In This Issue:
2017 Angler’s Guide
Featuring Oklahoma’s Close to Home Fishing Program

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

MARCH/APRIL 2017 – ONLY $10 A YEAR
If you haven’t been fishing lately, you are missing the boat.

Fishing is considered America’s favorite pastime in more than a few surveys. Nationwide, more than 33.1 million people said they had fished in 2010. And that number was up 11 percent from the previous survey in 2005.

Arguably, more Oklahomans participate in fishing compared to any other recreational activity (except perhaps watching football on TV). And consistent improvement in fishing access, such as new boat ramps, new fishing docks and Close to Home Fishing sites, makes a day near the water even more enjoyable.

Fishing is important in the Sooner State, and the statistics show it. Consider these findings reported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

- Oklahoma’s population was about 3.6 million in 2010. Of that number, about 680,000 had gone fishing at least once in the previous year.
- The number of anglers grew 19 percent from 2006 to 2010.
- All told, state anglers spent 7.9 million days fishing in 2010. That’s 21,629 years!
- Fishing-related spending by anglers represented a $730.5 million segment of Oklahoma’s economy.
- Fishing-related purchases generated $77 million in state and local tax revenues.
- Fishing activity supports more than 11,000 jobs in Oklahoma, according to the American Sportfishing Association.

Even more interesting are findings from the latest Oklahoma Angler Survey from 2014, supervised by responsive management specialist Corey Jager. Here are some eye-openers:

- Oklahoma fishing licenses were held by 722,298 people in 2014, and almost 600,000 considered themselves active anglers.
- The average Oklahoma angler is 48 years old.
- About 70 percent of state anglers said the relaxation from fishing was very important to them.
- The average fishing trip in Oklahoma has an economic value of about $67.
- The most popular fishing destinations in the state are Lake Eufaula, Lake Texoma, Fort Gibson Reservoir and Grand Lake O’The Cherokees, in that order, based on the estimated number of trips to each site during the year. These facts easily show the importance of sport fishing to Oklahomans and their economy. And that's one reason why our dedicated Fisheries Division employees work tirelessly to conduct research, operate hatcheries, stock fish, fine-tune regulations and conduct other projects that support and maintain some of the best fishing in the United States.

In this year’s Angler’s Guide, we are highlighting the Department’s Close to Home Fishing program. We are stocking extra fish in these areas, so pick a day to go give it a try.

Time equals priority. Please do yourself a favor and make a trip to one of our Close to Home areas this summer.

Sincerely,

Nels C. Rodefeld
Nels Rodefeld, editor

Top Species Anglers Preferred to Catch

1. Crappie
2. Largemouth Bass
3. Channel Catfish

Anglers were most likely to not go fishing because of a lack of time.
THIS PAGE: Oklahoma’s forested areas pop with pink and lavender splashes of color in early spring as the Eastern redbud comes into bloom. Also called “Judas tree,” the redbud is the official state tree of Oklahoma.

ON THE COVER: Young angler Aisha Wright, 12, proudly displays the bluegill she caught during a recent fishing adventure. Discover Close to Home Fishing spots near you in this issue’s 2017 Angler’s Guide. (Wade Free / ODWC)
Warmer weather encourages more people to venture into the outdoors. But be wary: At some point you will likely give some unwelcome parasitic hitchhikers a ride.

Ticks are abundant in Oklahoma and commonly feed on humans and other animals. Although only a small percentage of Oklahoma ticks are infested with diseases causing bacteria, numerous tickborne illnesses, including Rocky Mountain spotted fever, ehrlichiosis and tularemia, are reported each year.

You can decrease chances of illness by removing ticks as soon as you discover them. Using tweezers, grasp the tick close to the surface of the skin. Pull slowly and steadily without jerking, twisting or crushing the tick. After removing the tick, rub alcohol, an iodine scrub or soap and water to the bite area. Dispose of a live tick by either submerging it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag or container, wrapping it in tape or flushing it down the toilet. Never crush a tick with your fingers.

When planning to be in brushy areas, take precautions to keep ticks at bay. Good tactics include:

- Wear light-color clothing to make ticks more visible.
- Tuck pant legs into socks.
- Apply insect repellent, preferably one containing DEET.
- After an outing, check your body for ticks and remove them. Look along the hairline, around waistbands, underwear and armpits. Ticks like warm and dark places.
- Parents should thoroughly check their children for ticks.

(Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oklahoma Health Department)
OU Fishing Club Angler Lands Spotted Bass Record

Several new lake-record fish have been added to the Wildlife Department’s official database in recent weeks. Here are snapshots of those big ones that didn’t get away!

Game warden Phillip Cottrill, based in Major County, reported excellent participation by students attending his firearms and all-terrain vehicle safety class during Major County Fifth-Grade Wellness Day. Oklahoma’s game wardens are often called to give presentations about safety and their jobs to school students across the state.

Game warden Clint Carpenter, based in Dewey County, was seeking leads in a case involving six Canada goose carcasses illegally dumped along U.S. 183 south of State Highway 60. The initial report indicated a goose decoy was also left at the scene, but when Carpenter arrived, there was no decoy to be found.

If anyone has information that could help solve this case, please call Operation Game Thief at (800) 522-8039. Callers can remain anonymous, and if a caller’s information leads to an arrest and conviction, the caller may be eligible for a cash reward.

(Reports from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation—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.

Thunderbird Lake Record Spotted Bass

- Weight: 3.2 pounds.
- Length: 17.25 inches.
- Girth: 14.5 inches.
- Angler: Alexis Howard of Norman.
- Method of Catch: Spinning rod and reel.
- Date Caught: Nov. 13, 2016.
- Area Caught: East side near the dam.

Texoma Lake Record White Bass

- Weight: 3.6 pounds.
- Length: 18 inches.
- Girth: 14 inches.
- Angler: Enrique Enns of Seminole.
- Method of Catch: Baitcast rod and reel.
- Date Caught: Jan. 1, 2017.
- Area Caught: Soldier Creek.

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

The Lake Record Fish Program was established as a way to serve anglers and recognize big fish and the lakes they come from. To find out more, go online to wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/records.htm.
2016 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

"THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE TO SEE A SUNRISE"

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 Senior Apprentice Hunter category receive a guided antelope hunt in the Texas Panhandle. The Oklahoma Station Chapter of SCI will reimburse travel expenses up to $500 per essay contest winner. In this issue, “Outdoor Oklahoma” honors Senior Program male winner Will Russell, 15, a 10th-grader from Jenks High School.

By Will Russell

Hunting: It’s one of the old-est things man still does today. From generation to generation over a millennia, man has passed this ancient art down to their descendants. Unfortunately, in many respects, this is a dying art. Children aren’t spending time outside, learning to fish, learning to shoot a gun or mastering archery. Hunters are under frequent attack due to the actions of our predecessors and a few modern irresponsible outdoormen. However, there is still a glimmer of hope for this way of life.

Hunting is something of a way of life for many people, especially here in Oklahoma. Being in Native America, we have one of the most diverse and populous groups of Native Americans in the nation, and that means hunting is a very big part of many Oklahomans’ cultures and history. Native Americans’ lives often revolved around hunting, especially before Europeans arrived. They used everything they killed for things like clothing, food, shelter and tools. Some would even follow herds of animals while gaining great familiarity and knowledge with nature and landscapes around them. This wisdom was passed down from generation to generation, giving them a unique outdoor culture. To this day, Native Americans take great pride in their hunting.

