

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020
DIRECTOR'S REPORT



CALENDAR ITEMS:

Oct 10 Second Fostering Outdoor Oklahoma Families event at Perry CCC Lake
Oct 26-28 SEAFWA Virtual Annual Meeting
Nov 13 Sandhills WMA Grand Opening
Nov 18 FFA State Shoot
Jan 5-8 WAFWA Virtual Mid-Winter Meeting

AGENCY UPDATE

• ***LEGISLATURE:***

- The Legislature completed interim studies. The House held an interim study on 10/21 to discuss private property laws regarding retrieval of personal property for coon hunters, cattlemen, etc. (Rep. Grego - [HSP 20-002](#)). As a result of this study, houndsmen are likely to pursue legislative changes that would include hunting dogs into the legal definition of "estrays" to help better protect them on private property.
- Recordings of all studies can be viewed at the links below:
 - Senate: <https://oksenate.gov/live-chamber>
 - House: <https://okhouse.gov/Video/Default.aspx>
- The first legislative deadline is around the corner. Bill requests are due by December 11th.
- Prior to the start of the next session we will be working to introduce ourselves to the new legislators, invite them to our building, and give them an overview of the work we do.
- We held the Sandhills WMA Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on Friday, November 13th. Senators Murdock and Pederson, Representative Newton, Commissioner Dillingham and former Commissioner Groendyke were in attendance.



Photo by Smokey Solis

- **HUMAN DIMENSIONS**

- The controlled hunts/foundation hunts survey was finalized and sent out to previous controlled hunts applicants
- A survey for conservation passport holders was finalized and sent out to better understand how they use wildlife management areas and what they would like offered on public lands in the future.
- Betsey attended the Tableau virtual conference to learn more about data dashboards and worked with law enforcement data sets to create agency specific visualizations
 - [Law Enforcement District Data](#)
 - [Law Enforcement Ticket Data](#)
- A collaborative paper looking at water governance on the Red River conducted by OU researchers, USGS employees and Betsey York was accepted for publication in the *Journal of Environmental Management*
- The 2019 Game Harvest Survey final report was submitted. The following are some highlights from the report:
 - Overall, about 64% of survey participants indicated that they hunted in 2019, and participation rates varied by license type (annual/5-year, lifetime, senior and tribal).
 - “Other priorities” and “health issues” continued to be the top two reasons for not hunting.
 - Thirty-two percent of *active hunters* (those who hunted in 2018) used public land for their hunting in 2018.
 - Feral swine are tied for the third most pursued species by licensed hunters in Oklahoma. They follow behind deer and turkey and are tied with dove.
 - We asked about WMA management related to regulations on WMA as well as preferred management priorities.
 - If given \$10 to split between habitat management and infrastructure improvement on WMA’s, hunters would on average spend \$6.49 on improving the land for fish and wildlife and \$3.51 on improving the area infrastructure.
 - If asked what kind of infrastructure would be most beneficial, road improvements were popular across all license types. Camping areas were most popular amongst tribal license holders, signage and shooting ranges were most popular amongst annual license holders and another top pick for seniors was restrooms.
 - The majority of license holders (79%) did not take new hunters with them during 2019. The main reason reported by those that did hunt in 2019 and didn’t take someone is that they don’t know any new hunters.
 - In terms of recruitment we also asked about what species new hunters are targeting by asking what the first species current hunters recall ever hunting. This varied significantly by age. Those in the baby boomer and X generations were introduced to hunting via small game. Millennials and Gen Z are predominantly introduced by way of big game.
 - Eighty-eight percent of licensed hunters have access to the internet.

FISHERIES DIVISION

September Statewide Fish Stockings

Species	Number Fish	Size	Number Locations
Channel catfish	114,221	2"	12
Channel catfish	2,430	11"	1
Grass carp	188	12"	9
Grass carp	48	22"	2
Hybrid sunfish	3,296	5-6"	12
Rainbow trout	13,648	9-14"	2
Rainbow trout	275	14-24"	1

October Statewide Fish Stockings

Species	Number Fish	Size	Number Locations
Brown trout	3,740	9"	2
Channel catfish	36,550	6"	4
Channel catfish	23,479	9"	24
Hybrid sunfish	5,699	6-7"	12
Rainbow trout	26,750	9-14"	6
Rainbow trout	565	14-24"	4

