

# **BEAVER RIVER**

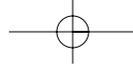
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# **Wildlife Management Area**

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PHOTO BY KIM HART





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Above: Beaver River WMA offers the chance for hunters to bag both bobwhite and scaled quail.

Facing Page: Lucky visitors may spot a badger at Beaver River WMA. Badgers feed mainly on ground dwelling animals such as

“Live water.” Folks in northwest Oklahoma, particularly hunters, know the importance of live water and its relationship to good wildlife habitat. While much of northwest Oklahoma's upland habitats are dominated by farmlands or relatively treeless sagebrush rangeland, it's the areas around live water such as small creeks or rivers that tend to concentrate populations of deer, turkey, small game and quail.

Live water can be a relative term when talking about northwest Oklahoma. Shallow-sandy creeks and rivers may not even run year-round, however, enough moisture flows through the sandy river bottoms to sustain thirsty cottonwood trees that provide critical roosting sites for Rio Grande wild turkeys. The moist soils around creeks or rivers also attract insects, which provide quail all-important “bugging grounds.” For the first six weeks of life, insects provide virtually 100 percent of a quail chick's diet. The

areas around live water, referred to as riparian zones by wildlife biologists, tend to have more plant diversity and trees to provide food and escape cover for larger game such as white-tailed deer.

If you ever wanted to see firsthand what “live water” means to wildlife and game populations, then look no further than the Beaver River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) located immediately northwest of the town of Beaver in the Oklahoma Panhandle. In a parched land that only receives a scant 19 inches of rainfall per year, water is a precious commodity around these parts. Yet despite the dry climate, the Beaver River WMA benefits from 11 plus miles of live water to create a classic western Oklahoma flood plain that provides sportsmen a wealth of hunting opportunities.

Covering some 17,700 acres, the Beaver River WMA is a large rectangular block of land that is some 12 plus miles east to west, and two to four miles wide



PAUL MOORE



Turkey hunters willing to scout carefully can find good opportunities in the rolling hills of Beaver WMA.

north to south. The meandering Beaver River bisects the WMA, forming two halves. The area is a mixture of upland, flood plain and river bottom. Sagebrush and buffalo grass predominate on upland sites, which are interspersed with sand plum thickets and gentle rolling sandhills. A quail hunter and a pointer with a decent nose will have plenty of room to roam over the hills and thickets in search of coveys. Among other species, Beaver River WMA is probably most well known for its quail hunting opportunities. Quail hunters from across the state and a growing number of nonresidents have discovered the area for pursuing bobwhites.

Like many western Oklahoma WMAs with good quail populations, a hunter who can avoid the weekends will have fewer dogs and hunters to compete with. Also, hunting pressure tends to drop off later in the quail season, although many bird hunters say that coveys become more skittish as the season goes on. A majority of the management practices on the WMA are conducted to enhance quail and other upland bird species. A combination of prescribed grazing of cattle, strip disking, strip mowing and prescribed burns are conducted to produce native forb species. To a quail, pheasant or prairie chicken, forbs, commonly known as weeds, are the smorgasbord of plants. Weedy species such as ragweed and sunflower are prolific seed producers and are enhanced by the various management techniques

used on the area.

As you get closer to the river bottom, sagebrush and grasslands give way to more woody vegetation. Sand plum thickets, salt cedar and mixed grasses with cottonwood, hackberry and American elm grow more plentiful as you get closer to the river. Turkeys and deer find refuge in the thicker stands of timber where escape cover is always nearby. Although the area doesn't boast a large number of trees for potential treestand locations, a bow hunter can still find plenty of setup areas next to game trails and well-worn river

crossings. One tip worth mentioning to treestand users is to check the length of your chain if your stand uses a chain to hang it on a tree trunk. In many instances, the only trees available are cottonwoods, which can be deceptively large in diameter. An 8 ft. chain will allow you to hang a stand in all but the most giant of cottonwoods.

Depending upon which month you visit Beaver River WMA, you may or may not see running water in the river. However, dry periods can actually work to the hunter's advantage. Deer will often come to water during early morning or late afternoon hours, particularly in the early part of archery season when temperatures are still warm. But perhaps the best advantage of having drought-like conditions occurs in September for dove hunters.

Even if no water is running down the river, there are usually a few pools that hold water even in drought conditions. These, in addition to approximately 20 windmills and 10 artificial watering stations called "guzzlers," scattered throughout the area can, at times, provide excellent early morning or late afternoon waterhole dove hunting in early September. As a general rule of thumb, the hotter and drier the weather is and has been, the hotter the dove hunting action can be around these few drinking sites. Much of the land bordering the WMA to the north and south are wheat farms, where migrating doves will feed on spent grain leftover from the har-

vest earlier in the summer. However, before going to roost in the cottonwoods, doves will usually stop off in the late afternoon to get a drink at just about any place that has an open puddle of water. While most windmills on the area are used to fill a stock tank, most of them are left running to create an overflow puddle, which can be “dove magnets” on a hot, dry day.

Although present in small numbers, Beaver River WMA offers some unique and usual game species. Populations of scaled quail, ringneck pheasant and even mule deer are present on the area and are occasionally taken by hunters. Additionally, the area provides small game hunters opportunities for both black-tailed jackrabbits and the more common cottontail.

To the wildlife watcher, Beaver River WMA offers unique viewing opportunities for two of Oklahoma's short-grass prairie icons, the black-tailed prairie dog, and the lesser prairie chicken. Although no hunting is allowed for these species, a visitor equipped with powerful binoculars or a spotting scope can view prairie dog towns from the area roads year-round. Viewing the rare lesser prairie chicken is more difficult. However, each spring, the male chickens will conduct their unique courtship displays on the same areas year after year. Birders who want to view these areas, called “booming-grounds” can contact the WMA biologist who conducts several viewing tours each March. 🌿

#### Beaver River Wildlife Management Area Contact Information

Danny Watson, biologist at Beaver River, Optima and Rita Blanca WMA's. Phone: (806) 339-5175.

#### WMA facilities Rifle Range

A rifle range can be found on the north side of the area. It offers both 50- and 100-yard ranges and has a covered shooting bench.

#### Camping

Five designated primitive camping areas are offered on the area.

#### Local camping/lodging facilities

The Beaver Dunes State Park offers campsites with facilities and RV hookups. The State Park can be reached at (580) 625-3373.

The towns of Beaver and Forgan have lodging and restaurants. The Beaver Chamber of Commerce can be reached at (580) 625-4726. In Forgan contact the city clerk at (580) 487-3393

#### Area Fishing Opportunities

Fishing opportunities exist at Beaver Dunes State Park, about 10 miles east of the area, and at Lake Evans Chambers (known locally as Clear Lake) located about 45 miles east of the area. There are no ponds or permanent pools on the WMA to sustain a reliable fishery.

For additional information and area attractions:

Buffalo Chamber of Commerce  
[www.pldi.net/~buffalo/chamber.html](http://www.pldi.net/~buffalo/chamber.html)

Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department  
Post Office Box 52002  
Oklahoma City, OK 73152-2002  
(800) 652-6552 or (405) 521-2409  
[www.travelok.com](http://www.travelok.com)

[www.redcarpetcountry.com](http://www.redcarpetcountry.com)  
(800) 447-2698