Native Americans are not the only ones who value their outdoor heritage. We have all had ancestors who have valued hunting. Outdoor knowledge has been passed from generation to generation. Fathers and sons hitting the woods, grandfathers telling their stories at family dinners, and old tales give us great outdoor knowledge and experience. Hunting is one of the biggest, oldest and one of the most important traditions we have today among all cultures.

Today, hunters are the biggest conservationists. Due to an excise tax on hunting gear and to license sales, hunters contribute more money to wildlife conservation than any other group and are virtually solely responsible for the restoration of deer, turkey, waterfowl and other wildlife populations. If we want to continue to enjoy the nature we have today for generations to come, we need to continue hunting and continue to teach children the values and ways of nature.

I truly believe hunting can act as a form of art, and one of the most rewarding arts you can do. From the time the season ends, hunters are itching to get back in the stand. Hunters work through the year, braving the elements, in order to find out when and where the deer will be. Then, you have to find the best way to and from your stand. When the season finally opens, you can feel the excitement in the air as people are ecstatic to see their hard work pay off. On opening day, you get up hours before dawn and head to your stand. You sit in silence as you watch the sunrise. There is no better place to see the sunrise than over a field on a cool Oklahoma morning. Even if the hunt isn’t successful, you still got to enjoy a day in nature.

However, sometimes out of nowhere you’ll hear a twig snap and your heart will begin to speed up. You assume it’s a squirrel and you begin to relax, but then you look below you and there’s a doe! She has her head in the air, and you fear she’s smelling you. You’re frozen in place. Your heart is beating uncontrollably as the doe steps in front of you. You get your bow ready and wait for her to get in a position where you can shoot. Then out of the corner of your eye, you see a fawn. It happily gallops out toward it’s mother as you lower your bow. You sit back and enjoy watching the show whose only director is God himself.

Suddenly, the pair runs off. Then you see a pair of antlers. It’s a massive buck. He smells the air, and you get your bow ready. He slowly makes his way into your shooting lane, and you think your heart is going to pound out of your chest. You wait for what feels like forever, then he emerges 20 yards away, broad-siding you. You draw your bow and get aligned, you let out a little grunt, and he stops and you shoot. He bolts off, but you see him fall only 50 yards away. There is no feeling of satisfaction quite like that, seeing all of that work pay off in a glorious way.

I love hunting, and I’m marred knowing it is in decline. However, I am hopeful seeing people and organizations like the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Safari Club International encouraging young people to spend time in nature by doing things like introducing archery into the schools, providing controlled youth hunts, and offering essay contests like this one. As long as we continue teaching our children about nature and providing them with outdoor opportunities, hunting — this great tradition — will never die. * *
Dear ODWC,
I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to several of your employees for their selfless service in support of the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant’s hunting program. It would be impossible for us to execute this nationally recognized program without the assistance of our partners from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Commission.

The dedicated efforts of Eric Suttles, Sherman Ellis, Jeff Ford, Chris Parker and Joe Hemphill were instrumental in providing a safe, controlled hunt that creates lasting memories for everyone involved.

This program is also essential in assisting this installation in an ongoing effort to demonstrate to the American taxpayer that the U.S. Army is committed to preserving our natural resources and protecting the environment, even while we execute our ammunition mission. Because of your professionalism, we have a multitude of advocates across Oklahoma and surrounding states that understand and can tell our story.

Again, thank you for your dedication to this program and our mission. It is my sincere hope that this program will last long into the future. Your continued efforts will bring that vision to reality for generations of hunters to come.

Army Col. Sean M. Herron, commanding officer, McAlester Army Ammunition Plant

Dear ODWC,

I am looking forward to receiving the magazine and reading the articles. I watch the Outdoor Oklahoma show on OETA every chance I get and always enjoy that.

In the back issue I just received, there was an article on the deer harvest for last year, which I found very interesting. There was a chart that showed the deer harvest by year going back to 1972, which was the year I killed my first deer! I give the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation the credit for the management and proliferation of the deer population we now have in the state.

I can remember reading back then that the Oklahoma deer population was estimated to be about 100,000. Fast forward to today, and the number that is harvested is around that total population number back then. Amazing!

Thanks again for all your Department does in helping to make Oklahoma a great place in which to live, fish and hunt. Keep up the good work!

Steve Reynolds, Pocola

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Deby Lawson, via Facebook

Dear ODWC,

The average member of the public does not think about the time, effort, impact and families that game wardens sacrifice to do such an amazing job in each of our counties in Oklahoma. Sacrifices are made each and every day by all of them. They believe in what they do, and they take it to heart to get their jobs done. I know this from firsthand experience. I’m proud of all of you for taking care of our communities and counties in Oklahoma, and then some.

Deby Lawson, via Facebook

EDITOR’S NOTE: On page 42 of our January/February 2017 issue, the location of Drummond Flats WMA was incorrect. The area is a half-mile west of State Highway 132 and Skeleton Road.
Wildlife Youth Camp Introduces Kids to the Outdoors

By Don P. Brown, Information and Education Specialist

Youths at the 2016 Wildlife Youth Camp were given the chance to help band geese at Lake Texoma.

Cliff Sager, senior fisheries biologist in the south-central region, holds one of the sizable catfish netted during an electrofishing demonstration for Wildlife Youth Camp attendees at Lake Texoma.

At the ropes course, campers learn how to face their fears by ringing a bell while jumping off the 40-foot Power Pole.

Last year’s 35 youth campers assemble for a traditional group photo.
A week full of fun outdoor activities, conservation education and camaraderie is in store for 40 lucky teens selected to attend the 19th annual Wildlife Youth Camp. Applications are now being accepted for this once-in-a-lifetime event.

“Campers will get a better understanding of wildlife and fisheries management and conservation law enforcement, while at the same time learning some fun outdoor activities,” said game warden Lt. Wade Farrar, youth camp coordinator. “If you are interested in hunting, fishing or a career with the Wildlife Department, then this camp is for you.”

The camp will be June 11-16 at the University of Oklahoma Biological Station at Lake Texoma. Game wardens, wildlife and fisheries professionals and dedicated hunters and anglers will be conducting the camp and supervising activities.

Activities will include fishing, archery, wildlife identification, rifle/shotgun shooting, ropes course, self-defense, wildlife law enforcement, wildlife and fisheries management, and deer/turkey/waterfowl hunting and law enforcement techniques.

“Thanks to the support of generous sponsors including the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the camp is free of charge for all of the youths selected,” Farrar said.
Applicants must be Oklahoma residents who will be 14 to 16 years old as of June 11, 2017. Prospective campers must fill out an application form and write a 75-word essay describing why they want to attend the camp, why they should be selected, and what they expect to learn. Also, they must furnish a letter of recommendation from someone other than a family member, and a recent photograph showing the applicant participating in an outdoor-related event or activity.

For more information about the camp and photos from previous years, go to wildlifedepartment.com/education/youth-opp/wildlife-youth-camp. Applications must be submitted by April 14, 2017.
Campers are given experience checking “anglers” (camp counselors) for fishing licenses, one of a game warden’s basic duties.

