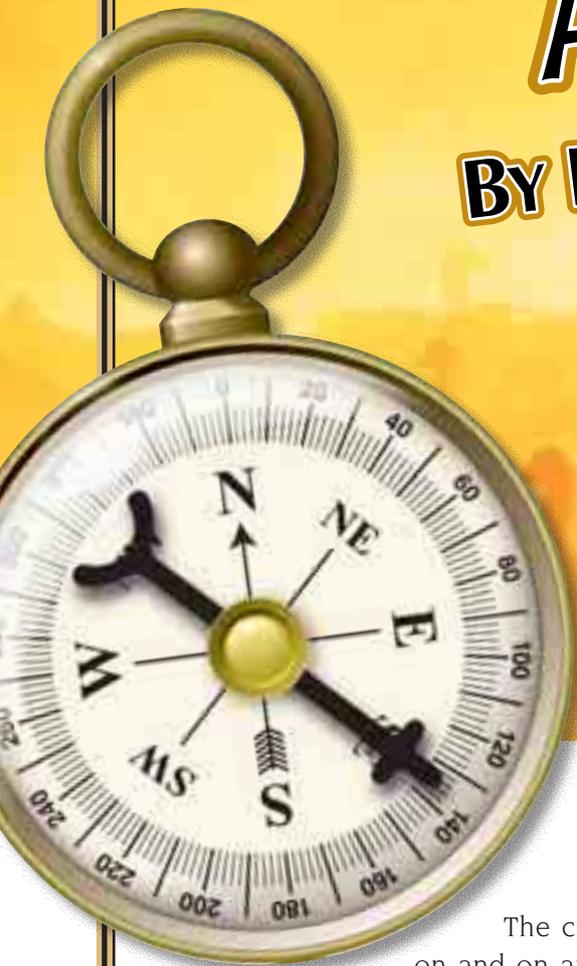


RED SLOUGH Wildlife Management Area

BY LANCE MEEK



Once a rice farm, the Red Slough Wildlife Management area is now managed for wildlife rather than agriculture. And the wildlife has responded. Thousands of waterfowl, including snow geese, and other migratory birds now flock to the Slough each fall and spring, in addition to a plethora of other wildlife that inhabits the area year round.

The circle of life goes on and on and all things are connected. Nowhere is that more evident than at Red Slough Wildlife Management Area.

With its rich biodiversity and natural history, Red Slough is one of the best examples of how nature can re-exert itself with a nudge here and there. Manipulated by farmers in the early 20th century to produce quality crops, it is now being manipulated by conservationists to produce quality habitat.

“It’s coming full circle,” said Mike Smith, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) wildlife biologist at the Red Slough Wildlife Management Area. “It was bottomland hardwood, then it was turned into farmland, now we’re turning it back into bottomland hardwood.”

The history of the area backs up Smith’s testimony. In the 1960’s a variety of forces, including demand for rice, a poor economy in southeast Oklahoma and industrious farmers, combined to reduce the habi-



tat at Red Slough to a fraction of its former glory.

Now, in the early 21st century, a variety of forces have combined to restore it. The ODWC, U.S. Forest Service, Ducks Unlimited and Natural Resource Conservation Service had the vision that this land could be reclaimed for wildlife, and out of love for diversity and quality hunting experiences they are seeing it through.

Red Slough WMA covers 7,800 acres in McCurtain County consisting of mudflats, emergent marshes, bottomland hardwoods, small areas of wet prairie and reservoirs. The entire WMA is intersected by Push Creek. In addition, roughly 2,800 acres have been set aside as a waterfowl refuge. No hunting is allowed in the refuge area and it is completely off limits from October 15 to January 31.

It is still a work in progress; it took years to reduce it to agriculture land, and it will take years to return it to its native environment. Management efforts are aimed at providing the highest level of plant and animal diversity possible. Practices consist of water level manipulation, disking, prescribed burning and mowing. One or a combination of these practices is used intensively in individual areas to maximize

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One does not have to look long to find life at Red Slough. From dragonflies to frogs to turkeys – the area is literally teeming with wildlife.



THE BIRDS OF RED SLOUGH

Based on winter bird counts and biologist observations, more than 37 families and 280 species of birds have been spotted at Red Slough since restoration efforts began.