Activities

- Virtually attended the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies annual meeting, the Annual Meeting of the American Fisheries Society, and the Oka Water Sustainability Conference.
- Fisheries rule change proposals were finalized after extensive review from staff.
- Streams surveys included sampling for Smallmouth Bass on the upper Illinois River, prairie chubs in the Red River drainage, and Neosho Mucket in the upper Illinois.
- A river cleanup was conducted below Fort Gibson Dam.
- Close to Home fishing ponds at seven locations were surveyed to collect baseline population data.
- Surveys were conducted on 12 reservoirs statewide, primarily to monitor Blue Catfish populations, presence of Saugeye young-of-the-year, and to determine the presence of shad populations for forage.
- Creel surveys continue on Lake Texoma to further evaluate the economic value of this important fishery.
- Water quality profiles were collected within Lake Texoma and downstream, before, during, and after de-stratification.
- Plankton samples were conducted on Grand Lake.
- Maintenance on Department Lakes included the following;
 - Clearing of fence lines, cutting shoreline vegetation to improve bank fishing access, and repaired gate post at Nanih Waiya.
 - Repaired ruts to jetties, road and parking at Ozzie Cobb.
 - Common reed was removed from the shoreline at Chambers to improve fishing access.

- General mowing and litter control continues at all other Department Lakes statewide as needed.
- Statewide habitat projects included the following:
 - Installed a total of 50 spider blocks at 3 locations on Davenport Lake and 4 locations on Sparks Lake.
 - Placed 13 trees between 3 locations at Stilwell Lake.
 - Installed 20 spider blocks down shoreline at Porum Lake.
 - Placed 80 trees between 5 locations at Ft. Gibson Lake.
 - Placed 100 cedar trees in the Salt Creek area of Keystone Lake.
- New creel survey procedures were tested on 20 reservoirs statewide. The results will be used to further refine creel survey protocols for a 2021 initiative to collect more extensive angler information on lakes and reservoirs.
- The final construction inspection was conducted for the Durant SFH phase 2B renovation project. This project is now complete.
- A 75% design meeting was held with Garver Engineering regarding the phase 1 pump station project at Manning SFH. The 75% design should be completed in October.
- New clay liners were installed on three hatchery ponds at Manning SFH.
- Cleaning out and reshaping levees was completed on reservoir #2 at Byron SFH.
- The Skiatook Nursery Pond was harvested, adding additional threadfin shad to the lake that were spawned in the pond and grew to an average of 1 1/2 inches in size before the release.
- Virtually attended the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies annual conference and the North American Sturgeon and Paddlefish Society annual conference.
- Installed signs, improved angler access, and began trout stockings at all seasonal trout fisheries statewide.
- Surveys were conducted on 29 reservoirs statewide, primarily to monitor crappie, saugeye, hybrid-striped bass, channel catfish, and smallmouth bass populations.
- Hard structures (otoliths, pectoral spines, and operculums) are being processed and aged to validate yearly annulus formation for Oklahoma's three buffalo species.
- A habitat project on Foss Lake was completed by refurbishing 10 brush piles with approximately 75 cedar trees. A similar project was completed on Lake Vanderwork.
- A workshop was prepared for Wildlife Division staff to provide training on pond and riparian management on private lands.
- Gave presentations to Trout Unlimited and the Striped Bass Association on striped bass management in the Arkansas River.
- Cooperated with Jacobs Engineering and Crossland Construction to remove fish from Coffey Dams built for new Zink Dam construction.
- The dock for Eagle Lake is in the process of being restored before placement next month.
- Finalized and submitted compliance documents for boating access projects on several lakes and reservoirs, including Atoka Bluestem Lake, Lake Bixhoma, and Stroud Lake.
- Met with State Parks staff to discuss ongoing management challenges at Beavers Bend State Park and identifying future collaborative activities.
- Monitored water quality within and below Lake Texoma to provide guidance to Corps of Engineers.

- Evaluated a fish kill below Denison Dam by coordinating and communicating with Corps of Engineers and Texas Parks and Wildlife staff.
- Continued promoting bowfishing management initiative and developed infographics, outreach materials and interviews.
- Provided a taxonomic status update to Southeastern Oklahoma State University fisheries staff concerning the distribution of Rock Bass and Shadow Bass in Oklahoma and surrounding states.