Oklahoma Wildlife Department Youth Camp Application Form

First Name  M.I.  Last Name

Address

City  State  ZIP

Birth Date  Phone Number

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Please include a recent photograph of the applicant participating in an outdoor-related activity or event. Complete application form and return it along with the required essay, letter of recommendation, and photo to:

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
Law Enforcement Division
P.O. Box 53465
Oklahoma City, OK 73152
“Close to Home” Fishing Program

By Skylar St.Yves, Information 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 the need to create more fishing opportunities for urban residents. Fisheries staff created the Close to Home Fishing Program (CTHP) at Dolese Lake, a 19-acre pond in northwest 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 sign up for 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.

Most of the cooperating municipalities are in the Oklahoma City area, including Edmond, Guthrie, Moore and Norman. The Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department contributes a great deal of support toward 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 44 CTHP waters statewide. Each CTHP area is required to have adequate facilities that can accommodate families, including restrooms, picnic areas, parking and fishing piers, before being selected by ODWC to participate in the program.

While the primary fishes stocked in CTHP waters over the years have been channel catfish and hybrid sunfish, many 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 creating put-grow-take fisheries by stocking low to moderate numbers of juvenile fish that will grow to a more desirable size that will please anglers. This approach has been moderately successful at ponds with low angling pressure. Ponds with fish feeders tend to show better growth.

**CTHP COMPONENTS**

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 associations or businesses) and existing water-supply reservoirs. There are 18 partnerships with municipalities statewide that include 44 sites totaling 306 acres of water. At least 10 cities 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 handicapped accessible 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 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 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. Some brochures, maps and news articles have been released since 2000.

ODWC will continue to provide residents of Oklahoma municipalities with quality fishing in neighborhood-based waters by focusing on anglers’ desires, uses and benefits and by implementing sound fishery management techniques on urban ponds and lakes.

In the next several pages, we’ll highlight some of our favorite areas from each region along with the CTHP fishing regulations, a story about hybrid sunfish production at our Byron fish hatchery as well as fish identification of common sport fish found in Oklahoma. Happy fishing and tight lines!
Kitchen Lake
• Oklahoma City
• 28 acres

Like several Close to Home fishing areas in Oklahoma City, Kitchen Lake has received some major renovations recently, including a new Americans with Disability Act compliant fishing pier, family picnic area and paved parking lot with ample spaces.

Easy bank access is limited to the southwestern and southeastern corners of the lake as well as the dam on the southern end. However, for the more adventurous bank anglers, access can be found along the entire shoreline. That is if you’re willing to take a trek.

Kitchen Lake is the second-largest Close to Home fishing area at 28 acres. With that much water, there’s no telling what you might reel in!

Try a night crawler and a bobber off the fishing pier or along the riprap on the dam during the spring months and you’re bound to have success. Make sure you’ve got adequate line on that reel because you never know when the big one might strike!

Amenities
• Picnic Area
• Paved Walking Path
• Fishing Pier
• Dam Parking Access
• New Paved Parking Area
Griffin Community Park

- Norman
- 5 acres

Situated just down the road from Kitchen Lake, Griffin Park in Norman is a great place to spend a day. Highlighted by an extensive wilderness trail, soccer and baseball complex, dog park, disc golf course and 5-acre lake, Griffin Park has something for almost everyone.

The lake has excellent bank access along the entire shoreline with several fish attractors scattered throughout. Finding fish here is usually as simple as putting a line in the water.

Each spring, the George Hulsey Trout Derby is held at Griffin Park Pond. The event is for youths ages 5 to 15. Hulsey served for many years as The Norman Transcript’s outdoor editor, writing columns about the world of hunting and fishing. Hulsey was instrumental in establishing the Sutton Wilderness Area just north of the park.

A large sheltered picnic area that sits along the north shoreline is great for large families and groups.

Bring a flying disc for disc golf, a ball for the dog or a rod and reel for fishing. It’s bound to be a grand day at Griffin Park!

Amenities

- Sheltered Picnic Area
- Dog Park and Walking Trail
- George M. Sutton Wilderness Area
- Disc Golf Course
- Ballfields
Crystal Lake
• Oklahoma City
• 48 acres

Crystal Lake has come a long way since its days as a dumping ground for tires and trash. In partnership between City Care and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the western Oklahoma City lake has been transformed into an ideal recreational area for urban youths.

The lake supports a healthy abundance of several fish species. A large floating fishing pier and easy-access shorelines provide bank fisherman with a great opportunity to catch fish. The lake also has a boat ramp for those who prefer fishing from a watercraft.

A 3-D archery range in the southwest corner of the property allows visitors the opportunity to shoot from both the ground and elevated shooting stands.

The goal at Crystal Lake is to provide a safe place for people in Oklahoma City to come out and enjoy the outdoors!

Amenities
• Floating Fishing Pier
• Boat Ramp
• 3-D Archery Range
• Covered Picnic Area
• Easy Bank Access
Lee Lake recently received a Federal Boating Access Grant makeover. Renovations included the installation of a paved boat ramp, walking trail around the lake, sheltered restrooms, lake reshaping and fishing piers. It is among the few Close to Home areas where anglers can put a motorized watercraft on the water.

About an hour north of Tulsa in Bartlesville, Lee Lake is a great place to spend a day fishing. With ballfields, walking trail and a dog park, there is something for nearly everyone in the family to enjoy!

Amenities

• Picnic Area
• Dog Park
• Ballfields
• Two Fishing Piers
• Walking Trail
Veterans Park Pond

• Jenks
• 3 acres

Nestled near downtown Jenks, Veterans Park Pond offers a wonderful fishing opportunity for families in the Tulsa area. Two covered fishing piers provide anglers with protection of the elements while they enjoy a day on the water.

In addition to numerous warm-water species, Veterans Park Pond also offers a seasonal trout fishery from Dec. 1 through Feb. 28 annually. These feisty cold-water fish offer anglers an opportunity to get out during the colder months and put a line in the water.

Veterans Park is just a few blocks down the road from the Oklahoma Aquarium, so families could easily make a day by viewing the aquarium’s freshwater and saltwater species from around the world, then head over to the park for a chance to catch a few fish.

The park has a playground for the little ones who may not be quite ready to fish. Sheltered picnic areas make the park a good place to bring a lunch and enjoy a picnic.

Conveniently situated right off the Creek Turnpike, Veterans Park is a must for local families.
Meadowlake Park

- Enid
- 10 acres

Meadowlake Park is one of the larger parks in Enid. This park is on 110 acres. Meadowlake Park has 13 shelters scattered throughout the area. The park includes activities for nearly everyone in the family, including train rides, miniature golf, walking and biking trails, horseshoe courts, tennis courts, baseball field and playground.

Centered in the park is a 10-acre lake full of fish. Great bank access offers anglers the opportunity to fish different depths around the lake. Don’t be surprised if a big largemouth bass gulps down your swim bait in the early spring.

Meadowlake Park has an excellent dog park, so don’t forget to bring Fido along for the fun.

Meadowlake Park Golf Course runs along both sides of the southern arm of the lake. Spring, summer and fall provide some great weekends for fishing and golf, so bring your pitching stick and your pitching wedge!
Elmer Thomas Park — Lake Helen

• Lawton
• 3 acres

With four fishing jetties, excellent bank access and a ton of near-shore fish structure, Lake Helen is a gem of a Close to Home fishing area. Within Elmer Thomas Park in northeastern Lawton, Lake Helen is an easily accessible area right off Exit 39B from Interstate 44.

