left, are produced at ODWC fish hatcheries and stocked regularly into Close to Home Fishing waters statewide.*



has been moderately successful at ponds with low angling pressure. Ponds with fish feeders tend to show better growth.

The five main components of the CTHP are opportunity, fishing access, boating access, education and outreach.

**Opportunity:** Development of a larger network of Close to Home Fishing locations through the use of existing and construction of city-owned and leased ponds, privately-owned ponds (homeowners association or businesses), and existing water supply reservoirs. Currently there are 18 partnerships with municipalities statewide that include 44 sites totaling 306 acres of water. There are another 10 cities that have expressed interest in joining the program.

**Fishing Access:** Construction of fishing docks, piers, shoreline access areas, and amenities associated with angler access, such as sidewalks, parking lots, lighting, and restrooms. Access projects installed to date include five fishing piers, one boat ramp, three handicap pads, and four aeration systems.

**Boating Access:** Construction of new and renovation of existing boat ramps, courtesy docks, parking lots, lighting, restrooms, and access roads. Only one boat ramp and boat dock have been installed under the program because the majority of the ponds do not allow boating due to their size.

**Education:** Increased numbers and locations for youth and adult fishing clinics with the assistance of trained volunteer instructors. Hundreds of Aquatic Education Resource Program (AREP) events have been held at CTH sites since the program started. More than 300 certified volunteer instructors are available statewide under the AREP program.

**Outreach:** Development and distribution of brochures, magazine articles, news releases, radio and television commercials, and programs regarding the conservation of our aquatic resources and their use in recreational fishing. A limited number of brochures, maps, and news articles have been released since 2000. The CTHF program has been a communication priority of the ODWC's Communication and Education Division for several years so more people can become aware of these fishing opportunities that might be right in their neighborhoods!

To learn more about CTHF, scan the code:



## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Fishing is fun for everyone, but it also comes with rules so that everyone can enjoy it now and in the future. All anglers are responsible for knowing and obeying the regulations in the annual Fishing and Hunting Regulations.

Several **changes in regulations** became effective last year or will soon be going into effect this year. Here's a summary of those changes.

- Combined three-fish bag limit for all Close to Home Fishing program waters.
- Combined three-trout daily bag limit statewide.
- No longer a catch-and-release requirement for paddlefish on Mondays and Fridays.
- Catch-and-release only for alligator gar caught with rod and reel.
- Tiger muskie restrictions removed.
- Fishing equipment labeling requires the use of Customer ID number.
- Liberalized snagging restrictions on the Arkansas River.
- Non-motorized boats allowed on Doc Hollis Lake.
- No minimum length limit for harvest of largemouth and smallmouth bass, but only one of more than 16 inches may be harvested per day.
- Allow for a black bass tournament exemption to size and bag limits until weigh-in, after which fish must be released.
- Revise Lower Mountain Fork River trout bag limit to include only one brown trout of 30 inches or longer, and re-establish trophy area in the downstream reaches of the trout area.
- Restore statewide daily bag limit for largemouth and smallmouth bass to Lake Murray and to waters in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.
- Limit the daily bag limit of fork-tailed catfish to six below Carlton Lake to the Robbers Cave State Park boundary.
- Require anglers using containers to store live fish, unattended, in the field to label the containers with Customer ID number.





## FISHING CLINICS

Want to learn all about fishing? Take advantage of in-person fishing clinics held throughout the year.

The Wildlife Department holds Family Fishing Clinics, Trout Fishing Clinics, and Fly Fishing Clinics. The City of Oklahoma City Parks Department holds Youth Hooked on Fishing clinics. Sign-up happens online, but spots are limited.

To check for upcoming clinics, keep an eye online throughout the year at <https://tinyurl.com/mtu8sr4w>.

## CLOSE TO HOME FISHING LOCATIONS

### **Bartlesville: (918) 338-4132**

- Lee Lake, Bartlesville, OK 74006

### **Choctaw: (405) 390-8198**

- Choctaw Creek Park  
(2001 N. Harper Road)
- Ten Acre Park (15600 N.E. 10th St.)

### **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.)
- Southern Hills North (2710 Faith Ave.)
- Southern Hills South (2810 Faith Ave.)

### **Enid: (580) 554-1536**

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

### **Guthrie: (405) 282-8400**

- Mineral Wells Park (901 S. Division)
- Hudson Pond @ Highland Park (1102 E. Warner Ave.)

### **Harrah: (405) 454-2951**

- Heritage Park (1374 N. Church Ave.)

### **Jenks: (918) 299-5883**

- Veterans Park Pond (E. 101 and Elm)

### **Jones: (405) 399-5301**

- Battey-Mullhousen pond  
(320 E. Main St.)

### **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 (530 S.W. 59th St.)

### **Newcastle: (405) 387-4427**

- Veterans Park Pond (1300 Garrett Drive)

### **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)

### **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

### **Sapulpa: (918) 227-5151**

- Kelly Lane Park (1151 S. Park St., Sapulpa, OK 74066)

### **Tulsa River Parks Authority: (918) 596-2001**

- Turkey Mountain (6800 S. Elwood Ave., Tulsa, OK 74127)

### **Tulsa: (918) 596-7275**

- Hunter Park Pond (5804 E. 91st St., Tulsa, OK 74137)
- Braden Park Pond (5036 E. 7th St., Tulsa, OK 74112)
- Mohawk Park Ponds (5701 E. 36th St. N., Tulsa, OK 74115, Mohawk Park, Tulsa, OK 74115) After entering park from 36th St. N., turn right on Cherokee Drive, just past entrance gates)

### **Yukon: (405) 350-8937**

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



# ***Run, Sandie, Run!***



WADE FREE/ODWC

## **ANNUAL WHITE BASS SPAWN IS AMONG STATE'S GREAT FISHING TRADITIONS**

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**BY SKYLAR ST.YVES, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST**



The official state fish of Oklahoma is a fan favorite of springtime anglers. White bass are prolific spawners that make their annual migration runs in the thousands, giving anglers the opportunity to catch fish fast and furious. White bass require very basic fishing equipment, which makes them an easy target for anglers of all experience levels.

Also called sand bass, these fish typically start their spawning routine before the other warm-water species in the state. Many longtime white bass anglers say the white bass spawning run begins when the redbud trees begin to bloom.

White bass prefer to spawn up inflowing creeks and rivers on a given body of water. When water temperatures in the lake hit 50 degrees, any public access site along the creeks and rivers that feed the lake are great places for anyone to target white bass.

For those with access to a boat, start your fishing efforts at the mouths of the inflowing tributaries and follow the white bass upstream. The spawning run can last up to three weeks, but typically there's a weeklong window when fishing is lights-out!



**White Bass**

DUANE RAYER

## WHITE BASS SPECIES PROFILE

**Oklahoma Distribution:** Although native to Oklahoma, white bass were not found in great numbers until large reservoirs were constructed. Now they are found statewide.

**Description:** The white bass can be identified by the distinctive arched back behind its head. It also has only one tongue patch.

**Habitat:** These fish usually travel in large schools. Adults prefer open water over sandy shoals during the day and shallows at night.