I&E DIVISION

- I&E employees and other agency staff will conduct FFA shooting Sports shoots at Coweta, Ft. Supply and Altus for schools that fall within the NE, NW, SW and Central districts for FFA.
- Sarah Southerland updated the ODWC's social media "best practices" and has begun working with social media administrators. Sarah worked with Foundation Executive Director, Rick Grundman on a promotional video clip for OOTV promoting the Foundation.
- Shawn Gee and Lance Meek continued to monitor work being done on range renovations and projects across the state. A dedication is being planned for the OPSU range in conjunction with OPSU staff.
- Michael Bergin worked to release several R3 marketing emails using targeted marketing strategies. Communications are focused in several areas including mentorship, encouraging antlerless harvest, CWD, and reminding constituents that the Outdoors Are Always Open. Michael Bergin reports that all marketing emails since January have generated more than \$121,000 in revenue.
- Kelly Boyer and Colin Berg worked on formalizing a plan for the February OKNASP state shoots. The new format based on recommendations from NASP Nationals will be implemented in 2021. All schools will participate in three virtual shoots to determine Tier One and Tier Two teams. The top 20 high school, middle school and elementary teams (Tier One) will be invited to a two day in-person state shoot in OKC. All other teams will conduct a forth virtual shoot to determine Tier Two level champions for 2021.
- As part of IE's diversity and inclusion initiative, Don attended an Adaptive Shooting Sports event in Tulsa. This is a new program of the Mid-America Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America to help people with physical challenges enjoy shooting sports.
- Kelly Boyer and Shawn Gee conducted two Outdoor Education Program teacher training courses at the Arcadia Conservation Education center. These courses were set up for new schools and they provide training for new teachers that will be teaching our Outdoor Education programs in existing schools during the 2020/21 school year. Teachers who attend the training receive instruction in NASP, Explore Bowhunting, Explore Bowfishing, Hunter Education and Oklahoma Fishing in the Schools programs.
- Blake Podhajsky worked with Tess Maune and Michael Bergin to produce an influencer video and PSAs for marketing purposes. View the full-length video [here](#).
- Colin Berg, Lance Meek, Damon Springer, Jason Smith, Jennifer Benge and Micah Holmes all participated in the Midway USA Foundation Shooting Sports Conference which was held virtually.
- I&E staff conducted FFA clay target shoots at Norman and Broken Bow. The state shoot was conducted at the OKC Gun Club near Arcadia. The shoots were all well attended, and safety protocols were implemented so the shoots could be conducted.
- Michael Bergin and Kasie Harriett worked to submit a proposal for a \$50,000 grant from the Association of Conservation Information. The agency was awarded the grant and will use the funds to produce digital ads, push notifications, and text messages to new, lapsed, potential, and existing customers in an effort to increase hunting license sales and antlerless license sales.

- Lance Meek and Jennifer Benge continued to increase promotion efforts regarding our on-line hunter education course. Certifications are up due to the additional promotion and have surpassed the 2019 totals. The WMA atlas give away was so successful that it is being implemented a second time to encourage students to complete the course. Lance Meek and Kasie Harriet worked with the NRA staff to gain access to student info that had started but not completed the course. In the future monthly reminders will be sent to encourage students to complete the course.
- Damon Springer, Lance Meek, Jason Smith and Micah Holmes met with engineering staff regarding an issue that was discovered after construction began on the Arcadia Conservation Education Area road. The project has been suspended due to the increased cost of repairing the culvert at this time.
- Jena Donnell assisted Wildlife Division to monitor a special guest at Hackberry Flat WMA. A single whooping crane visited the area just before the season opener of Sandhill Crane. Michael Bergin was able to send a quick email to all crane hunters notifying them of the closure and eventual reopening of the area. Sarah Southerland captured several photos of the visiting endangered Whooping Crane and shared those on social media. Ed Godfrey, at The Oklahoman used the photos in an article about the rare bird.
- Skylar St.Yves, Kasie Harriet and Micah Holmes conducted several virtual hunting and fishing courses covering topics including trout fishing, deer hunting and using the agency's mapping system.
- Skylar StYves and Colin Berg worked to develop a plan to expand the Fostering Oklahoma Outdoor Families events in 2021. The Department will be working with DHS to train their staff and provide them with equipment kits so they can conduct events across the state.
- Kasie Harriet spoke at a QF/PF banquet about the ODWC R3 programs and importance of mentoring. She also assisted with and served as a mentor for the NWTF WITO event at Tenkiller.
- Daniel Griffith continues to update the website and is working to incorporate the regulations into webpages, making them easier to find. He is working with both R3 coordinators to provide the most appropriate and helpful information to hunters and anglers depending on their location on the R3 spectrum (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). He has worked with Nels Rodefild and Rodney Derrick to implement a new program, the Oklahoma Slam and Super Slam.
- Darrin Hill worked with Director Strong to pre-record the 2020 Virtual SEAFWA Awards. This year Director Strong served as awards Chair and was tasked with the honor of emceeing this year's awards presentation. ODWC received two Special Recognition Awards for efforts on the Outdoors Are Always Open communication campaign and Oklahoma Fishing Trails collaboration with OTRD.
- Sarah Southerland is working on a Limited English Proficiency Plan to provide ODWC information in a variety of languages such as Spanish, ASL, and Vietnamese. She is also working with HECHO and Latino Outdoors to identify potential story leads and outlets. Additionally, Jennifer Benge is submitting a proposal for the Vamos A Pescar grant program through the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation.
- Blake Podhajsky worked with media personality Tess Maune and Youtube star Daniel Arms to produce a pair of influencer videos for marketing purposes.