An extensive walking trail offers anglers the opportunity to get in some extra exercise on a nice sunny day, and there’s a great playground for the kids.

Elmer Thomas Park is the site of several large public events each year.
The park is named after John William Elmer Thomas, who was elected a member of the first Oklahoma Senate in 1907. He served as a senator until 1920. He also served as president pro tempore from 191-13, founded Medicine Park Resort, and oversaw the state’s first fish hatchery about 12 miles north of Lawton in Medicine Park. The J. A. Manning State Fish Hatchery is now operated by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Amenities

• Four Fishing Jetties
• Walking Trail
• Sheltered Picnic Area
• Easy Bank Access
• Community Events
Looking for a nearby fishing lake or pond?

**Close-to-Home Fishing waters have the following restrictions:**
- Fishing is limited to no more than three rods and reels per person, with no more than three hooks per line (treble hooks are considered one hook). No other fishing methods are allowed.
- All largemouth bass must be released (returned to the water) immediately after being caught; no harvest is allowed.
- Channel catfish and blue catfish have a combined daily limit of six; only one blue catfish over 30 inches is allowed to be kept.
- Netting of any kind (including castnetting) is not permitted.

**Oklahoma City – (405) 297-1426:**
- Crystal Lake (6625 SW 15th). Fishing pier may be reserved for youth-related aquatic programs. For more information, contact City Care at (405) 657-7947.
- Dolese Youth Park (5105 NW 50th)
- Edwards Park (1515 N Bryant Ave.)
- Kids Lake (3200 W Wilshire Blvd.)
- Kitchen Lake (5894 SE 119th)
- Route 66 Park (9901 NW 23rd)
- South Lakes Regional Park (4210 SW 119th)
- Zoo Lake (2101 NE 50th) — east shoreline only

**Bartlesville - (918) 338-4226:**
- Lee Lake (2200 SE Adams Blvd.)

**Choctaw – (405) 390-8198:**
- Choctaw Creek Park (2001 N Harper)
- Ten Acre Park (NE 10th Street and Choctaw Road)

**Del City – (405) 670-7314:**
- Eagle Lake (3405 E Reno)

**Edmond – (405) 359-4630:**
- Hafer Park (1034 S Bryant Ave.)
- 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 (Corner of S Van Buren Street and W Rupe Ave.)
- Government Springs North Park (300 S 5th St.)
- Crosslin Park (1600 block W Purdue Ave.)
- City of Enid Water Works (1400 block W Chestnut Ave.)

** Guthrie – (405) 282-8400:**
- Mineral Wells Park (Division and Mineral Wells Circle)
- Highland Park (Warner Avenue and N Drexel Boulevard)

**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 (N Henney Road and W Main Street)

**Lawton – (580) 581-3400:**
- Elmer Thomas Park - Lake Helen (Interstate 44 and NW Cache Road)
- Liberty Lake (1717 NW Kinyon)
- Skyline Pond (NE 27 and Dearborn Ave.)
- Park Lane Pond (SE Pinewood Drive)

**Medicine Park – (580) 529-2825:**
- Medicine Creek (From Gondola Dam to State Highway 49 bridge)

**Moore – (405) 793-5090:**
- Little River Park (700 SW 4th) (currently closed for renovations, call for updates)
- Buck Thomas Park Pond (1903 NE 12th St.)

**Mustang – (405) 376-7739:**
- Wildhorse Park (SW 59th and Mustang Road)

**Norman – (405) 366-5472:**
- George M. Sutton Urban Wilderness Area (12th Avenue NE and Rock Creek Road) (currently closed for renovations, call for updates)
- Norman Lions Northeast Park (1800 Northcliff Ave.)
- Griffin Community Park (1001 E Robinson)

**Sapulpa - (918) 227-5151:**
- Kelly Lane Park (1151 S Park St.)
- WELCH Park (615 Annawood Road)
- Robertson Activity Center (1200 Lakeshore Drive)
The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation’s Byron Fish Hatchery is in northwestern Oklahoma. It is where ODWC produces all of its hybrid sunfish for state fish stocking purposes.

A hybrid sunfish is a cross between a male bluegill and a female green sunfish. Unlike all of the other fish species that are produced at Byron, hybrid sunfish are the only ones that are produced through natural spawning.

Most hatchery-raised fish are produced in what is known as jar culture. This is the process of collecting milt and roe from brooder fish stock (breeding adults). Those are then combined in “test tubes” to simulate the reproductive process. After a short incubation period, the fry are either placed in what are known as rearing ponds, to allow them to grow to larger sizes before being stocked, or they are immediately put in bags and shipped to other hatcheries.

Byron produces several species of fish, including striped bass, hybrid striped bass, walleye, sauger, saugeye and hybrid sunfish. But since it is a natural forage fish for most reservoir predators, the hybrid sunfish requires a much longer process than all of the other species Byron produces.

Stocking predator species usually involves a quick turnaround. The fry are produced and stocked in bulk (in the thousands) to ensure a desirable number of that particular species makes it to adulthood, as most will not survive due to predation or other natural causes. Hybrid sunfish on the other hand are allowed to develop for three years prior to being stocked. This allows ODWC to stock fewer fish with a lower mortality rate in a body of water.

The production of hybrid sunfish involves three half acre ponds. The production pond is stocked with 10 to 20 breeding pairs of male bluegills and female green sunfish. These pairs then naturally reproduce in the pond, 50,000 to 100,000 offspring. After a year of growth, the fish are moved into a secondary pond to continue their growth. After a second year of growth, they are put in a third pond for a final year of growing. These 3-year-old fish are then ready to be removed from the hatchery and sent out for stocking. This process is repeated annually, serving as a conveyor belt of sorts for hybrid sunfish production.

Most of the 3-year-old fish will be sent to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in exchange for 5,000 adult brown trout that get stocked in ODWC’s two year-round trout fisheries. 10,000 hybrid sunfish are sent to the Oklahoma City fish hatchery and are stocked in the Close to Home waters around the metro.
The remaining hybrids are sent to ODWC’s other fish hatcheries to be stocked in Close to Home waters in those regions. Hybrid sunfish may be a forage fish by most predators, but don’t be fooled by the “bait fish” label, as these are a voracious species with an insatiable appetite, which is why they are the preferred stocked fish in Close to Home waters. It is not uncommon to catch the same fish multiple times in the same day, especially in late May and June when sunfish begin their spawning period.

Most Oklahomans’ introduction to fishing came by catching sunfish in a farm pond and the Close to Home fishing program aims to continue that legacy by providing a feisty fish for families to catch in their neighborhood waters.

