



# Your Side of the Fence

Summer 2018

A Publication of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Private Lands Section

## NRCS Wildlife and Monarch Cost Share Assistance Programs

By Dustin Lamoreaux, Pheasants Forever



What's out there?! Several assistance options that help landowners manage their habitat for wildlife are available across the state

of Oklahoma. The following Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) are offered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and have technical and financial assistance available to landowners. They have been developed to address certain resource concerns in targeted areas of the state. Each program has established a specific Habitat Evaluation Guide to determine the limiting factors and document a benchmark condition. Once limiting factors are identified a management plan will be developed to address these factors and any other identified resource concerns.

**Cross Timbers Initiative** – An allocation will be set aside to

fund applications for restoring wildlife habitats indicative of the Cross Timbers Ecoregion. This ecoregion is a mosaic of upland deciduous forest, woodland, glade, savannahs, and prairie that dissects Oklahoma from north to south. Many savannahs and woodlands have become thicker and composition has shifted as a result of prolonged fire suppression. This lack of fire also has resulted in the invasion of eastern redcedar and winged elm throughout all habitat types. Financial assistance is available for practices like prescribed

burning; brush management, including cedar removal and timber thinning; and native grass plantings. These practices benefit a variety of grassland birds including northern bobwhite. **Available Oklahoma Counties:** Coal, Hughes, McIntosh, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Pittsburg and Seminole.

**Monarch Butterfly Initiative** – The monarch has experienced significant population declines over the past two decades. Through Farm Bill conservation programs and technical



*Landowners in the bulk of Oklahoma can help conserve monarchs by planting milkweeds and nectar-rich plants on their property.*

Ray Moranz/Merces Society

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assistance, NRCS will work with partners and clients to increase monarch habitat on private lands. While the monarch butterfly occurs in 49 different states, NRCS is targeting their effort to the core migration route and the primary breeding range. In the southern Great Plains, the initiative's focus will be on improving habitat for monarchs by restoring native grassland health. Applicants interested should expect and be accepting of management that aims to increase the numbers and diversity of fall flowering plants. Geography of the Monarch Initiative includes 67 of the 77 counties in Oklahoma, **excluding** the following 10 counties: Adair, Cimarron, Craig, Delaware, Haskell, Latimer, Le Flore, McCurtain, Ottawa and Sequoyah. This particular initiative covers a large portion of Oklahoma, primarily due to the fact that Oklahoma is in the heart of the monarch migration corridor.

**Grassland Restoration Incentive Program** – The primary objective of the Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture's (OPJV) Grassland

Restoration Incentive Program (GRIP) is to reverse the decline of grassland bird and pollinator populations through voluntary habitat restoration of private lands within the Oaks and Prairie conservation region. Interested applicants should contact Oklahoma's GRIP Coordinator, Ken Gee at 580-319-8440 or kennethlgee@gmail.com to facilitate plan development and GRIP ranking. **Available Oklahoma Counties:** Craig, Carter, Jefferson, Johnston, Love, Murray, Nowata, Osage, Pawnee and Pontotoc.

Land managers interested in these cost-share programs are encouraged to contact the local USDA-NRCS Service Center for additional information. In addition, land managers may contact Dustin Lamoreaux, Quail Forever Biologist, for additional information at dlamoreaux@pheasantsforever.org or 405-742-1249. Keep in mind, when going to talk with these offices it is best to have a clear objective for the resources and wildlife species you plan to address.



Dustin Lamoreaux/Pheasants Forever

*Several technical and financial assistance programs are available to landowners interested in managing their habitat for wildlife.*



Brandon Brown/ODWC

## Kid-Friendly Pond Fishing

By Kurt Kuklinski, Fisheries Research Supervisor



For kids, summer typically means no school and days filled with dirty hands, muddy shoes, and endless opportunity for

adventure outside the confines of classroom walls. One kid-friendly adventure involves the feeling of a fish pulling on the end of a fishing line. Kids love summer, and fishing is woven into the very fabric of summer in this great country. With young anglers in mind, let's think about your pond's fishery and how appealing it may be for kids.