WADE FREECOW

### White Bass Online

For detailed information on white bass angling and where to go, scan the code.





**Natural Food Sources:** Shad, minnows, crustaceans and insects.

**Spawning:** White bass are prolific. One female can produce up to a million eggs. Reproductive activities are triggered by water temperatures of 50-55 degrees. Spawning is at random over weeds, debris and rocks. When tributary streams are available, this species prefers upstream migration for spawning. No parental care is provided to eggs or young.

**Facts:** The white bass is Oklahoma's state fish. An estimated 1.5 million pounds of white bass are harvested annually from Oklahoma waters by anglers. Due to their short life span and high reproductive capacity, no creel limits are imposed on most lakes. Anglers learn to watch for circling and diving gulls and/or surface disturbances

as sure signs of schooling shad. Where there are shad, white bass are usually nearby.

## WHITE BASS FISHING TIPS

When water temperatures reach the high 40s, focus your efforts at the mouths of inflowing creeks and rivers on the north ends of the water body. Try lipless crankbaits in gold, silver or red patterns, sassy shad in pearl white, shallow- or medium-diving lipped crankbaits in shad-colored variations, and small white maribou jigs or curly tail grubs.

Each water body in the state seems to have a bait of choice for white bass, so if you're unfamiliar with the area bring an array of these types of lures until you find the one that picks up the most fish.

If fishing with artificial lures, keep your retrieve slow and steady.

Boat anglers can use a live minnow on a small- to medium-size bait-holding hook attached to a 12-inch leader line below a barrel swivel and a quarter-ounce to half-ounce egg weight. Let the line off the reel directly below the boat to your desired depth.

In lakes that do not have inflowing water, try the bait selections described above around coves, points and rip-rap areas, especially during morning and evening hours.

Follow the fish upstream during the spawn and look for brushy areas along the bank or mouths of small tributaries to target.

Sandies are schooling fish, so if you're not getting bites using the types of baits described, change locations often until you find them.







## FISHING RESOURCES ONLINE

The Wildlife Department's **Fishing Resources webpage** is a comprehensive collection of tips and tricks curated specifically for Oklahoma anglers, no matter their skill level. Find fishing advice organized according to skill level, as well as videos, articles and more. It's just a click away at [www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/fishing-resources](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/fishing-resources).

Here are some things you will find:

- More than 130 “Learn to Fish” videos.
- “Learn to Fish” Manual.
- Find free fishing clinics.
- Tips From the Pros.
- More than 25 hours of “Ask An Angler” educational seminar videos.
- “Angler Tips” sections for beginning, intermediate, and advanced anglers.
- Fishing Tips For All Seasons.
- Family Fishing Tips.
- Find a Fishing Tournament.
- Knot Tying.
- Find a Fishing Campground.
- Outdoor Insights for Women by Women (Artemis).
- Lake Access Closures.
- General Fishing Information.
- Boat, Motor Registration Information.



To explore ODWC's Fishing Resources webpage, scan the QR code.

### Fishing Gear

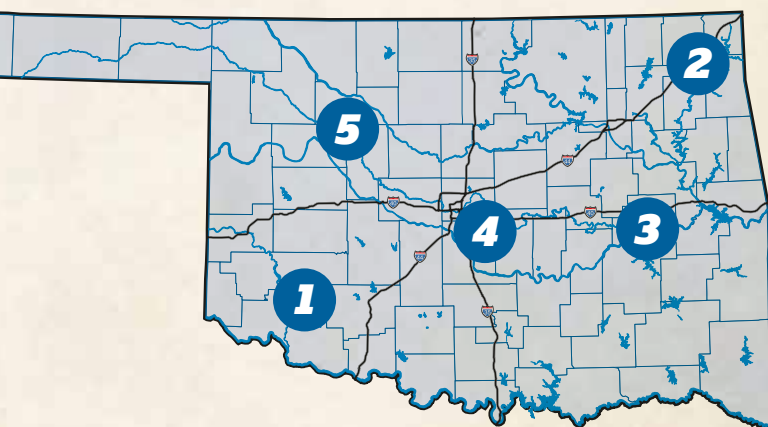
- 5-foot-6 to 7-foot medium-light to medium action rod.
- 4- to 10-pound monofilament line.
- Spinning, spincasting or casting reel.

### Popular Baits

- An eighth-ounce to a quarter-ounce lipless crankbait in gold, silver or red.
- Curly tail white or chartreuse grub on a sixteenth- to quarter-ounce jig head.
- Shallow to medium diving lipped crankbait in a shad coloration.
- A sixteenth- to three-sixteenth-ounce white or chartreuse maribou jig.
- Sassy shad of 2 to 3 inches in pearl white or chartreuse on an eighth- to quarter-ounce jig head.
- Small to medium size bait holding hook paired with a live minnow.

### Popular Spots

- 1 Tom Steed (southwest).
- 2 Grand Lake watershed (northeast).
- 3 Eufaula watershed (southeast).
- 4 Lake Thunderbird (central).
- 5 Canton watershed (northwest).



### FREE FISHING DAYS 2022

Mark your calendar now to participate in Oklahoma's Free Fishing Days, which will be June 4-5, 2022. Anyone may fish in Oklahoma on these days without a state license (free paddlefish permit still required). Some city/local permits may also be required. It's a great chance to take someone fishing for the first time!



# Conservation

## Get Outdoors!

Grab a smartphone and head outside to search for creepy crawlies! Insects and spiders are emerging as the weather warms. Zoom in and take pictures of creatures you come across. If you don't know what's in your photo, send it to [iNaturalist.org](http://iNaturalist.org) and ask someone who can tell you!

## for Kids!

### Word Search: Insects and Spiders

#### Hunting Tip

It's time to practice with your box call or mouth call, because springtime brings turkey hunting season! This year's youth turkey season is April 9-10. Youths 17 and younger may harvest one bearded turkey, and must be accompanied by a non-hunting adult. An unfilled youth license will be valid for regular spring turkey season April 16 to May 16 statewide. And don't forget to help our biologists by using E-Check online to report any harvested turkey.

#### Fishing Tip

Ever heard the old saying "white bass run when the redbuds bloom"? There can be a lot of truth to that. But other factors play roles to urge Oklahoma's state fish to begin swimming up creeks and streams to their spawning grounds. Usually from mid-March into April is when you might cast from a stream bank and enjoy some furious fishing action for "sandies." Tip: Wait until the river or stream is flowing after a springtime storm and you might have better success.