This is the half-acre pond used for the brood stock of male bluegills and female green sunfish at the Byron Hatchery. The hatchery’s hybrid sunfish (inset photo) are produce by 10 to 20 pairs naturally each year.
SPORT FISH OF OKLAHOMA

SALMON FAMILY — SALMONIDAE
- Brown Trout
  *Salmo trutta*
- Rainbow Trout
  *Oncorhynchus mykiss*

GAR FAMILY — LEPISOSTEIDAE
- Alligator Gar
  *Atractosteus spatula*

PADDLEFISH FAMILY — POLYDONTIDAE
- American Paddlefish
  *Polyodon spathula*

PERCH FAMILY — PERCIDAE
- Walleye
  *Stizostedion vitreum*
- Sauger
  *Stizostedion canadense*
- Saugeye
  *Stizostedion canadense x Stizostedion vitreum*
Black Crappie
Pomoxis nigromaculatus

SPORT FISH OF OKLAHOMA

CATFISH FAMILY — ICTALURIDAE

Flathead Catfish
Pylodictis olivaris

Blue Catfish
Ictalurus furcatus

Channel Catfish
Ictalurus punctatus

Striped Bass Hybrid
Morone chrysops x Morone saxatilis

TEMPERATE BASS FAMILY — MORONIDAE

White Bass
Morone chrysops

Redear Sunfish
Lepomis microlophus

Striped Bass
Morone saxatilis

Black Crappie
Pomoxis nigromaculatus

SUNFISH FAMILY — CENTRARCHIDAE

Green Sunfish
Lepomis cyanellus

White Crappie
Pomoxis annularis

Bluegill
Lepomis macrochirus

Largemouth Bass
Micropterus salmoides

Spotted Bass
Micropterus punctulatus

Smallmouth Bass
Micropterus dolomieu
Streams Team biologists enjoyed many remarkable views, such as this one of Medicine Creek in the Wichita Mountains of southwestern Oklahoma.
A series of well-worn footpaths leads to many of our state’s streams and rivers, taking anglers and outdoor enthusiasts from a world of hectic schedules and acres of concrete to one of fishing poles, ice chests and river shoes.

One-third of Oklahoma’s anglers take these footpaths each year to wet a line and see what waits for them in the state’s waterways. While sportsmen may enjoy the streams for their fishing opportunities, biologists with the Wildlife Department’s Streams Program see the beautiful stretches of creeks and rivers as an office with an incredible view. Instead of catching fish for supper or sport, the “Streams Team” catches fish for science.

Though the Streams Program historically concentrated on small-scale stream renovations, biologists have recently shifted gears to a statewide focus on the fish in our streams. Their work now includes managing sport fish like largemouth, smallmouth, spotted and striped bass, as well as flathead, blue and channel catfish. They are also working to increase public stream access, improve fishing opportunities at the lower Illinois River tailwaters, and kicking off a long-term fish community monitoring project.

By surveying the fish communities in our state’s major drainages on a 10-year rotation and comparing the results to historic surveys, biologists will be better able to understand how our fish are faring and update records of where certain groups of species can be found.

To get the new monitoring program’s feet wet, the Streams Team visited southwestern Oklahoma’s sandy Upper Red River basin.

The Braided River of the Southwest
Fed by a mix of silty and sandy tributaries, the Upper Red River’s channel constantly changes. Easily flooded, the river’s sand bars are pushed and pulled downstream with heavy spring and fall rains. When flooding resides, the main channel divides and reunites multiple times as it flows, giving it a braided appearance.

Biologists Get Their Feet Wet During Streams Team’s Survey

By Jena Donnell, Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist
By the end of the summer, the team had sampled each of the sites three times and had documented 53 fish species in the 17 surveyed creeks and riverways.

West Cache Creek near Lawton was among the 17 creeks and river areas sampled by biologists in the Upper Red River Survey.

Among the survey's catch was this brilliantly colored longear sunfish.

With data collected, Streams Team biologist Tony Rodger packs up his bags before heading for another site.

ABOVE: Streams Team Technician Donnie King and biologist Matt Skoog pull a seine through the water.
The Streams Team surveyed the ever-changing river in July and August 2016, when the river was low enough to safely traverse. Working their way from the Prairie Dog Fork of the Red River near Hollis southeast to Lake Texoma near Kingston, the team took their sampling gear to 48 different sites along the river and nearby tributaries.

Backpack electrofishing units were used to capture fish in the rocky, headwater mountain streams of the Wichita Mountains, but biologists were able to use a large net to sample the fish communities in the sandy and silty-bottom streams throughout the rest of the basin. The net, or seine, was pulled through the water at least 20 times at each site to capture a variety of fish. Their catch was identified and recorded with each seine haul.

Before team members moved to the next site, they also recorded information including the stream’s water depth, flow rate and temperature along with the amount of woody debris and the width of the stream. This habitat data will help biologists learn more about each fish species’ preferences and may help them predict which species may be present at similar sites.

By the end of the summer, the team had sampled each of the sites three times and had documented 53 fish species in the 17 surveyed creeks and river ways. As expected, some of the survey sites hosted more species of fish than others.

“Diversity hotspots” for the Upper Red River basin included the East Cache Creek survey site near Lawton, where 25 species
Surveying the Upper Red River

48 individual sites were surveyed 3x in the summer of 2016 on 17 different streams, creeks and rivers covering 990 miles of waterways in southwestern Oklahoma.
of fish were documented; the Red River site near Marietta, where 22 species were recorded; and the West Cache Creek site near Walters, where 21 species were logged.

Four of the species documented last summer are considered to be species of greatest conservation need.

To see how the current fish community compares to communities of the past, the Streams Team has been combing through past survey data, including field notes and logs from Bill Matthews and Edie Marsh-Matthews, biologists with the University of Oklahoma. Matthews and Marsh-Matthews were the last to conduct a comprehensive survey of the region in the late 1980s and have graciously shared their information with the Streams Team.

This summer, the team will continue its work surveying the state’s major drainages, focusing efforts on the Arkansas River and its tributaries. As team members move across the state sampling various rivers, they will track changes in fish distribution and document the distinct fish communities found in each ecoregion.

The prairie chub is among four species of greatest conservation need that were documented by the Streams Team.

Learn more about one of the fish species of greatest conservation need that was found during the Streams Team survey of the Upper Red River. Little is known about the prairie chub, but it proved its resilience in surviving several years of drought. This fish’s intriguing story will be included in the May/June issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.
Let’s Talk Turkey

Know These Basics to Help

By Kelly Adams, Information Specialist
& Rich Fuller, Wildlife Biologist
Clamorous gobbles echo over the landscape, surprising early spring’s still morning. There is something special about spring turkey season. And to truly know the addictive nature of this pursuit, one must experience it firsthand.
Although turkey hunting is complex, persistence and patience will pay off. And while the ins-and-outs of turkey hunting can get complicated, the best place to start is with the basics. Here's an overview of spring turkey hunting essentials.

Like duck hunting, turkey hunting uses calls and decoys, which require practice beforehand. A sportsman can become a successful turkey hunter by learning about wild turkey behavior, wild turkey sounds and how the two relate. Learning on the job isn't a good way to approach turkey hunting, and taking the time to study, learn and practice undoubtedly will pay off.

**Calling All Toms**

Turkey calls are designed to be user-friendly and easy to learn, but that won't make up for a lack of preparation. Knowing how to make a turkey sound is one thing, but mastering what calling technique (such as a gobble, yelp, etc.) to use and when to use it takes time and practice.

One of the most interesting things about turkey calling is that a certain device or vocalization may work perfectly one day but not the next. For this reason, seasoned hunters often carry more than one kind of call. Also, they remain versatile for the duration of the hunt, changing the sounds they make until they find one that works. Luckily, thousands of turkey hunting videos exist online and are a great way to learn what turkeys sound like, how to call a turkey, and how they react to different calls.

If calling properly, a hunter should be able to attract a tom. But many hunters supplement their calling by using decoys.

**Wild Turkey Sounds**

From gathering poults (young birds) to finding a mate, wild turkeys make a vast array of sounds. Here are common calls heard in the turkey woods.