GREBES

Eared Grebe
Horned Grebe
Pied-billed Grebe

Canada Goose
Black-bellied Whistling Duck
Wood Duck
Gadwall

Virginia Rail
Yellow Rail
Black Rail
Sora
Purple Gallinule
Common Moorhen
American Coot
Sandhill Crane

PELICANS

American White Pelican

American Wigeon
Mottled Duck
Mallard

CORMORANTS & ANHINGAS

Neotropic Cormorant
Double-crested Cormorant
Anhinga

Blue-winged Teal
Cinnamon Teal
Green-winged Teal
Northern Pintail
Northern Shoveler
Redhead
Canvasback
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup

PLOVERS & SANDPIPERS

Black-bellied Plover
American Golden Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Solitary Sandpiper
Willet

BITTERNS, HERONS, & EGRETS

American Bittern
Least Bittern
Great Blue Heron
Green Heron
Tricolored Heron
Little Blue Heron
Snowy Egret
Cattle Egret
Great Egret
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

Common Goldeneye
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Red breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck

OSPREYS, HAWKS, & FALCONS

Osprey
Swallow-tailed Kite
Mississippi Kite
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk

Spotted Sandpiper
Upland Sandpiper
Whimbrel
Hudsonian Godwit
Marbled Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper
Baird's Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Dunlin
Stilt Sandpiper

IBISES & SPOONBILLS

White Ibis
Glossy Ibis
White-faced Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill

Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Swainson's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Golden Eagle