One common issue in Oklahoma ponds is overcrowded or stunted bass populations. This simply means too many bass are competing for a limited amount of food, resulting in stunted, or very slow growing bass. In this situation, most bass grow 10 to 12 inches in length, with few individuals obtaining greater lengths. This can be corrected by reducing the total bass population (usually through harvest), but from a young angler's perspective is this really



Kurt Kuklinski/ODWC

*Inviting young anglers to an overcrowded pond may be a solution to your fishery, and for keeping kids active this summer.*

a negative situation? In addition to a lot of hungry bass to catch, stunted bass populations also usually produce quality sunfish populations.

When most bass are less than 12 inches, small sunfish (usually 2- to 4-inch bluegill and redear) are their main diet. Small bass eat a lot of small sunfish. But sunfish that survive past 4 inches now have virtually no predators and will grow to maximum size, up to 10 or 12 inches in many cases. So a stunted bass pond will offer two very appealing populations of fish for kids to target: plentiful hungry bass, and a healthy population of large sunfish. Add to this the fact that most Oklahoma ponds also contain healthy channel catfish populations, and you can see

how appealing such a pond could be for youngsters.

Although it may not be ideal for experienced anglers, this scenario is ideal for kids who want to catch a lot of fish at a rate that will keep them interested. The best part is, it's a win-win situation for landowners and kids. Landowners benefit by having an improved fishery through the harvest of stunted bass and the kids benefit through nearly endless catching excitement.

Overall, it's important to remember that a pond that we might consider a poor fishery could actually be the perfect environment for young anglers. I hope you consider inviting kids to fish your farm pond this summer.

# Landowner Spotlight

## Walt Haskins Named Landowner of the Year

By Russ Horton, Wildlife Research Supervisor



The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation presented its 2017 Landowner of the Year Award to Mayes County ranch owner

Walter D. (Walt) Haskins. The award acknowledges outstanding conservation efforts on Oklahoma private lands.

Haskins is the owner and operator of the Mayes County Deer Ranch, a 485-acre property south of Locust Grove. When first purchased, the ranch looked very similar to the habitat throughout the county – extensive areas of mature, closed canopy mixed hardwood forest. But the ranch also had an extensive infestation of eastern red cedar (ERC). In Haskins own words, “...it was clearly in need of work.....” Using an intensive ERC eradication effort, and an ongoing prescribed burning program, Mr. Haskins has transformed his property.

As the name implies, quality deer management is one of Walt's primary management goals, but of equal importance is his

goal to manage for wildlife and recreational diversity through sound land stewardship and a passion for sharing the property with others. A small portion of the ranch is dedicated to well-planned and distributed food plots managed for supplemental wildlife forage. The majority of the property, however, is managed for high quality, diverse native vegetation, providing excellent habitat for the diversity of wildlife indigenous to the area.

Mr. Haskins enrolled in ODWC's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) soon after he purchased the ranch, and began

protecting young bucks while harvesting 35 to 40 does annually. To help reach those goals, Walt and his family began mentoring members of the local Boy Scout Troop, and over the years, many local Boy Scouts have gotten their first deer on the Mayes County Deer Ranch. He also continually utilizes the ODWC wildlife technical assistance program for guidance with habitat management planning and implementation. Through sound herd and habitat management, the doe-buck ratio goal was reached and continues to be maintained at the desired level, resulting in an annual harvest of



*Gathered for the ODWC 2017 Landowner Conservationist of the Year Award are Russ Horton, ODWC research supervisor; Chad Hibbs, ranch manager; Bill Dinkines, ODWC assistant chief of wildlife; award winner Walter D. Haskins, Mayes County Deer Ranch; Wade Free, ODWC assistant director; J.D. Strong, ODWC director; and Alan Peoples, ODWC chief of wildlife.*

several quality bucks. He has also created several (five and counting) ponds on the property for wildlife watering, wetland/waterfowl habitat management, fisheries management and recreation, and irrigation (for wildlife food plots). A major challenge now, and going forward, is a serious feral hog problem. Haskins, his hunters, and his ranch manager are tackling this through sustained

trapping and shooting efforts.

Along with his passion for wildlife and habitat management, Walt is equally passionate about sharing with others. For years he has worked closely with Boy Scouts of America, Troop 1, and every year scouts have opportunity to earn merit badges in Fishing, Camping, Environmental Science, or Fish and Wildlife Management.

Likewise, numerous family and friends are the beneficiaries of Walt's sharing nature, enjoying all that the ranch has to offer.

In summary, Walt's effort, dedication, and passion exemplify successful wildlife conservation on private land, and he is very deserving of recognition as the 2017 ODWC Landowner Conservationist of the Year.



## OLAP Seeks Leases for 2nd Year

By Jeff Tibbits, OLAP Wildlife Biologist



The Oklahoma Land Access Program (OLAP) provides financial incentives to landowners who allow public access for hunting, fishing,

stream access and wildlife viewing opportunities on private lands.

The Wildlife Department received a \$2.26 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture as part of the 2014 Farm Bill, through the Voluntary Public Access - Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). OLAP aims to increase walk-

in access opportunities for sportspersons while including and rewarding conservation-minded landowners. Landowners have the flexibility to maintain their current farming or ranching practices while providing sporting opportunities. Enrolled landowners are compensated based on enrolled acres, location, access type and contract length. Added compensation is available for properties enrolled in conservation programs, such as CRP, to further reward landowners making efforts to conserve and sustain wildlife. A bonus is available to multiple landowners who form local OLAP cooperatives.

Almost anyone who owns or leases at least 40 acres can

qualify. Property boundaries are posted with signs, and parking areas will have informational signs indicating access dates and allowed activities. Enrolled landowners are accorded limited liability by existing state laws, and Game Wardens periodically patrol OLAP properties.

Landowners may temporarily deny access while ranching or agricultural activities are occurring. Access is limited to foot traffic only, and vehicles are prohibited.

For more information or to sign up, go to [www.wildlifedepartment.com/OLAP](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/OLAP).

# Tech Note

## New Quail Guide Offers Tips for Enhancing Habitat

By Kyle Johnson, Private Lands Biologist



When it comes to bobwhite quail, weather and habitat are important elements that contribute to their year to year production.

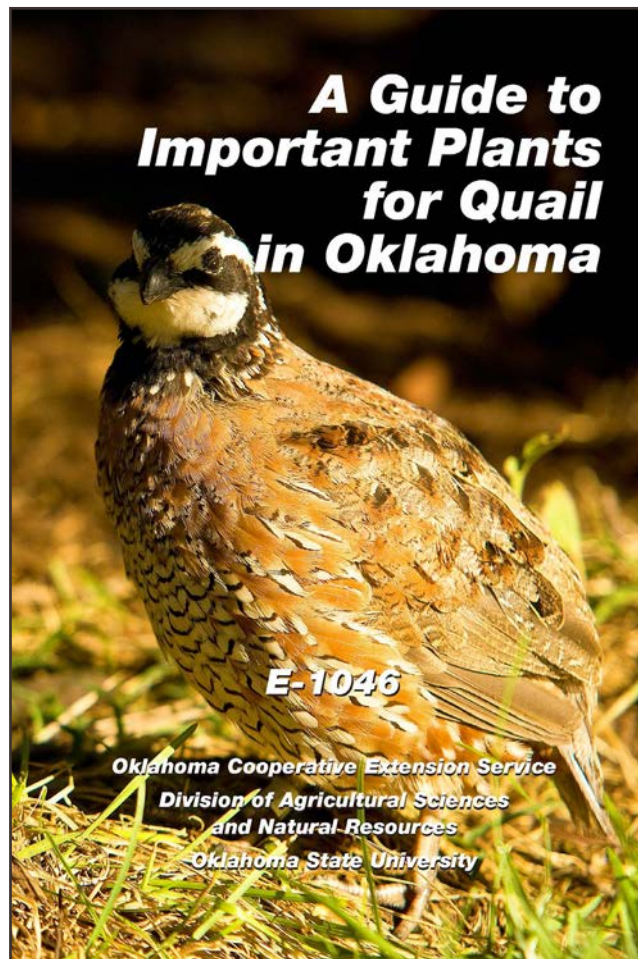
Unfortunately, there is little a landowner can do about the weather. Thankfully, great habitat can help offset the highs and lows of the weather in a given year. For land managers wishing to enhance habitat for quail and other wildlife, a new quail plant guide is now available to assist.

*A Guide to Plants Important for Quail in Oklahoma* offers land managers an opportunity to identify plants important for quail and other wildlife and learn about their management. Overall, 70 plants are included with the guide including grasses, forbs (weeds), shrubs, and trees. But the guide isn't just a plant identification guide. It also offers unique information of where each plant occurs within the state as well as its habitat preference, flowering period, insect attractiveness, and food and cover use by quail.