- **Cluck:** The cluck is one or more short, staccato notes. The plain cluck includes two or three single-note clucks. It's generally used by one bird to get the attention of another. It's a good call to reassure an approaching gobbler that a hen is waiting.

- **Yelp:** The yelp is a basic turkey sound. It is often delivered in a series of single note vocalizations and

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*Full camouflage is necessary when turkey hunting. Turkeys have exceptional eyesight, and they have crystal-clear vision throughout a 270-degree field of view.*
can have different meanings depending on how the hen uses it.

- **Putt:** The putt is a single note, generally used as an alarm. It could be several notes in sharp or rapid fashion, usually meaning the bird has seen or heard something that might be dangerous.

- **Cut:** A series of fast, loud, erratic single notes is referred to as cutting. It’s a modified cluck and is a distinct, abrupt call with a somewhat questioning nature. It can be heard at a great distance and is often used by a single turkey looking for companionship.

- **Tree Call:** Usually a series of soft, muffled yelps from a roosting bird. Sometimes volume increases as fly-down time nears. It’s believed this call is used to communicate with others in a flock.

- **Purr:** Purring is a soft, rolling call that turkeys make when content. It can usually be heard by feeding birds. This is not a loud call, but is good for reassuring turkeys as they close in on your position.

- **Gobbling:** The gobble is one of the principal vocalizations of the male wild turkey and is used primarily in the spring to let hens know he is in the area. Imitating a tom turkey’s gobble should only be used with utmost caution, and probably avoided in areas with moderate to heavy hunting pressure.

### Decoys

Knowing which decoys to use and how to place them may seem overwhelming, but for a new hunter, keeping it simple is the best approach. Flashy turkey decoys that spin and shake are fine but not necessary. It’s not the decoy that attracts the gobbler; it’s decoy placement and numbers. For this reason, new turkey hunters should opt for cheaper decoys.

The best place for a new turkey hunter to start is with a simple setup with two decoys of a jake and a hen. It should be obvious why a hunter would use a hen decoy during a spring turkey hunt; it’s mating season. For this reason, hens are the best decoys to use during a spring hunt. Although a jake is a young male not ready to breed, a dominant gobbler doesn’t want him interfering with a potential mate. Mature toms are not reluctant to enter a jake’s territory.
Scouting

All the calls and decoys in the world don’t hold a candle to being in the right location. And to be in the right location, a hunter must scout. Every hunter knows scouting is important, but not every hunter does it. And when it comes to turkeys, scouting is critical. Scouting for turkeys can mean anything from driving around and looking for tracks in the dirt to extensive groundwork searching for, and reading, the various types of turkey sign.

Hunters who go into the field armed with sufficient knowledge greatly increase their chances of harvesting a bird. Locating food plots, agriculture fields and open meadows is a great way to start. From there, search for turkey sign such as tracks, droppings and feathers.

- **Tracks:** Search areas where tracks will be noticeable such as along field edges and paths clear of leaves. Tracks will confirm that birds are in the area and maybe help you understand where they like to travel. Turkeys have three long toes. A single track measuring 4.25 inches or more from the tip of the middle toe to the heel indicates a gobbler, smaller than that it is probably a hen.
- **Droppings:** A hen’s look like small pieces of popcorn while a gobbler’s droppings are larger and J-shaped.
- **Wingtip marks:** When gobblers strut, their wingtips drag the ground leaving two parallel lines in the dirt, sometimes with turkey tracks visible between them.
- **Feathers:** Turkeys will typically knock feathers loose from their wings as they fly up to and down from their roosts. In western Oklahoma, tall timber areas littered with feathers mixed with droppings indicate a good roost site. In the east, larger wooded areas make identifying roost areas a little more difficult because the birds have more roosting options.

While tracks, droppings, shed feathers and sightings of turkeys are all positive proof that birds are in the area, many hunters opt to delve further into the business of scouting. Here’s what they look for:

- **Roosting site:** Turkeys generally roost high in the branches of large trees and often spend some time gobbling before flying down at sunrise. Rio Grande roosts are often located on cottonwoods found along rivers, stream and creeks. Eastern birds may roost near water also, but may spend their nights high in ridge top pines. The ground below roost trees will be littered with feathers and droppings. While birds may not use a specific site every night, a roost tree with fresh sign is reliable indication that birds are frequenting the area. This is a good, centralized location to continue scouting, but most veterans prefer not to hunt near a roost. Turkeys spooked off the roost, they believe, tend to move out of the area.
- **Fly-down area:** Turkeys, Rio Grandes in particular, prefer to leave the roost and hit the ground on a relatively open area. In the west, this may be a pasture or wheat field, while in the east it may be clear cut, grazed field or open understory beneath the pines. If a hunter can pattern birds coming off their roost, fly-down areas are excellent places to set up for a hunt.
- **Display areas:** In the spring, gobblers spend much of their day strutting in a high visibility area such as a knoll, rise, bare ridge, old roadway or meadow. Look for concentrations of tracks and drag marks made by the wingtips of a displaying tom.

Feeding area: In some areas, turkeys feed randomly and are nearly impossible to pattern. In other areas, hunters can almost count on birds using particular field or draws where a food source is readily available. These also are good places to set up and wait.

- **Loafing area:** Depending on weather, turkeys may spend their afternoons in sunny openings amid hillside brush or in cool, shady creek bottoms. These areas are often protected from wind and well-used dusting wallows are often nearby. Late in the season when hens are nesting, toms are often lonely and vulnerable to hunters set up in a loafing area.
- **Staging area:** Turkeys often congregate in a seemingly designated locations before moving together toward the roosting site. Difficult to locate except by visual observance, these areas are excellent ambush sites.
- **Travel lanes:** Tree rows, shelterbelts, draw, creek banks, cattle or deer trails are all likely routes which turkeys take from one area to another during the course of a day. These too are excellent locations to plan a hunt.

**Go Public**

No matter the season, the main concern for many hunters is where to hunt. About 30 percent of Oklahoma’s active hunters said they hunted at least one day on public land in 2015, and these areas should not be disregarded. Because of the Wildlife Department’s management efforts, turkey hunters have a legitimate chance to
bag a spring tom on many of the Department’s wildlife management areas open to public hunting. Biologists enhance turkey habitat on WMAs by planting food plots; removing cedar trees around larger roost trees such as cottonwoods, elms and oaks; renewing plant succession by burning or disking; and planting mast trees such as oaks and pecans. Moderate grazing, like that observed on some wildlife management areas, can help enhance poult rearing and feeding areas.

With more than 1.6 million acres of public hunting land available to hunters across the state, deciding which WMA to visit for a turkey hunt may seem overwhelming. Hunters new to the sport should know hunting Oklahoma’s western half is a much different adventure than hunting far eastern and southeastern Oklahoma. For one, the birds are different. Rio Grande turkeys are the most widespread, inhabiting the western two-thirds of the state. Eastern turkeys are found in eastern and southeastern areas of Oklahoma. Hybrids are found where the ranges overlap.

**Eastern Turkeys**

Some hunters will argue hunting Eastern gobblers is more difficult than pursuing its western cousin. It most definitely is different. Eastern wild turkeys are cautious, and aren’t as eager to run toward a hen (or a hunter’s yelp) as a Rio. Looking at the variances in habitat type, it is easy to understand their behavioral distinctions. Rios inhabit wide-open spaces and can see approaching danger. Eastern turkeys inhabit areas with thicker vegetation and broken terrain, making them vulnerable to “close quarter” ambushes from predators. For this

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**A locator call, binocular, camo and a pair of comfortable boots is all a hunter needs to scout. Arrive early and spend time looking for sign and listening for gobbles.**
reason, Eastern toms are less likely to respond to calls, or gobble themselves, making hunting tactics much different than those used for Rio Grande turkeys.

The first rule for hunting Eastern birds is keep calling to a minimum, especially in areas of high hunting pressure. Mature bearded toms will simply quit calling after they’ve exchanged just a few gobbles. Don’t make the mistake in thinking that the gobbling turkey doesn’t know where you are in a vast unbroken forest of pine trees. He knows your location. If the tom continues to gobble and appears to be moving off in a separate direction, you can try giving him just a few yelps, purrs or clucks with a different type of call (i.e. changing from a box call to a slate). But be conservative in your calling. Sometimes just the change in tone is enough to seduce the tom into shotgun range.

**Rio Grande Turkeys**

A different tactic can be used for Rio Grande turkeys. Early in the spring season, before gobblers are call shy, use loud and aggressive calling. Toms may not yet be wildly interested in breeding, but mimicking a ready and aggressive hen is a good play. Don’t be afraid to cackle, cut and yelp long and loudly. A Rio tom will often express how he wants to be called. An excited gobbler is best matched with an imitation of an excited hen, at least at first. A not-so-eager bird is a good candidate for conservative calling.

**Tips**

Regardless of species, even with proper planning, practicing and research, situations may arise that even the most-prepared hunter wouldn’t expect. It is important to be patient and persistent.
If you are out in the pre-dawn darkness and get a roosting tom to cut off your calls with a throaty gobble, be quiet and stay put. The bird knows exactly where you are. If he flies down from the roost and doesn’t come to you, it could be that one or more hens is with him. If so, chances are he won’t be coming to your calls anyway. It is possible to aggressively call in the hens to your location, which theoretically will also bring in the gobbler, but this technique is usually tough to accomplish with high-presured turkeys. As the season goes on, many hens will often leave a tom by midmorning to seek nesting sites. If this happens, he’ll come back to the exact place that he last heard your hen calls from the roost. And, it’s likely he won’t be gobbling when he comes searching for you. Full camouflage, absolutely no movement, razor-sharp senses and plenty of patience are needed to wait out these “high-pressured, call-shy” gobblers.

It doesn’t take much to over-call, which results in a hung-up gobbler. When a gobbler answers right back to your call or cuts you off by gobbling as you’re calling, you’ve got his attention. If the tom starts heading your way, he will quit gobbling or gobble less frequently. If you call during this time, you are making the bird stop to respond to your call, and it may hang up. The bird may stop in its tracks trying to make that hen (or the hunter in this case) come to him. Remember: The main reason a tom turkey gobbles is to call hens to his location, not the other way around. What spring turkey hunters are essentially doing is imitating hen sounds to make the tom behave counter to the way it typically happens in nature.

If the tom hangs up out of shotgun range, you can quit calling altogether and hope that he gets curious enough to get closer, or you can change your type of call to produce a more seductive tone, or you can try to move to a different set-up location. Aggressive calling usually will not work with turkeys that hang up out of range. Moving to a different set-up is usually a risky proposition. If you are in an area with other turkey hunters, extreme caution is required. Certainly, any hunters on public lands should assume that he or she is not the only hunter out on the area. Whenever a hunter sneaks toward a gobbling turkey, he runs the risk of being mistaken as game by another turkey hunter. Imitating a tom turkey’s gobble should only be used with utmost caution, and probably avoided on public areas and other areas with moderate to heavy hunting pressure.

At best, using a gobble call will often attract other hunters to your immediate area, and their movements may spook the very turkey that you are trying to call to your location.

At worst, imitating the sounds of a gobbling turkey may unintentionally place two hunters into a dangerous situation. The excitement and adrenaline rush of hearing a gobbling turkey may lead to shooting accidents in which hunters make the disastrous mistake of not properly identifying their target and what lies beyond it before pulling the trigger.

It may seem impossible that a human could be mistaken for a turkey. But most turkey hunters wear camouflage clothing from head-to-toe. This camouflage disguises the obvious silhouette of a human form. Add in the sounds of the gobbling turkey, crunching leaves, and movement of vegetation, and this situation can lead to one hunter mistaking another for a turkey.

Another prime safety practice for turkey hunters is to avoid wearing any item of clothing with red, white or blue on it. Those are colors that can be seen on a tom turkey’s head.

If a hunter encounters another hunter converging on the same turkey, common sense says not to make turkey calls in an effort to alert the hunter to your presence. Waving your hand or other body movements can also compromise safety. The safest way to alert another hunter is with your voice: “Hey! I’m a hunter! Don’t shoot!” If that spooks the turkey away, so what? At least both of you will be able to enjoy another turkey season.

Moving to a different calling set-up on a hung-up turkey can be productive, but again it should be done very cautiously. If two hunters are together, then one designated caller can attempt to dislodge a hung-up tom by moving farther away to call. Sometimes this “leaving hen” trick can induce a tom into following. By adjusting his angle, the caller can try to lure the tom in a path that converges with the designated shooter’s line of fire.

The difference between collecting a mature turkey beard and coming home empty-handed is persistence. April weather in Oklahoma can change rapidly. Wet weather and sudden weather changes usually equal less gobbling activity, especially for Eastern birds. Also, these birds can be fickle. Hunters should have several plans, and he might need to switch to Plan B. As long as you do your homework, remain patient and be persistent, your turkey hunt will be a successful one.
Among the most popular turkey hunting locations in Oklahoma, Black Kettle Wildlife Management Area is an excellent destination for new turkey hunters. In terms of total acres, this WMA is also among the largest of all Oklahoma WMAs. Near Cheyenne, Black Kettle WMA consists of 30,710 acres divided among about 100 units scattered throughout Roger Mills County. Each unit showcases a different uniqueness found in the Central Great Plains ecoregion.

Rio Grande wild turkeys are present in good numbers, and Black Kettle’s abundant drainages and cottonwood stands allow hunters plenty of opportunity. Navigating Black Kettle’s scattered property can be overwhelming for the unprepared, so it is important to have a plan. Luckily if that plan fails, the several maintained roads that connect the properties allow hunters to relocate easily if necessary.

Primitive camping is allowed on the WMA in accordance with U.S. Forest Service/Black Kettle National Grassland regulations. Three developed camping areas are available: Skipout, Spring Creek and Black Kettle. No hookups are available for RVs. Lodging and restaurants can be found in Cheyenne. ![Wild turkey roosting sites are easier to locate in areas such as Black Kettle WMA in western Oklahoma because fewer large trees are found there.](image)
Although it’s an entirely different pursuit, the potential exists for hunters to bring home a trophy Eastern wild turkey gobbler from southeastern Oklahoma’s McGee Creek Wildlife Management Area. The 10,000 acres of habitat on McGee Creek offers hunters a mixture of oak and hickory forests with some shortleaf pine groves, particularly on drier southern-facing slopes. The area is rugged with ridges, rocky outcroppings and occasional small clearings or grassy meadows interspersed.