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

Find and circle these names of insects and spiders found in Oklahoma:

Brown Recluse  
Daddy Long Legs  
Horse Fly  
Mosquito

Caterpillar  
Grasshopper  
June Beetle  
Paper Wasp

Cicada  
Harvester Ant  
Mayfly  
Tarantula



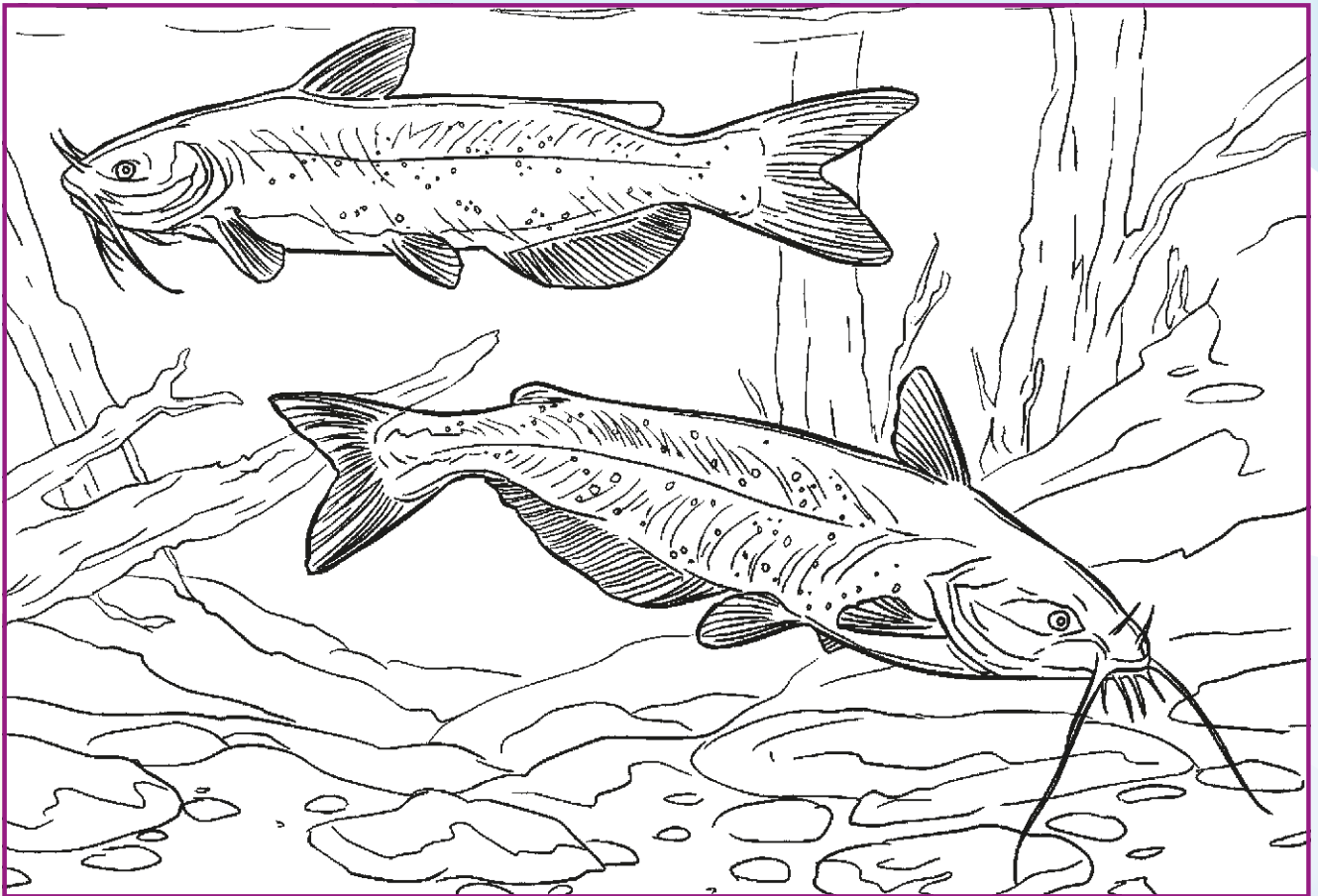
## Some COOL FACTS about the Channel Catfish:

- They are common in streams, ponds and lakes across Oklahoma.
- ODWC fish hatcheries at Medicine Park, Byron, Durant and Holdenville raise them for stocking into waters statewide.
- ODWC stocks about a half-million channel catfish statewide every year.
- They have a forked tail and the anal fin is curved across its bottom.
- The state record was caught in September 2005 from Taft Lake. It weighed 35 pounds 15 ounces and was 39 inches long.
- They are omnivorous, feeding on a wide variety of organic matter, dead and alive. Some of the more common foods are fish, mussels, snails, insects and crayfish.
- Often thought of as “bottom feeders,” they actually feed at any level.
- An angler’s daily limit for channel and blue catfish is 15 in any combination.



ROBERT L. CURTIS/CC-BY/USAA

## Color a Critter: Channel Catfish





# Turkey Hunting Rules Change As Research Examines Slump

**By Don P. Brown,  
Communication and Education Specialist**

Spring turkey hunting season won't be the same in 2022 as in recent years. New season dates and a new bag limit are in place across Oklahoma, changes made this past summer after Department of Wildlife Conservation wildlife biologists expressed concerns about declining numbers of wild turkeys in the state.

Hunters planning to pursue any of the three subspecies of wild turkeys that can be found in Oklahoma are reminded of these new regulations:

- The spring turkey season dates are April 16 to May 16, statewide.
- The spring turkey season bag limit is one tom turkey per hunter. A tom is defined as any bearded turkey.
- The youth spring turkey season will be the Saturday and Sunday before April 16. A turkey taken during youth spring turkey season counts toward the regular season limit of one turkey per hunter.

As the days get warmer, many sportsmen and sports-women embrace the opportunity to harvest a large game bird during a time when the budding landscape and mild conditions make it a prime time to enjoy outdoor pursuits.

Spring turkey hunting is a popular pursuit for hunters in Oklahoma and across the country; in fact, the wild turkey is second only to deer as America's most-hunted game. In 2021, an estimated 60,000 hunters harvested about 19,000 wild turkeys during Oklahoma's spring seasons. The banner year for turkey hunting in the Sooner State was 2003, when an estimated 75,000 hunters took about 42,000 birds.

But it wasn't always this way.

## Conservation "Poster Child"

Wild turkey populations were robust in western Oklahoma before the first land run in 1889 began opening large areas to settlement. In the ensuing decades,



habitat losses and subsistence hunting decimated the wild turkey population. Some estimates put the total number of wild turkeys at 30,000 birds at the beginning of the last century — for the entire continent!

By 1930, most Oklahomans would say there were no wild turkeys to be found here.

Biologists realized that even where suitable habitat remained, the birds were totally absent from the central and western portions of the state, and the statewide population was probably less than 1,000 birds.

In 1948, the Wildlife Department embarked on an ambitious program to re-establish the wild turkey to its former range. Southwest Region Wildlife Supervisor Rod Smith said turkey restoration really ramped up throughout the 1960s. The trap-and-transplant efforts proved highly successful, not only in Oklahoma but across America. By the early 1970's, America's population of wild turkeys was about 1.5 million.

"By the '80s, we were getting real close to completing restoration," Smith said. "For the last 20, 25 years, we have not trapped turkeys and relocated them."

Nationally, the wild turkey was becoming a very worthy "poster child" for the wildlife conservation community. Populations continued healthy growth, and by 2010 an estimated 6.7 million wild turkeys were on the landscape.