In addition, the guide includes close-up seed images designed to aid in identifying the food contents of harvested quail.

Perhaps the greatest feature of the guide for land managers are the management options listed to promote or control each plant for wildlife. Often, knowing when, how, and where to direct such practices as disking, burning, grazing, mowing, spraying, thinning, or cutting can be the difference between having good habitat for quail versus habitat which is much less desirable. Overall, the guide was developed to be an easy-to-understand and easy-to-use management tool for land managers across the state.

To download a pdf version of the guide, visit <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/>



Get/Document-10890/E-1047. In addition, print copies are available by visiting the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management office (008C Ag Hall) on the campus of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma or by scheduling a technical assistance private lands visit with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation private lands biologist in your region.



**Little Bluestem**  
(*Schizachyrium scoparium*)



Actual seed size – 1/5" |

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**Common Name:** Little Bluestem

**Scientific Name:** *Schizachyrium scoparium*

**Family:** Poaceae, Grass Family

**Origin:** Native

**Distribution in Oklahoma:** Across the state.

**Site Description:** Little bluestem is adapted to a variety of soils and conditions, including those that contain clay, gravel or sand. These grasses are characteristic of the mid- to late-stages of plant succession and is often the dominant grass in prairies, but also occurs within open forests, forest edges, glades, pastures and old fields.

**Plant Description:** Little bluestem grows from 2 to 4 feet in height and is recognized by its bunchgrass form, strongly flattened stem bases and many single, narrow, fuzzy, white branches that are attached individually atop each stem. The plants bloom from August through November and seeds can persist on the plants into the winter.

**Quail Use:** Little bluestem provides ideal nesting cover for quail and is identified as a preferred nesting component in many quail studies, likely due to its abundance. The plants hold up well to winter weather and have year-round cover value. The small seeds are occasionally consumed by quail, especially during the fall and winter. The plants attract a variety of valuable quail insect foods including caterpillars of skipper butterflies, leaf beetles, jewel beetles, planthoppers, grasshoppers, aphids, leafhoppers and scales.

**Other Considerations:** Little bluestem is palatable to livestock and readily eaten during the spring, but only fair for cattle forage later in the year. It is a fire-adapted species and declines with the absence of fire, but can dominate open forest communities that are exposed to frequent burning. The plants generally increase with frequent fire and can become so dense that forbs decline. Little bluestem decreases as forest canopies close in the absence of fire and forest thinning.

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**Top: Texas Croton (*Croton texensis*)**  
**Bottom: Woolly Croton (*Croton capitatus*)**



A: Texas Croton  
B: Hogwort Croton  
C: Glandular Croton

Actual seed size – 1/5" |

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**Common Name:** Croton, Hogwort, Doveweed

**Scientific Name:** *Croton* spp.

**Family:** Euphorbiaceae, Spurge Family

**Origin:** Native

**Distribution in Oklahoma:** Across the state.

**Site Description:** Crotons are characteristic of the early to mid-stages of plant succession. They occur on dry, sandy or rocky soils and soils of poor quality, including prairies, pastures, open forests, forest edges, areas of cleared timber and roadsides.

**Plant Description:** Crotons are 1- to 3-foot tall forbs and are recognized by their gray-green appearance, white, often very hairy flowers and, upon close inspection, star-shaped hairs common on the stems and leaves. They bloom from June through September.

**Quail Use:** The seeds of the various croton species are considered choice quail foods, readily eaten year-round if available, but especially during the summer and fall months when they are most available. The plants also provide growing season cover, including brood cover when occurring in larger densities. The caterpillars of some butterflies feed on the foliage, with plants also attracting bees, grasshoppers, leaf beetles, aphids and spiders.

**Other Considerations:** Crotons are largely avoided by livestock and increase in abundance within areas that are heavily grazed, sometimes forming dense stands. The plants are easily enhanced through light winter disking, establishing in disked or dozed fireguards as well as disturbed sand and gravel roads. Fire, particularly during the winter, benefits the establishment of croton. Many crotons also increase within forest areas that are aggressively thinned or clear-cut. Mourning doves are highly attracted to the seeds of croton, hence the name doveweed.

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*Roy Moran/Merces Society*

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