To an Eastern turkey hunter, McGee Creek presents an inexhaustible supply of hunting locations and scenarios. Forbs and tubers such as wild onion grow in low-lying areas and is a staple of a wild turkey diet. Although the WMA is extremely rocky and in places steep, the network of roads belies the rugged terrain. The roads on McGee Creek are smooth and wide with numerous parking areas located throughout the area. One designated primitive camping area is offered on the area. Additional camping and cabin rental are available through McGee Creek State Park, while lodging and restaurants are available in Atoka and McAlester.
**Outdoor Oklahoma Caps**

These sharp, colorful fabric caps feature the “Outdoor Oklahoma” logo. Available color selections may vary.

Item OS-11 — $18 or $23

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**“Outdoor Oklahoma” Magazine**

Start enjoying a full year (six big issues) of hunting, fishing, natural history, camping and much more when you subscribe to “Outdoor Oklahoma” magazine. Subscribe for yourself, or a friend.

Item OS-10 1 year — $10, 2 years — $18, 3 years — $25

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**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. Item OS-13 — $10 each
Oklahoma Waterfowl Hunting Stamp

Oklahoma “duck stamps” are always popular with collectors and hunters, although for different reasons. 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. Please specify when ordering. (2016-2017 stamp is shown).

Item OS-7 — $10

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. The WMA Atlas is a longtime best-seller; get a copy while supplies last. Your atlas purchase comes with a one-year subscription to the award-winning “Outdoor Oklahoma” magazine.

Item OS-8 — $25

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.

Item OS-6 — $18

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Cy Curtis Awards Program Record Book

Is your name in the record book? Want to find out where the big ones have been hiding? This up-to-date book contains the hall of fame of trophy deer harvested in Oklahoma since 1972, including county-by-county listings by method. Purchase comes with a one-year subscription to “Outdoor Oklahoma” magazine.

Item OS-12 — $25
RECOMMENDED READING

“Fish On, Fish Off”
Dodging five-ton bull elephants, bullies brandishing fillet knives and beach-going nudists, former New York Times outdoors columnist Stephen Sautner has experienced the perils of fishing in ways many of us never will.

In his first book, “Fish On, Fish Off,” Sautner chronicles his experiences, beginning as a self-taught fish obsessed teenager in the early 1980s to the present, taking readers through every imaginable pitfall and oddball encounter along the way. These include rogue waves, menacing grizzly bears, a terrifying helicopter ride over the Straits of Magellan, and the dangers of “combat fishing” in his crowded home state of New Jersey.

Sautner fishes for anything with fins. He fly casts for Atlantic salmon, dangles off bridges for giant tarpon, and fishes with “GI Joe-sized” tackle through the ice for diminutive panfish.

Each story is written with a distinct campfire storytelling style full of wit, color, and keen observation of the natural world.

Some stories transport readers to remote outposts such as the Falkland Islands to fly cast for a strange fish no one has heard of, or Cuba’s Bay of Pigs where his only fishing rod breaks on the second cast. Other stories cover more familiar themes such as trying to find the balance between family and a full blown addiction to pursuing one’s passion.

“Fish On, Fish Off” is published by Lyon’s Press and is available at bookstores and online.

A Field Guide to Oklahoma’s Amphibians and Reptiles
If you’ve ever tried to figure out the difference between an Eastern River Cooter and a Red-eared Slider, this is the book for you. It has more than 200 pages of maps, descriptions and other information to help you with all of your amphibian and reptile identification needs. Color pictures and easy to use spiral binding make this a must-have field guide. Your purchase of this book includes a one-year subscription to “Outdoor Oklahoma” magazine.

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Donate to the Wildlife Diversity Program
Your tax deductible donation to the Wildlife Department’s Wildlife Diversity Program can help wildlife for years to come. Just indicate the amount you wish to donate in the “subtotal” column on the order form on this page.
Landscaping for Wildlife

Landscaping for Wildlife: A Guide to the Southern Great Plains brings your property to life. Find everything you need to know about attracting birds, butterflies, turtles and other wildlife in this full-color, 224-page landscaping guidebook. You'll find useful instructions for meeting water needs, feeding preferences and nesting requirements for wildlife found in the Southern Great Plains, with specific emphasis on Oklahoma species. Enjoy the detailed diagrams and plant listings that accompany book photographs and illustrations in addition to woodworking diagrams and lists of plant and seed companies. This book was compiled with the most up-to-date “wildscaping” information available. Your purchase of this book includes a one-year subscription to “Outdoor Oklahoma” magazine.

Item WD-1 — $14

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 $38 (original or replacement) or $36.50 (renewals) above your regular annual registration fee with proceeds going to Oklahoma’s Wildlife Diversity Program. For a free application form, check Item WD-13. The forms are also available at local tag agencies, or online at tinyurl.com/WildTags.

Item WD-13 — FREE
The long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*) is among nature’s pest-control specialists. Its diet is made up primarily of small mammals such as mice, which helps control the number of farm pests.

With a higher metabolic rate than any other mammal of similar size, long-tailed weasels are valuable and effective hunters. They have a huge appetite and will eat as much as 40 percent of their body weight daily. Weasels are known to attack chicken coops and bird nests but are more likely to be a helpful presence by keeping rodents at bay.

Long-tailed weasels have long, skinny bodies, short legs and a small head to more easily hunt burrowing animals such as shrews, gophers, mice and ground squirrels. Some larger weasels have even been known to hunt cottontail rabbits. Even though small mammals make up 95 percent of their diet, weasels will also eat birds, reptiles, fruits and berries.

Long-tailed weasels hunt by either smelling or hearing their prey and then following the animal to make a quick attack.

Oklahoma’s weasels have a brown coat with a cream belly and a distinctive bushy black-tipped tail. They shed their fur twice a year. Oklahoma’s weasels keep their brown fur throughout the year, but northern populations trade their brown coats for white coats for winter months.

The long-tailed weasel makes its home in woodlands, farmlands, bottomlands and brushy areas across Oklahoma. Most commonly found in northeastern Oklahoma, weasels might be seen near their hiding places such as rock piles and firewood stacks.

Weasels have adapted well to environmental changes caused by people. They thrive in small wooded areas near suburbs and in crop fields. They build nests under rocks, in hollow logs, under barns and in the abandoned burrows of other animals.

They are solitary animals for most of the year. Their home range typically occupies 30 acres or more. The home ranges of male and female weasels may overlap, but those of the same sex do not. They are very territorial and are aggressive toward intruders.

Male and female weasels begin to cohabitate during the breeding season in summer. Mating typically occurs in July or August. Young weasels, called kits, are born in groups of four to eight in spring. Kits are born blind with wrinkled skin and white fur. The mother feeds the young for two months until they are able to kill prey on their own.

Females reach sexual maturity after only three months, and they begin breeding the summer after they are born. Males will begin mating a year later, taking 12 months to fully mature.

These predators are elusive, private and primarily nocturnal, which makes it difficult to track populations. But the species is stable throughout North America; long-tailed weasels have a presence in most of North America, from extreme southern Canada throughout the United State and down to Central America. They can also be found in the northern portion of South America. Long-tailed weasel populations change locally in conjunction with the availability of prey.
Beautiful sunsets and fun hours afloat create memories that last a lifetime for youths attending the annual Wildlife Department-sponsored Youth Camp. See more from camp in this issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.