WILDLIFE DIVISION

- A ribbon cutting ceremony was held on 13 November at the recently acquired Sandhills WMA in NW Oklahoma. This 5212 acre WMA in southeastern Woods County is a very nice addition to our public lands in Northwest Oklahoma.
- Deer activity/movement has substantially increased as the rut ramps up, and social media sites are showing that a number of very nice bucks as well as antlerless deer have been taken across the state.

- Field staff are very busy with fall hunting seasons, conducting controlled hunts and general hunts, assisting hunters and area users, as well as general WMA upkeep and maintenance. Field work has been completed for fall planted crops.
- Pumping / water manipulation to fill wetland units scheduled to be flooded this fall has been mostly completed, including 500 acres at Hackberry Flat WMA.
- A total of 72 bears (43M, 29F) were harvested this season, including 4 bears harvested during muzzleloader season. This includes 2 bears from Haskell County, and one bear from Bryan county, areas that were first opened last season, and is an indication that the bear population is still expanding.
- Staff report a significant increase in WMA use this fall compared to previous years, which we have expected due to a substantial increase in hunting license sales this year.
- Several Wildlife Division staff attended the virtual SEAFWA Annual meeting.
- As of November 19, e-check records indicated that just over 46,000 deer had been checked in 2020, compared to ~27,000 during the same time period in 2019. For this same time period, WMA deer harvest increased from just over 2,000 in 2019 to almost 4,700 in 2020. Through the close of muzzleloader season, doe harvest was 39%.
- Duck season opened with mixed results. It was a warm and windy opener, but there were abundant hunters and fair success in some areas like Hackberry Flat WMA.
- Quail season opener saw average hunter turnout in the NW, to below average turnout in the SW. Windy, dry conditions were prevalent across western OK on opening day, and may have affected hunter turnout/success.
- Many of the deer and some of the elk controlled hunts have been conducted, including the inaugural “walk-in only” elk hunt at the Wichita Mountains. That hunt went well with good hunter harvest success: 68 hunters harvested 43 elk (15 Bulls / 28 Cows). The McAAP archery hunts (600 hunters) produced a harvest of 42 bucks and 70 does.
- The OLAP program continues to be well received and properties are receiving good hunter use. Over 80,000 acres are open for public access through OLAP.
- Staff assisted SWOSU students by conducting simulated hiring interviews.

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

- The Cherokee Nation is the first to get the Cross-Deputization agreement done. We are currently working with 3 of the 5 tribes to get the commission cards done for their officers and also for our officers. This is the first step to solidifying our wardens’ LE abilities on tribal land for tribal members. Waiting on the Choctaw and Seminole tribes currently. Creek Nation is in the process of getting our commission cards done for us now.
- Game Warden Stephen Paul (D8) rescued an individual off of Sooner Lake that more than likely would have drowned if not for his actions. The individual was separated from his disabled boat with only a partially full can of gas to help keep him afloat. The wind was of course blowing about 25-30mph that day. If it hadn’t been for Stephen’s quick action and willingness to drop everything and get to the lake to help, the individual would have more than likely succumbed to the cold water and drowned that day. Stephen deserves a big pat on the back the next time you see him.
- During the month of September, Law Enforcement completed or assisted with 42 Hunter Safety classes across the state.
- Game Warden of the Year Jared Cramer and Chief Nathan Erdman travelled to Georgia in October to recognize Jared and the other states GWOY winners. This award is a prestigious award and with the planned virtual meeting at SEAFWA, the SEAFWA LE chiefs came up with this meeting to recognize all of the state's winners.
- Effective Nov. 15th the new Law Enforcement procedure manual went into effect. This creates a number of changes for LE. One of the most notable changes will be allowing facial hair for our wardens. Another one is physical standards for wardens.

- Wardens are gearing up for deer season with numerous special operation requests and air flight dates coming into the office. Looks like it will be a busy season with participation numbers on the rise.