Oklahoma saw similar gains. "Numbers increased really rapidly from 2000 to 2006; they really spiked," said Smith, the Department's Rio Grande wild turkey project coordinator. In 2016, the estimated Oklahoma turkey population was just under 100,000. Today, the estimate is 70,000 birds statewide, a drop of about 30 percent in six years.



**To learn more about wild turkey conservation history in Oklahoma, scan the code.**

## Reversal of Fortunes

Southeast Region Wildlife Supervisor Eric Suttles, who serves as the Department's eastern wild turkey project coordinator, said it was decades ago when biologists noted declines in eastern turkey populations. To address the issue, the Department established different season dates and bag limits for wild turkey hunting in the Southeast Region.

Suttles said the effect of those changes has been to stabilize the eastern turkey population. He said surveys have shown modest ups and downs in the Northeast and Southeast regions over the past decade.

"We are in better shape than the western part of the state," he said.

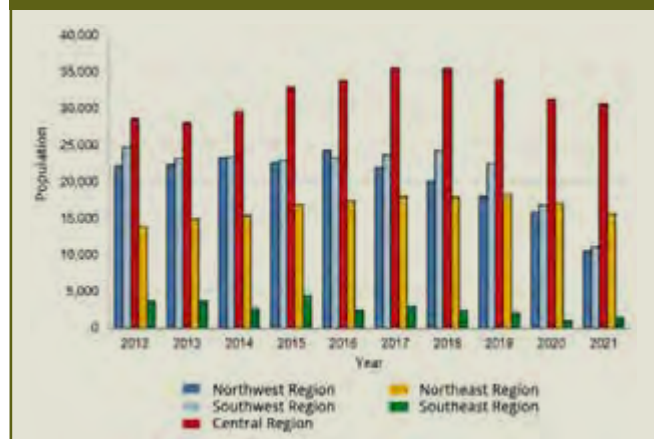
Smith tells a different story about western Oklahoma. "The drought in 2011 and 2012 hit and really started affecting turkey numbers. They didn't really rebound after that."

"In the last three to four years, numbers have gone down dramatically."

The declines are being seen nationwide, not just in Oklahoma. Nationally, biologists say the turkey population has dropped to about 6 million birds, which is down about 15 percent from the historic high seen around 2010. And many states are in the same situation, trying to figure out what is driving the decline in wild turkey numbers.

In Oklahoma, wild turkey populations have declined over the past three years in all five regions where surveys are conducted. Those three-year declines range from a 2.7 percent in the Northeast Region to a whopping 67.1 percent in the Southwest Region.

### WINTER FLOCK SURVEYS



GREG PATTERSON/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2015



BEFORE THE OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
STATE OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE MATTER OF )  
)

Fall Turkey Hunting Legal Means of Take)  
Fall Turkey Hunting Bag Limits)  
Spring Turkey Hunting Bag Limits and Dates)  
Spring Youth Turkey Hunting Season Dates)

**RESOLUTION**

WHEREAS, the population of wild turkeys residing in Oklahoma on privately owned and public land is established. However, population indices and professional observation recently indicate a declining population, especially in western Oklahoma. Frequent constituent reports of reduced populations further validate field data and staff observations.

WHEREAS, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation staff recommends that population concerns should be addressed by adjusting wild turkey season dates and bag limits.

WHEREAS, Title 29, Section 2-149 of the Oklahoma Statutes, defines the term wildlife as "all wild birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and other wild aquatic forms, and all other animals which normally can be found in the wild state, regardless of classification." Pursuant to that section, wild turkeys are a wildlife species governed by the Wildlife Conservation Code and therefore, the season can be established by resolution under Title 29, section 5-401(A) of the Oklahoma Statutes.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED AND ORDERED THAT, Wild Turkey Season Dates and Bag Limits, are hereby modified and substituted as follows for fall 2021 and spring 2022, and shall remain in effect for future years until further modified or revoked:

**FALL WILD TURKEY – LEGAL MEANS OF TAKE**

Open Counties: Archery, Statewide.

The following counties are open to shotgun hunting:

Adair, Alfalfa, Beaver, Beckham, Blaine, Bryan, Caddo, Canadian, Carter, Cherokee, Cimarron, Cleveland, Comanche, Cotton, Craig, Creek, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Garfield, Garvin, Grady, Grant, Groer, Harmon, Harper, Haskell, Hughes, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnston, Kay, Kingfisher, Kiowa, Lincoln, Logan, Love, Major, Marshall, McClain, McIntosh, Murray, Muskogee, Noble, Nowata, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, Osage, Pawnee, Payne, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Rector, Mills, Seminole, Sequoyah, Stephens, Texas, Tillman, Wagoner, Washington, Washita, Woods, and Woodward.

**FALL WILD TURKEY – BAG LIMITS**

Bag Limit – The season bag limit is one tom turkey statewide, regardless of method of take.

**SPRING WILD TURKEY – BAG LIMITS AND DATES**

Open Counties: Statewide

Bag Limit – The season bag limit is one tom turkey statewide, regardless of method of take.

Dates: The dates for spring turkey hunting shall be April 16 through May 16.

**SPRING WILD TURKEY – SPRING YOUTH SEASON**

Dates: The dates for the youth season shall be the Saturday and Sunday prior to the opening day of the regular statewide Spring Turkey Season. A turkey harvested during the spring youth season shall count against the spring bag limit.

DONE the 28 day of June, 2021 in a Special and open meeting of the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission.

*Bruce R. Mabrey*  
Bruce R. Mabrey, Chairman

ATTEST:

*Leigh A. Gaddis*  
Leigh A. Gaddis, Secretary

The biologists decided a year and a half ago that something needed to be done. The first goal is to immediately address the decline. The next goal is to conduct scientific research to learn what is causing the decline and what can be done long-term to best manage wild turkey populations.

The quickest way to effect change is to alter the hunting regulations. So, proposals were brought forth to alter season dates and bag limits. An opinion survey of turkey hunters generated more than 5,200 comments — an all-time high for hunter input on a proposed change in regulations. Interestingly, hunters supported reducing the spring bag limit to two toms as proposed by the Wildlife Department, but nearly 30 percent offered an unsolicited suggestion to reduce the bag limit to one tom.

Another interesting outcome from the public survey was that many respondents said using bait to attract turkeys was a problem, citing reasons including increased predation and possible aflatoxin poisoning.

ODWC Assistant Director Wade Free said the tremendous response from hunters to the survey was very valuable to biologists, Wildlife Commissioners and staff. "We were impressed with the public's input, which we consider an important part in making the best wildlife management decisions."



**Current Wild Turkey Distribution**





In June 2021, Suttles and Smith presented management data, survey results and regulation change proposals to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission, which ultimately approved the new regulations in a 5-2 vote.

Suttles said he takes pride in the fact that Commissioners challenged the biologists on behalf of Oklahoma's hunters, and that biologists were able to respond with solid data to support the proposals. He believes the new regulations not only benefit the resource but also are simpler for hunters to understand. He also said the later season opener for most of the state is much better biologically for turkeys to increase in number.

However, Smith cautioned that nobody should expect the new hunting rules to have a major effect right away. He said any benefits will likely take several years to show up in the data.

## What's Going On?

As 2019's downward trend in bird numbers continued, the plight of the wild turkey in Oklahoma quickly became a priority for the Wildlife Department. It was time to study what was causing the decline. "This was a high priority for the Wildlife Division" in regards to research, Smith said.

Research Supervisor Kurt Kuklinski said the Department is emphasizing how important it is to learn about the wild turkey's status by embarking on a five-year research project. "Just the fact that we're willing to put almost \$2 million on the line for a five-year project, that shows at the administrative level that this was important."

The ambitious research project, which kicked off Jan. 1, 2022, in the Southeast Region, is being conducted with teams from Oklahoma State University and Texas A&M University-Kingsville, funded by the Wildlife Department and the federal Wildlife Restoration Program. It is a three-pronged approach looking at wild turkey life cycles in the Southeast Region and Southwest Region, and a study of wild turkey genetics statewide.

Stated research objectives are to:

- Evaluate nesting ecology of wild turkey, including nest initiation rates, clutch size, nest success, nest site characteristics, and habitat selection of nesting wild turkey at two sites in southeastern and southwestern Oklahoma.
- Evaluate brood ecology of wild turkey by monitoring poult survival and habitat selection for wild turkey broods.



*New turkey hunting regulations this spring require the use of shotguns only and allow the harvest of one bearded turkey only.*

- Determine seasonal movement and habitat selection of wild turkey.
- Determine survival of wild turkeys for breeding and nonbreeding hens based on VHF data, and leg bands will be used to estimate harvest rates for male turkeys.
- Determine how fragmentation and landscape features influence gene flow and genetic diversity among turkey populations.
- Determine if any populations are isolated or have low genetic diversity.
- Determine patterns of hybridization and introgression between genetic stocks founded by the Rio Grande and Eastern wild turkey subspecies.
- Provide best management practices for wild turkey management and incorporate research findings into public outreach and extension programs.

Researchers said they expect the project to define areas of the state where conservation and management of wild turkeys should be priorities. Data will shed light on turkey nesting success, poult survival, habitat needs, and predation threats.

Suttles said relatively little research exists on turkeys in Oklahoma, and he's especially anticipating what the project will reveal about poult behavior and survivability. Smith said he's hopeful the project can shed light on how various weather affects turkey populations.

In the end, this major research project will help provide a better understanding into the cause of the current wild turkey population decline, and will add to the collective science and best management practices for wild turkey management in Oklahoma and across the nation. 🌿



A photograph of a man and two young children in a forest. The man, in the background, is wearing a camouflage baseball cap and a camouflage jacket, smiling at the camera. The two children, in the foreground, are also wearing camouflage hats and jackets. They are all smiling and appear to be enjoying their time in the woods. The background is filled with trees and foliage.

**FOR HUNTING'S FUTURE...**

**ATTITUDE  
IS EVERYTHING!**

**BY TODD CRAIGHEAD, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST**





**The man in my memory was born in 1917. He was already 68 when I was 16 years old. Even though we weren't related, the age difference meant nothing when we were together.**

He would pick me up on Saturday mornings in his Chevy S-10 Blazer. Then, a mile out of town, he would lift open the console lid and show me some cans of Dr Pepper on ice and a couple of Snickers bars, and say, "Shh, don't tell your mom." He's still the only person I've known that used that removable tray in the console to ice something down!

In the beginning, we would just go out to his lease to shoot clay pigeons with my H&R single shot. On later trips, we'd drive around and inspect his treestands and cut brush to make ground blinds.

He and some friends, one of which was my dad, converted an old chicken coop on the property into a first-rate hunting camp! To me it was magical, complete with bunk beds, a full kitchen, and a working bathroom and shower!

In later years, I learned how to play dominoes at that kitchen table in the Chicken Shack, as it came to be known.

One spring, he picked me up and, on the drive out, handed me a little plastic container with a rounded flat piece of what I thought was duct tape. He said it was the newest thing. On that drive, I learned how to use a turkey mouth call — complete with a lot of gagging at first!





I was 19 in 1988 when I got my first deer. I was with a buddy from high school, and we had no clue how to field dress it. We actually used sticks like chop sticks to scoop and drag stuff out of the carcass; I don't recommend that technique!

My folks were at Sunday evening church when we got back to town, so I left a note saying, "I got a doe! Going to the check station and be back soon!" Before leaving the house, I called Dr. Bill Taggart to tell him.

When I got back, there was my mom, my dad, and Dr. Taggart standing in the driveway. It's hard to say which of the four of us was the most proud and excited. I backed my dad's pickup into the garage, and the two men strung up the deer to more thoroughly clean it out. My dad said, "Todd, I thought you said you shot a doe?"

It was actually a button buck, but in all my excitement, I never even noticed. We laughed about that while playing dominoes for many years.



TODD CRAIGHEAD/ODWC

Dr. Taggart had his own family, and even had grandsons my same age that I went to school with. But he always found a way to include me. My dad was a bird hunter before starting a family. But as so often is the case, he gave it up for more pressing family priorities. So, I didn't grow up watching him go off on weekend hunts with buddies, or tag along before being responsible enough to carry a shotgun.

Yet, as a boy, when the things of the wild caught fire in my soul, my dad kept that fire burning by taking me hunting and teaching me safe gun handling. But it was Dr. Taggart who taught me what a deer eats, how to look for sign, when and where to set up for a hunt, and other woodsman skills that honed me into the hunter I am today.

I'm sure I never even heard the term "mentor" in the context of hunting until I started working at the Wildlife Department in 1995. And I don't really care for boiling someone down to just a simple label, but Dr. Taggart embodied the very image of the quintessential mentor. Even though he's gone now, his influence, his impact and his integrity for things of the wild still burn within me.

With my story of Dr. Taggart in mind, I'd like for you to consider something with me: adversity.

I know a couple of things about adversity. When I was born, I wasn't even expected to live overnight. And if I did, doctors told my parents I'd never walk and they'd have to eventually institutionalize me. Fourteen corrective surgeries later, including a long time spent in a wheelchair, I'm finally a pudgy, bald, middle-age man!

My adversities have given me a unique perspective of the world. And much of my world is consumed with hunting. I'd like to share how dealing with adversity affects my perspective about hunting.

First, we all understand that it's hunters and anglers that pay for wildlife conservation in America. And without licensed sportsmen paying the bills, true conservation as we know it would cease to exist.

From my perspective, the future of hunting in America is at a pivotal point. President Ronald Reagan said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction." And I believe that holds true for hunting, as well.

Outside pressure on our sport increases every year. Just ask famous hunting celebrities like Eva Shockey and Melissa Bachman if the anti-hunting movement is alive and well. Legislation often tries to systematically chip away and undermine hunting every year.

Other issues like land access, the ever-increasing cost of hunting, and the urbanization of our society all certainly contribute to us reaching this pivotal point. But I firmly believe there is one adversity we face that will either make or break the future of hunting.



TODD CRAIGHEAD/ODWC



When I was growing up, my mother would often see me struggling with something. Maybe it was trying to climb the ladder on the slide at the playground, trying to zip up my coat or brush my teeth. Just when I was getting frustrated and about to give up, she would say, "Todd, don't forget – attitude is everything!"

Now as an adult, I hear myself repeating that nearly every day. Attitude IS everything! Sure, we're comfortably coasting along right now, but a lackadaisical, selfish attitude will end up being the demise of hunting in America.

Matt Dunfee, a professor, hunter, and trained social scientist with the Wildlife Management Institute, has done most of the leading research on a subject that we all should find very interesting: What does it take to make a hunter?

First, he identified who is a hunter in North America. Think of yourself and where you fall in line here:

- 13.7 million out of 580 million people.
- Nearly nine in 10 hunters is male.
- 94 percent of hunters are Caucasian.
- A hunter's average age is 42.
- About half of all hunters are college graduates.
- A majority of hunters' households earn \$50,000 or more annually.

Then, Dunfee and the Wildlife Management Institute dug further and desperately wanted to know when and how hunters got started:

- 70 percent of hunters started at age 20 or younger.
- More than 50 percent had hunted at least once by age 12.
- Nearly 100 percent of hunters said a mentor and a social support system were involved.

Most hunters are hunters today largely due to one person in their past that took them under their wing. Many were related to that one person.



TODD CRAIGHEAD/ODWC

The truth is it takes a hunter to make a hunter. And it's not a flash-in-the-pan, one-time experience that produces results. Your first time hunting no doubt sparked an interest. But what made the difference for most was the one-on-one, long-term investment someone made in your life.

I'll be the first to admit that there are always exceptions, but should we rest the fate of hunting's future on isolated exceptions?

I guarantee you the Wildlife Department will continue to do what it does well – manage resources, increase access and opportunity, fine-tune conservation through regulations, and carry a torch for education. But what this all boils down to is you. Your individual attitude toward mentoring someone is where the lion's share of the difference will be made.

Are you willing to at least replace yourself with another hunter? If you're not willing, that means I or another hunter will have to pick up your slack to ensure the future of hunting.

The sooner we admit that hunting's greatest adversity is our own attitude, the stronger



TODD CRAIGHEAD/ODWC



our sport's future will be. I wake up thankful every day that Dr. Taggart had the right attitude about mentoring.

I'm challenging you to consider mentoring someone, anyone this year. The research says people younger than 20 are the "low-hanging fruit." But don't restrict yourself to just kids. A coworker, a neighbor, someone you're compatible with — because we're talking about a long-term commitment here. If we're not willing to do that, then Ronald Reagan was right: we're one generation away from extinction. 🌿

*A Stillwater native, Todd Craighead has served as a producer and on-air host of the Wildlife Department's award-winning "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV show since 2001. After graduating from Oklahoma State University in 1992 with degrees in communications and wildlife and fisheries ecology, he worked in Michigan's upper peninsula as a handicapped children's camp nature instructor and in Colorado's Rocky Mountains as a U.S. Forest Service ranger. His greatest accomplishment has been his ability to overcome monumental physical obstacles from birth defects to his arms, hands, legs and feet. A wheelchair during his youth and multiple surgeries over a lifetime could not stop him from becoming today's most widely-recognized outdoorsman in Oklahoma.*







TODD CRAIGHEAD/DWIC





**PREPPING FOR 74-DAY DUCK SEASON  
TAKES HALF A YEAR**

**WETLAND MANAGER'S BUSIEST MONTHS  
ARE DURING WATERFOWL OFF-SEASON**



**By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist**

For many duck hunters, the tail end of winter marks the time of year when waders, decoys and other gear will go back into storage. But for wetland managers, the end of one season simply marks the start of the next.

"There's not much of an off-season in wetland management," said David Banta, Wildlife Technician at the Wildlife Department's Love Valley Wildlife Management Area near Thackerville.

The ducks — and the duck hunters — attracted to the area's Wetland Development Units are the result of six months or more of muddy boots, scheduled flooding events and drawdowns, unpredictable rainfall and flooding, plant identification and management, and much more.

"I have to look at the wetland units with a different eye than the average duck hunter," Banta said. "When duck hunters wade out on opening morning to set their decoys, they're focused on the birds they may see. The vegetation we've spent the entire growing season managing has died back and is mostly underwater and out of sight. But it's still playing a vital role in their hunt."

A wetland unit's plant community can provide ducks and other birds with three fundamental components in the winter: structure to loaf in and hide behind; food in the form of ripened seeds; and when the standing vegetation is mowed and flooded, food in the form of invertebrates that feed on the flooded vegetation.

In order to have that structure and food available during next year's duck season, Banta and many other wetland managers begin scheduling slow late-winter water drawdowns that will expose mudflats and encourage the germination of beneficial flowering plants such as annual smartweeds and beggarticks in the early spring.

The timing of these drawdowns can create different plant responses; earlier drawdowns can trigger the germination of more flowering plants, while later drawdowns can trigger the germination of more wetland grasses that also produce a high volume of beneficial seeds.

The "right" timing can vary across regions of the state, the manager's plant preferences, and even with the current year's weather conditions.



MICHAEL BERGIN/OWWG

*Water control structures allow wetland managers to quickly flood or drain a unit to achieve the desired plant response.*





For Banta, the ability to control the timing and duration of the water drawdowns is key to the potential success of most wetland units.

“Natural drawdowns are a viable option; it’s a slow process which allows for a longer period of moist soil conditions that are often ripe for germination, but you are left completely at the mercy of Mother Nature. A heavy early summer rain, for example, could stunt or

kill a stand of great wetland plants you’ve worked hard to establish, if the water isn’t diverted off of the unit in short time.

“But investing in at least one water control structure can give wetland managers the upper hand by not only allowing them to control the timing and duration of drawdowns, but also maintaining the unit’s progress for the upcoming duck season.





"Controlling the timing and duration of the water drawdown can open so many doors for a wetland manager. From my perspective, a manager who can time and control drawdowns is 100 steps ahead of a manager who can't."

Beyond recognizing when to add and remove water to trigger desired plant responses that produce duck food for the upcoming hunting season, Banta is also thinking

about and managing a layer deeper: the wetland unit's seed bank.

"Each wetland unit comes with its own set of challenges. Here at Love Valley, we can make strides toward a desirable wetland plant community, but the units are ultimately at the mercy of the Red River."

Much of Love Valley WMA, including the Stevens Spring Wetland Development Unit, is within a quarter-mile of



the Red River. Heavy rainfall can occasionally cause the river to rise and get out of its banks and into the wetland units — sometimes for prolonged periods.

“The river, and our proximity to it, has created really fertile soils in our wetland units, which is a huge benefit. But when the river gets out of its banks for extended periods, it can bury desirable seed under a layer of silt. In addition to burying the good seed too deep to germinate, flooding from the river can also deposit less desirable seeds. But if we can get three to four years of desirable seed production using moist soil management, we typically have a high enough density of desirable plants in the seed bank that they can outcompete the less desirable.”

Although periodically covered by river silt during flooding events, the desirable seeds are still there deep in the seed bank. By disturbing the unit’s soil by disking after it dries sufficiently, a manager can actually retrieve and re-establish the hard-earned seed bank by redepositing them back in the germination zone, depth-wise.

Periodic mechanical soil disturbance also provides an additional benefit. It sets back plant succession, favoring a plant community of annual grasses and weeds that produce high volumes of nutritious seeds beneficial to migrating waterfowl, as opposed to far less desirable perennial plant communities that gradually become naturally established over time without soil disturbance.

When managing the seed bank, knowledge is power. Many native wetland plants can pull double-duty in a wetland and provide both seeds and vegetation mats for invertebrate cover. But many plants – both desirable and undesirable – look very similar when they first germinate. Banta has had to learn how to correctly identify freshly germinated plants and act quickly if undesirable plants start sprouting.

“Knowing which plants provide nutritious seeds for ducks and other wildlife, and which plants dominate your units as they mature, is important. But knowing which



JENA DONNELLO/DWC

plants are sprouting while they are still small seedlings is vital. It gives you a management leg up and may let you get ahead of the undesirable plants with early control measures.”

## **Wetland Look-Alikes: Desirable and Undesirable Plant Combos**

By late spring, wetland units generally have an established plant community and are well on their way to producing food and cover for duck hunting season. But Banta regularly checks in as the growing season progresses to see how the units are faring and if any less-desirable plants have germinated since his last visit. During a recent check-in, he pointed out two sets of wetland look-alikes, each with a desirable and undesirable plant combination.

Banta’s favorite wetland plant, barnyardgrass, produces a lot of high energy seeds — one healthy plant can produce 750,000 to 1 million seeds — and provides a really stout mat of vegetation for invertebrates. But the plant can be easily misidentified for the less desirable johnsongrass, a nonnative plant that can provide some supplemental seed for ducks and vegetation cover for invertebrates. Johnsongrass tends to become a monoculture, outcompeting other desirable plants and greatly decreasing plant community diversity.

To distinguish the two grasses, Banta focuses on the base of the stems. Barnyardgrass has flattened stems and a light purple coloration at the base of the stem.





## WETLAND UNITS

Wildlife Department management area biologists and technicians operate more than 100 Wetland Development Units at 22 Wildlife Management Areas across the state. Periodic status reports are available on the ODWC website; scan the QR code.



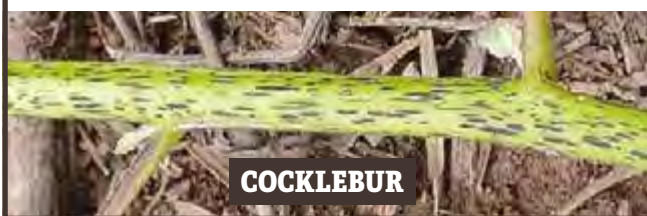
Wetland management practices at Wildlife Department Waterfowl Development Units create attractive areas for American pintails and other duck species.

## BARNYARDGRASS VERSUS JOHNSONGRASS





# SUNFLOWER VERSUS COCKLEBUR



JENA DONNELLODYWC



JENA DONNELLODYWC

*A rough cocklebur plant can look similar to an annual sunflower plant. Pointed leaves of recently germinated plants (upper left), a unique seed (lower left) and relatively smooth stems can help wetland managers distinguish the two native species.*



Johnsongrass has rounded, darker red stems. As johnsongrass matures, it also develops a bright midline vein down the center of its leaves.

"I don't actively manage for johnsongrass in the units. I'd much prefer barnyardgrass or another native plant to be growing. But johnsongrass can provide ducks with some seed and invertebrate cover, so it's a decent Plan B if all else fails."

Another common set of wetland look-alikes is annual sunflower and Banta's wetland enemy No. 1: rough cocklebur. When the plants first sprout, the initial leaves of both species are long and narrow. But while the sunflower's initial pair of leaves are rounded at the end, the cocklebur's leaves are more pointed. As the plants grow, the incoming leaves are both heart-shaped, but other differences can be more readily seen. The sunflower has extremely rough "hairy" stems, while the cocklebur has more smooth stems with purple streaking or spotting.

"As frustrating as cocklebur can be, the plant's life strategy is truly fantastic," Banta said. "It's an annual plant, but each 'bur' has two seeds. The larger seed typically

germinates the year it was produced. But the smaller seed can germinate later in the season it was produced, or in the following year. That means we may have to fight the same crop of cocklebur, an annual plant, for at least two years. In fact, some studies suggest that their seeds can remain viable for up to 5 years, making it a very challenging adversary."

Being able to recognize the tiny pointed leaves of newly germinated cockleburs allows Banta to take steps to control the less-desirable plant, through herbicide or shallow flooding, before it takes hold and dominates the wetland.

Boots-on-the-ground experience has been Banta's best teacher for early plant identification, but he's also leaned on other wetland managers and wetland management guides from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to better recognize and manage Love Valley WMA's plant communities. Begin gathering your wetland resource library or reach out to the Wildlife Department for an in-person visit with a biologist to better understand your wetland. 🌿



DAVID BANTA/OWWG

*Wetland management practices at Stevens Springs Wetland Development Unit produced this stand of Pennsylvania smartweed last year. The field was flooded before hunting season to attract ducks and benefit hunters.*



# Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation Update

## Foundation Funds Grant Writer to Aid ODWC

Part of the Wildlife Department's Strategic Plan launched in 2020 was an initiative to develop new revenue streams beyond traditional sources. A team of dedicated ODWC employees set about to compile a new revenue project fact sheet for nine projects that appeared to offer the greatest potential. The team then developed a new revenue project scoring metric for ranking each proposal.

One highly ranked concept was creation of a large-scale grant writing program. This idea was offered to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation, which embraced it and has enlisted Write On Fundraising in Tulsa to further the initiative.

Each ODWC division was asked to submit a list of top priorities for grant funding, and these were prioritized into a Top 10 list. They are:

- Arcadia Conservation Education Area repair and enhancement.
- Education programs.
- Bear and wildlife management projects.
- Wildlife restoration efforts.
- Close to Home Fishing Program support.
- Shooting ranges renovation and creation.
- Equipping Game Wardens.
- Wildlife Management Area improvements.
- Hackberry Flat renovations.
- Stars & Stripes license program.

Any additional funding generated by Write On through the Foundation's support can be used to enhance existing programs and in many cases can be matched with federal funds.

In the absence of license fee increases, these alternative sources of revenue will become even more critical in ODWC's quest to effectively manage Oklahoma's fish and wildlife resources.

## James L. Johnson, Board of Directors

From the inception of the Foundation in 2018, James L. Johnson has been eager to do his part to serve its mission in helping preserve the great outdoors for future generations. He was encouraged to become a founding director by close friends who also are serving on the board.

Hunting, angling and outdoor pursuits are and have always been a high priority for Johnson and his family.

"I have been very blessed in my life to travel to some of the most remote places on Earth in pursuit of outdoor adventures," Johnson said. "This has helped me in my appreciation for the vast and diverse opportunities that the state has to offer."



*Johnson takes a shot while hunting.*

Johnson's favorite outdoor activity is observation. "The older I get, the more I really enjoy observing wildlife. It may be watching a covey of quail moving across a food plot, to



## OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT



*A vintage snapshot shows a young James Johnson enjoying a family fishing trip.*



*James L. Johnson*

watching a red-tailed hawk riding the thermals on a warm day."

He is also involved in REMERGE, a gender-responsive, trauma-informed, strengths-based program keeping women in the community and out of prison, offering life-changing opportunities for them and their families.

Johnson earned a master's degree in business administration from Phillips University in Enid. He works as a managing

director for Morgan Stanley, an investment company. He and his wife, C. Diane Johnson, live in Edmond and have four children: Grayson, Colton, Ryan and Jacob.

Together with the Foundation, Johnson is able to focus on conservation and allow the OWCF and Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to act in the best interests of all Oklahomans, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the outdoors.

"Society should support OWCF because it is necessary to preserve Oklahoma's unique wildlife and habitat. As the human population grows, it is our responsibility to make sure to protect the habitat of wildlife and the sustainability of it into the future." 🌿



THE OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION (OWCF) is the nonprofit organization formed to work exclusively alongside and provide added financial support to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and its activities in managing the state's fish and wildlife resources and habitats. The Wildlife Department receives no general state tax appropriations; ODWC operates primarily with license sales and federal matching grants. OWCF provides supporters an outlet to show their passion for the outdoors by investing their time and money in projects that will make a difference for generations to come.

All donations are tax-deductible. To learn more about the Foundation and how to help, go to [www.OKwildlifeconservation.org](http://www.OKwildlifeconservation.org) or [www.facebook.com/OKWildlifeFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/OKWildlifeFoundation) or email Rick Grundman at [rgrundman@okwildlifeconservation.org](mailto:rgrundman@okwildlifeconservation.org), or call (918) 323-5566.



The Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation is a charitable organization through AmazonSmile, a program that donates 0.5 percent of your eligible purchases on Amazon to a charity of your choice. Just start your shopping at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com). The donation is made at no extra cost to you, and you can choose from nearly 1 million public charitable organizations.



# The Outdoor Store

OUTDOOR STORE items are sold in person at the Oklahoma City headquarters, 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd., or online at [license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://license.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com). Create or sign into your account, or just click on "Shop."



## Outdoor Oklahoma Caps

These sharp, colorful fabric caps feature the "Outdoor Oklahoma" logo. Available selections may vary from those shown here (subject to availability). — \$20



## Get Your Durable Collectible Card

Upgrade your license to this durable card on custom art by a local artist and support the next generation of conservationists.

Buy online at [License.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://License.GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com) — \$5



## Oklahoma Habitat Donor Window Decals

Show your support of the Wildlife Department's Land Acquisition Fund with these striking window decals. All proceeds are earmarked to help provide hunting and fishing access to the public. — \$10 each



## Oklahoma Waterfowl Hunting Stamp

Oklahoma "duck stamps" are always popular with collectors and hunters. While each year's stamp features a different handsome design sure to add appeal to any stamp collection, funds from stamp sales are used for many kinds of waterfowl management projects. Specify year when ordering. — \$10

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





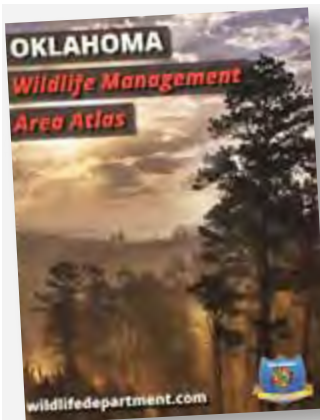
### Wildlife License Plates

Dress up your vehicle while showing your support of our great state's wildlife resources by getting a wildlife license plate. Nine Wildlife Conservation Plates are available to serve as your regular, rear-bumper license plate. The plates cost just \$40 (original or replacement) or \$36.55 (renewals) above your regular annual registration fee with proceeds going to Oklahoma's Wildlife Diversity Program. The forms are available at local tag agencies, or online at [tinyurl.com/WildTags](http://tinyurl.com/WildTags).



### Habitat Donor Caps

Top-quality, American-made caps display the Habitat Donor Patch of your choice, which designates you as a contributor to the Department's Land Acquisition Fund. Wearing this hat means you care about future generations and the great hunting and fishing tradition. Specify hat style on order form. — \$20



### 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. Your atlas purchase comes with a bonus one-year subscription to the award-winning "Outdoor Oklahoma" magazine. — \$25

### A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles

Get an introduction to Oklahoma's 140 species of salamanders, frogs, turtles, lizards, snakes and alligator in the 4th edition of our guide to the state's amphibians and reptiles. Six species accounts have been added and range maps have been updated throughout the guide. — \$20



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# Watchable Wildlife

## AMERICAN BADGER

BY JESSE GOGGIN, EDUCATION INTERN

The American badger (*Taxidea taxus*) is a member of a carnivorous family of mammals known as Mustelidae, which includes wolverines, minks, and weasels. Badgers have a brown coat on top, but are mostly white underneath. Their heads have a distinct striped pattern, with one long white stripe extending the length of the body.

Badgers are fossorial, or burrowing, predators. They use their strong legs and large claws to dig into a prey animal's burrow. Badgers are known to plug the tunnels of prey to prevent escapes. Sometimes they use objects such as rocks to block the tunnels. This qualifies them as a tool-using animal. They also sometimes hunt with coyotes. The coyotes help the badger's success rate by deterring prey animals from leaving their tunnels. Badgers mostly prey on smaller rodents but are known to eat reptiles and insects. One reptile that badgers seem to enjoy eating is the rattlesnake.

Badgers are found primarily in the North American Great Plains. They can be found as far north as British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. They occur as far east as Ohio. Badgers are found across northern Mexico and are referred to as the *tlalcoyte*. In Oklahoma, badgers are primarily present in the western and central parts of the

state. They have been documented in eastern Oklahoma. They prefer dry, open ground such as fields and pastures.

There are five subspecies of the American badger. *T. t. taxus* is the first described population, or nominate, subspecies. This type is found throughout central Canada and the central United States, including Oklahoma.

Badgers spend most of their time alone. During late summer and early fall, they will begin to gather for the

mating season. Males will mate with multiple females. Although they mate in July and August, the embryos do not start to develop until around December to February. Females give birth, in an underground nest, around March. A litter of badgers will usually consist of one to five cubs. The young are

born blind with a light coat of fur.

The young badgers emerge from the nest at about 5 weeks of age. They will leave their mothers when about 6 months old. Females have been known to become pregnant at four months old. Males, however, usually do not become fertile until they are about 2 years old.

In Oklahoma, badgers may be harvested from Dec. 1 to Feb. 28 using firearms, archery gear or traps. There is no daily or season limits for harvest. 🌿

*Badgers are known to plug the tunnels of prey to prevent escapes. Sometimes they use objects such as rocks to block the tunnels. This qualifies them as a tool-using animal.*







With spring approaching, the lapping of the water entices us outside to feel those exciting tugs at the tip of a fishing rod and the pride of landing a big one. Young or old, novice or pro, fishing is an Oklahoma tradition that spans generations. Learn more in the 2022 Anglers' Guide, inside this issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.

# Outdoor Oklahoma

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