STORKS & VULTURES

Wood Stork
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture

American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Prairie Falcon

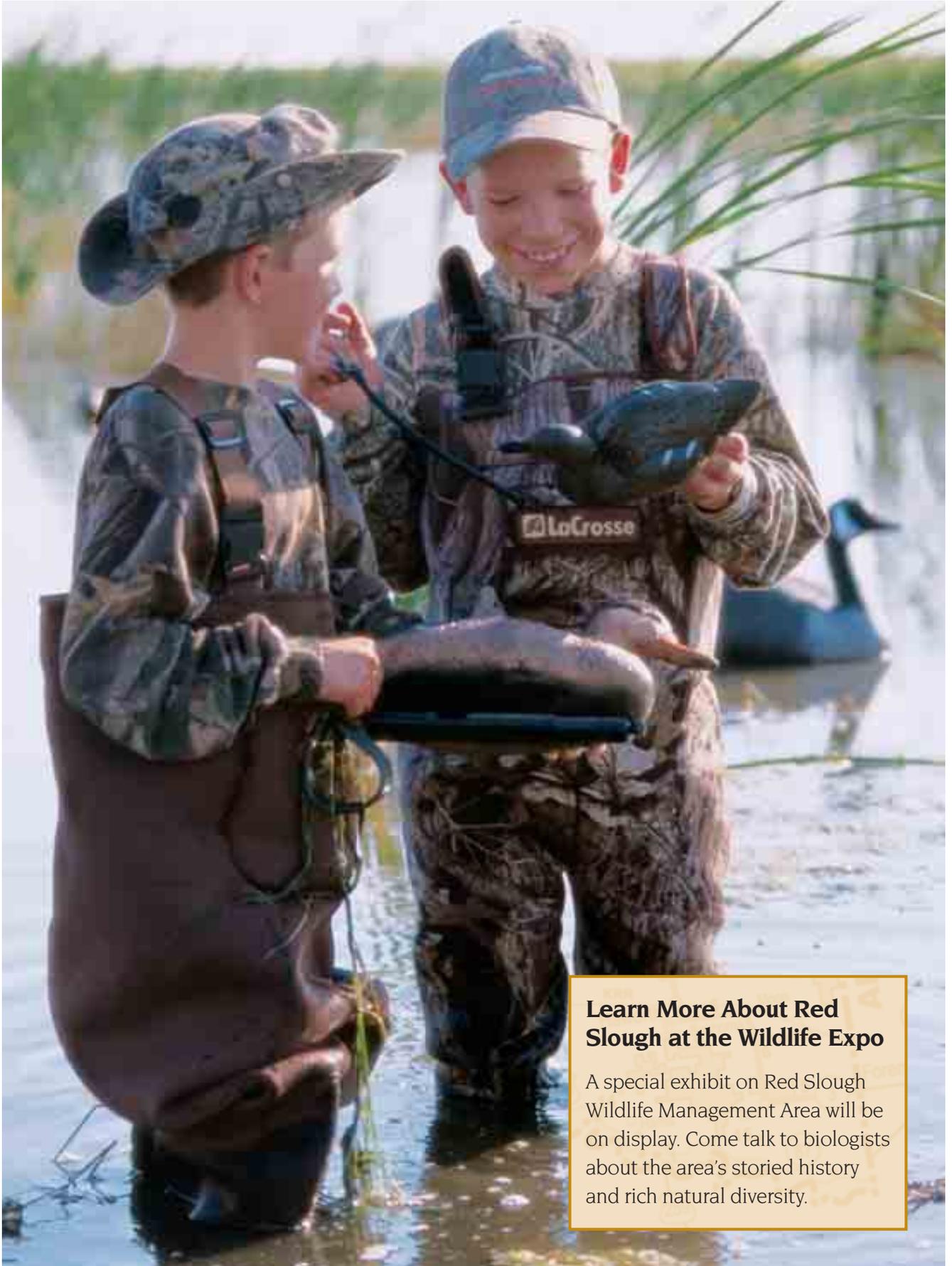
SWANS, GEESE, & DUCKS

Tundra Swan
Greater White-fronted Goose
Snow Goose
Ross' Goose

Quail & Turkey
Northern Bobwhite
Eastern Wild Turkey

RAILS, GALLINULES, & CRANES
King Rail

Sanderling
Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Common Snipe
American Woodcock
Wilson's Phalarope



Learn More About Red Slough at the Wildlife Expo

A special exhibit on Red Slough Wildlife Management Area will be on display. Come talk to biologists about the area's storied history and rich natural diversity.

The September teal season at Red Slough is a great way to kick off the waterfowl hunting seasons. It is also a great way to introduce young hunters to the sport.

their diversity. Japanese millet is planted annually, but native plants and invertebrates provide the majority of forage for game and non-game year round. In addition, more than 25 miles of dikes were installed to recreate water structures and half of the acreage is scheduled for bottomland hardwood restoration.

Thanks to these improvements, Red Slough offers a variety of outdoor experiences including hunting, wildlife watching, botany and primitive camping. As diverse as the activities to be experienced, they pale in comparison to the number of species that call Red Slough home.

More than 260 bird species, 313 plant species and 47 snake and lizard species of call Red Slough home. Add in white-tailed deer, frogs, and hundreds of insect species, not to mention the rarely seen American alligator, and it is easy to see that the area is teaming with life.

“One of the most unique things about the area is the incredible diversity of wildlife,” said Mike Smith, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation wildlife biologist at the Red Slough Wildlife Management Area. “From alligators, to rare plants, to birds not found anywhere else in the state, Red Slough has it all.”

The area is becoming a Mecca for bird watchers anxious to check some of the numerous avian species at Red Slough off of their life list. Among the many birds that nest or migrate through you can find roseate spoonbills, black-necked stilts and fulvous whistling ducks. There are five wildlife-viewing platforms placed strategically through the area to aid bird watchers.

Waterfowl hunters are also beginning to learn about the potential opportunities on the nearly 5,000-acre wildlife management area; some traveling from as far away as Minnesota, California, Florida, and Illinois to hunt the wetland. Located on the edge of both the Central and Mississippi flyways, thousands of ducks find refuge at Red Slough each winter.

“We nearly always have an excellent early teal season,” Smith said. “During the second half of the waterfowl season, we often get some impressive numbers of ducks.”

Snow geese also often make a stop at Red Slough during the fall and spring migrations. According to Kevin Norton, assistant director for state conservationist programs for the NRCS, the area has become an increasingly important landmark for numerous

GULLS & TERNS

Franklin's Gull
Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Laughing Gull
Common Tern
Caspian Tern
Forster's Tern
Least Tern
Black Tern

PIGEONS & DOVES

Mourning Dove
Inca Dove
Eurasian Collared Dove
Rock Dove
Common Ground Dove

CUCKOOS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Black-billed Cuckoo

OWLS

Barn Owl
Great Horned Owl
Screech Owl
Barred Owl
Short-eared Owl

NIGHTHAWKS & NIGHTJARS

Common Nighthawk
Chuck-Will's-Widow

SWIFTS &

HUMMINGBIRDS

Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird

KINGFISHERS

Belted Kingfisher

WOODPECKERS

Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker

FLYCATCHERS

Eastern Wood Pewee
Acadian Flycatcher
Willow Flycatcher
Alder Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
Great-crested Flycatcher
Ash-throated Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

SHRIKES

Loggerhead Shrike

VIREOS

White-eyed Vireo
Bell's Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo

JAYS & CROWS

Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow

LARKS

Horned Lark

SWALLOWS

Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Barn Swallow

CHICKADEES & TITMICE

Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse

CREEPERS

Brown Creeper

White-breasted Nuthatch
Red-breasted Nuthatch

WRENS

Carolina Wren
Bewick's Wren
House Wren
Winter Wren
Sedge Wren
Marsh Wren

KINGLETS

Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet

GNATCATCHERS & THRUSHES

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Eastern Bluebird
Gray-cheeked Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush
Hermit Thrush
American Robin

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
Brown Thrasher

STARLINGS

European Starling

PIPITS

American Pipit
Sprague's Pipit

WAXWINGS

Cedar Waxwing

WARBLERS

Tennessee Warbler
Orange-crowned Warbler
Nashville Warbler
Northern Parula Warbler
Yellow Warbler

The History of Red Slough

The unique wetland resource now known as Red Slough once covered approximately an eight square mile area and was one of the largest wetland complexes found within Oklahoma. Most of this area was lost or drastically altered over the course of the last half-century. Historically, bottomland hardwoods dominated the area, accounting for three-quarters of the Red Slough property. Scrub/shrub, emergent vegetation, and prairie habitats accounted for the rest.

