



# Your Side of the Fence

Summer 2019

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

## Wildlife Community Remembers Alva Gregory

By Russ Horton, Research Supervisor

Few Oklahomans have had a more profound impact on Oklahoma's wildlife than Alva Gregory, Northwest Region Habitat Coordinator within the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's private lands section. Even more, Alva's willingness and ability to connect with landowners and build life-long working relationships was unmatched. Sadly, Alva Gregory passed away suddenly on May 1, 2019 after more than 31 years of service to Oklahoma's hunting and wildlife-minded constituents.

Alva began his career in 1987 as a wildlife technician on the newly acquired Beaver River Wildlife Management Area, and shortly thereafter transferred to the then brand-new Packsaddle WMA, where he worked for the next 14 years. He was very instrumental in the development of the area, working tirelessly to help make Packsaddle one of the premiere quail hunting destinations that characterize the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's western WMAs. His efforts also contributed significantly to the early, landmark quail research on Packsaddle, which continues even



today. Alva found his true niche in wildlife conservation in 2001 when he began focusing his time providing technical guidance to, and helping landowners enhance habitat for wildlife through various private lands positions. Alva impacted hundreds of landowners and countless acres within western Oklahoma and was widely consulted for his vast knowledge and experience with range management, prescribed burning, and many other habitat management techniques. Alva was a true warrior for conservation who was well-respected by his peers and by those he served.

Above all, Alva was a man of faith

and family. His impacts among the conservation field were exemplary, and this was simply a result of his incredible character. Faith and family came first and these important measures were well represented in his work. Alva Gregory will be missed by many, but he left behind a legacy of faith, family, friends, and work that can be treasured by all whom his life impacted. In addition, countless acres will continue to be maintained and managed for wildlife as result of Alva's dedication to put others above himself through his time and attention.

*Alva Gregory,  
October 21, 1963 – May 1, 2019.*

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## I Struck Water!

By Jim Burroughs, Streams Supervisor



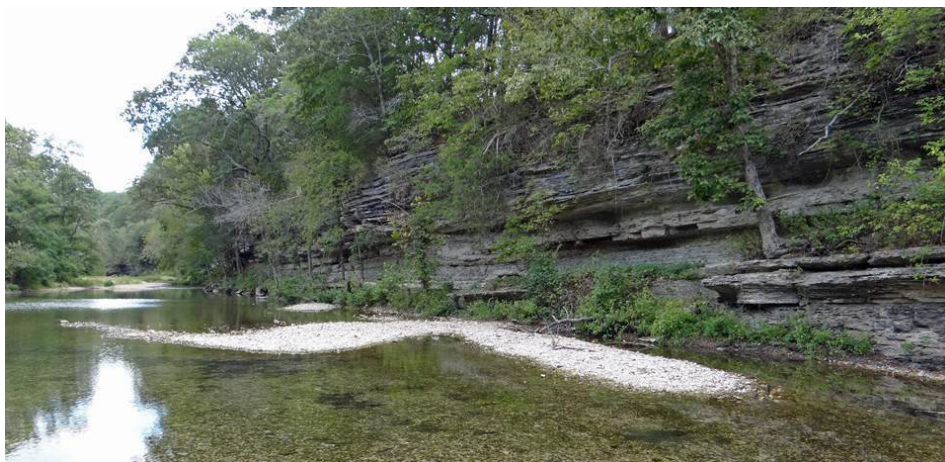
We live in a day where water is becoming as valuable as gold, and having free-flowing water across your property is like striking oil. In several

countries, water is traded like any other commodity.

Protecting water quantity and quality is something that has often been taken for granted but when water becomes limited its value becomes infinitely apparent. It is recommended that anyone permitted to remove water from a stream use a monitoring/metering system to help conserve the resource.

If you are a landowner lucky enough to have a stream flowing through your property then you likely already know its value. Healthy streams aren't just good for fish. They help sustain surrounding plants and wildlife while providing water for downstream users including both humans and fish and wildlife.

Streams are dynamic systems and are often misunderstood. For example, building a retaining wall to protect the stream bank on one side of the stream results in the stream shifting and increasing erosion on the opposite bank. Removing gravel from one area will result in downcutting to bed rock in upstream portions. Straightening the stream's natural curving path and channelizing the stream will speed up water flow



and increase bank erosion both upstream and downstream of the action. Removing too much water can lead to a lowering of the water table which can cause a loss of vegetation along the stream bank. These plants are essential for soil stabilization to protect the stream bank from erosion during high flow events. Such activities make for poor relationships with your neighbors.

Although streams are complicated landscape features, protecting them and your property is a simple concept. Recovery or restoration is a complicated and costly endeavor while managing what you have is relatively straightforward and inexpensive. There are some simple things landowners can do to protect the water quality and quantity while also protecting their land.

Fencing cattle away from streams and providing alternative watering sources is preferred but when not an option, landowners should consider allowing controlled access. An electric fence may be one simple method to control limited access of cattle to a stream.

Stream bank erosion can be easily reduced simply by not clearing all land up to the stream edge for farming and limiting fertilization in the near stream area. Any additional short term gain in crop or grass production will be quickly lost if acres are lost to erosion during the next flood.

Maintaining a mix of native plants including native grasses, trees and shrubs is important in maintaining and protecting a stream. Zones of protection,

also known as riparian zones or buffers, can be created and should be as diverse as streams. These zones can be broken into at least three zones. Think of the first zone as the one nearest the stream. Here, trees provide shade that buffers the thermal temperature of the water from extreme heat during the summer. Trees also provide an energy source via falling leaves for the aquatic organisms and tree roots help to hold the soil together. Moving further away from the stream in the second zone are shrubs or a mix of shrubs and trees which help slow runoff and capture pollutants keeping

them out of the water. Furthest away from the streambank in zone three is a mixture of grasses and a variety of plant species including native grasses and wildflowers which help to trap sediment and slow runoff back to the stream.

In all, protecting Oklahoma's streams through sound management and conservation is something all landowners should shoot for to protect their land and the resource. Additionally, sound stream management now can greatly reduce the need for costly and difficult restoration in the future.



2003



2013

*River and stream systems can quickly erode large tracts of land as shown in these images from 2003 to 2013, especially when the riparian areas aren't properly managed.*



Jo Ann Bishop/RPS

## Landowners Making a Difference for Youth Hunters

By Kyle Johnson, Private Lands Biologist



Although the mid-December morning was quite cold, excitement easily overcame the chill as Natalee Heck and her dad geared up in blaze orange and headed

for the deer woods in nervous anticipation. It was a 2018 private lands youth antlerless deer hunt and the only question was whether the deer would be on the move that morning or not?

Sure enough, bucks and does began appearing from the woods shortly after sunrise and by 10 a.m. Natalee had harvested her first deer – a doe weighing 112 pounds. Not only was it her first ever deer, it was the first deer hunt she had ever been on. The smiles were endless and the memories priceless for all involved.

More than 50 youth hunters age 12 to 17 had similar experiences during 2018, all feeling the excitement and thrill of what Oklahoma’s private lands youth antlerless deer hunt program is all about – creating lifelong memories between landowners,



*Private lands youth deer hunt participant Natalee Heck and father Larry making memories in Love County, Oklahoma.*

young deer hunters, and the family member or friend along to help. The program may be administered through the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, but the achievement, success, and appreciation of the program is a result of generous Oklahoma landowners opening their land to create these youth hunt opportunities.

The great news is that the Wildlife Department enrolls willing landowners each year and the need has never been greater. More than 200 youths applied

for private lands youth hunts last year and while the odds of getting randomly drawn for a hunt are around 25 percent, three out of four youths remain without a spot within one of the hunts each year. Like Natalee, many youths experience deer hunting for the first time through the private lands youth hunt program, and it’s all a result of generous landowners.

Enrolling within the program is free and easy and a Wildlife Department biologist will be there to assist the landowner each step of the way, including through the

hunt. Landowners simply choose the date(s) they'd like to host a youth hunt on their property and the biologist and landowner work together to determine the number of youth hunters eligible for the size of the property. There is a 1,000-acre minimum acreage requirement, but multiple landowners can combine their acreage to meet the minimum. While lodging and/or meals are

offered by some landowners for the youth participants and their accompanying adult, this is not a requirement for the program. Additionally, the Wildlife Department handles the administrative side of the hunts including the collecting of the youth hunt applications, licensing, and safety orientation. However when it comes to the hunt, enrolled landowners take the lead

in assisting youth participants and their accompanied adult to their pre-determined hunt locations. Whether you are a landowner interested in the program or a family member interested in applying a young hunter for one of the fall 2019 private lands youth deer hunt spots, more information is available by contacting 405-590-2584.

## Help the Wildlife Department Learn What's Buzzing with Bumble Bees

By Matt Fullerton, Wildlife Biologist



So far, this year is stacking up to be one of the wettest on record and that spells good things for Oklahoma's wildflowers and our pollinator

community.

The American bumble bee is part of that pollinator community, and the Wildlife Department is trying to find out if the buzz pollinator is still one of our state's most common bumble bees. At least 10 species of bumble bees have been found in our state, and some are experiencing declines in other parts of their range.

Sharing photos of American bumble bees – or bumble bees in general – on the free online nature crowdsourcing platform iNaturalist, along with information about when and where the bee was spotted can help the Wildlife Department check back in on the species' distribution and status.



Queen American bumble bees emerge from their hibernation burrows in early to mid-spring and begin creating an underground colony of worker bees. New queens and male bees are produced in autumn, and all but mated queens die before winter.

Bumble bees are familiar insects for most Oklahomans, but what makes the American bumble bee distinguishable is its pattern of black and yellow bands. These

bees have three black and two yellow bands. The first yellow band is just behind the eyes on the thorax or body of the bee, with the second band located in the middle of the abdomen. Another feature that separates bumble bees from the common carpenter bee is a hairy abdomen. Carpenter bees have a shiny abdomen and a "bald spot" on the thorax.

Share your sightings at [inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org).

# Tech Note

## Gobblers on a Limb: Taking Care of Your Turkey Roosts

By Jeremiah Zurenda, Private Lands Biologist



From the Ouachita Mountains in the southeast, to the high plains of the panhandle, Oklahoma boasts a wide array of habitat that is suitable

for the three subspecies of wild turkey – Eastern, Rio Grande, and the Merriam - that call this state home. This diversity in habitat also brings a long list of suitable tree species that turkeys will utilize when roosting.

All of these trees share similar physical traits. Roost trees are as tall or taller than most surrounding trees. They have a number of large horizontal branches that make for good perches as they roost. And the understory of these trees are thin. Shorter vegetation under and around roosting trees allows turkeys to identify threats or predators easier. A dense and taller understory can make a roosting turkey more susceptible to threats from below. As the understory around favorable roosting sites begins to fill in, these sites become less desirable to turkeys.



*Maintaining roosting habitat is an important component of wild turkey management. (Jeremiah Zurenda/ODWC)*

The eastern half of the state has no shortage of suitable roosting habitat. From the cross timbers east, suitable roosting trees are generally more abundant. But suitable roosting trees can be a limiting factor for turkeys in the western half of the state. Because of this, managing the understory of existing roosting sites can be critical to some of the more western populations of turkeys. This doesn't mean we shouldn't pay attention to roosting sites in eastern Oklahoma; managing roosting sites statewide will be beneficial to local turkey populations.

There are several methods that can be used to manage the

understory of roosting sites. It can be as easy as using a chainsaw and the proper protective gear to remove the undesired brush. A chainsaw can be highly effective, but take your time and be aware of your own personal limitations while tackling a project like this by hand. The next option would be to use a tree cutting implement. There are a number of different implements for a tractor or skid steer that are suitable for cutting undesired brush. It is a good idea to remove the unwanted brush from beneath the roost trees after they have been cut. Mastication, or mulching, is another effective mechanical clearing method. The drawback to mulching implements is their

price tag. Several contractors across the state offer mastication or forestry mulching, and may offer a more cost effective option for mastication around roosting sites.

Prescribed fire is a wonderful way to finalize the cleanup of the understory of your roosting sites. Fire is very effective at

thinning understories. However, if the understory is too thick, roosting trees may get too hot and die while the underbrush around them burns. Because of this concern, it is a good idea to remove as much woody fuel as possible from underneath roosting sites before implementing a prescribed burn. Cedar trees and other woody

species readily re-establish under enhanced roost tree sites and fire is an important tool to help keep this woody encroachment in check.

Contact your regional private lands biologist to get personalized guidance for improving your turkey roost habitat.



*This series of photos shows the progress of a turkey roost restoration project at Black Kettle Wildlife Management Area. The Wildlife Department partnered with the National Wild Turkey Federation to use a skid steer equipped with a mulching implement to remove brush from the understory of a young cottonwood grove. (Jeremiah Zurenda/ODWC)*



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