Red Slough is not only unique because of its natural history, it is also unique because of the series of events and partnerships that are restoring it.

In the late 1960s, it was drained, cleared, and converted to agriculture land for production of rice, soybeans, corn, and milo. The channelization and dredging of Push Creek, the creek that transects Red Slough, greatly reduced the frequency and duration of flooding. This virtually eliminated important wetland values previously associated with the natural flooding cycle.

In 1996, landowner Philip Hogan enrolled his Push Creek Farm into the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The WRP is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The NRCS goal for land enrolled in the WRP is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. Mr.



American alligators are just one of the unusual species that can be found at Red Slough WMA. Southeast Oklahoma is at the very northeast edge of the gator's range.

Hogan's enrollment of his property into the WRP began the Red Slough Wetlands Reserve Project.

In 1997, The Conservation Fund (TCF) purchased 3,855 acres from Mr. Hogan. They donated that acreage to the Ouachita National Forest to be put into public ownership. In 2000, TCF purchased the remaining 1,959 acres from Mr. Hogan. Between 2000 and 2002, the Ouachita National Forest acquired 1,475 of those remaining acres from TCF and acquired the remaining 484 acres in 2003. All totaled, Red Slough WMA covers 5,814 acres.

In late 2003, Ducks Unlimited, the US Forest Service and NRCS partnered with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to provide funding and support to a full time wildlife technician position at Red Slough. This position, filled by Terry Stuart, formerly the technician at McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, has allowed a more aggressive management plan. Representatives from all four entities meet monthly in order to evaluate current practices and provide input for future strategies. At the end of the three-year agreement, the partnership will evaluate the success of the management and decide whether or not to continue the arrangement.

"I can honestly say that we all work well together," said Stuart. "Everybody has their own opinion, which makes it a good project. In 2006 we'll go back to the drawing boards and see what works and what didn't work." 🌿

species of waterfowl and shorebirds since the U.S. Forest Service purchased it in 1997.

"The managers have done an excellent job of increasing wetland habitat by working together and pooling resources," Norton said. "It's fast becoming a premier birding and waterfowl hunting destination in Oklahoma."

In addition to waterfowl, Red Slough is open to archery deer and all other small game hunting. It is increasingly becoming known as a good place to hunt dove and has an expanding Eastern wild turkey population. Hunters also successfully pursue both

swamp and cottontail rabbits. Red Slough is a non-toxic shot area for all game species.

As if hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities aren't enough, Red Slough also contains 397 acres of reservoirs containing bass, sunfish and catfish. In addition, anglers often find action in the pools and riffles of Push Creek, which dissects Red Slough. It abounds with native game and non-game fish species.

Red Slough is a unique and diverse area not only because of the multitude of species that call it home, but also because of its history and the unique partnership that made it a reality. 🌿



While you're there

Those who are looking for more to do in McCurtain County have many options ranging from Broken Bow Lake, which produced the last state record largemouth bass, to Beavers Bend State Park, an area that every Oklahoman should visit at least once.

For additional information and area attractions: The U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service has more information about Red Slough on their website:
www.fs.fed.us/r8/ouachita/natural-resources/redslough/index.shtml
(800) 722-8180

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Swainson's Warbler
Blackpoll
Black and White
Warbler
American Redstart
Prothonotary
Warbler
Northern
Waterthrush
Louisiana
Waterthrush
Mourning Warbling
Kentucky Warbler
Common
Yellowthroat
Wilson's Warbler
Yellow-breasted Chat

TANAGERS

Summer Tanager

NEW WORLD SPARROWS

Spotted Towhee
Eastern Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper
Sparrow
Clay-colored
Sparrow
Nelson's Sharp-
tailed Sparrow
LeConte's Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
American Tree
Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated
Sparrow
Harris' Sparrow
House Sparrow
White-crowned
Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Lapland Longspur

GROSBEAKS & BUNTINGS

Northern Cardinal

Rose-breasted
Grosbeak
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Painted Bunting
Dickcissel

BLACKBIRDS & ORIOLES

Bobolink
Red-winged
Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Western
Meadowlark
Yellow-headed
Blackbird
Rusty Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle
Great-tailed Grackle
Brown-headed
Cowbird
Orchard Oriole
Baltimore Oriole

FINCHES

Purple Finch
House Finch
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch