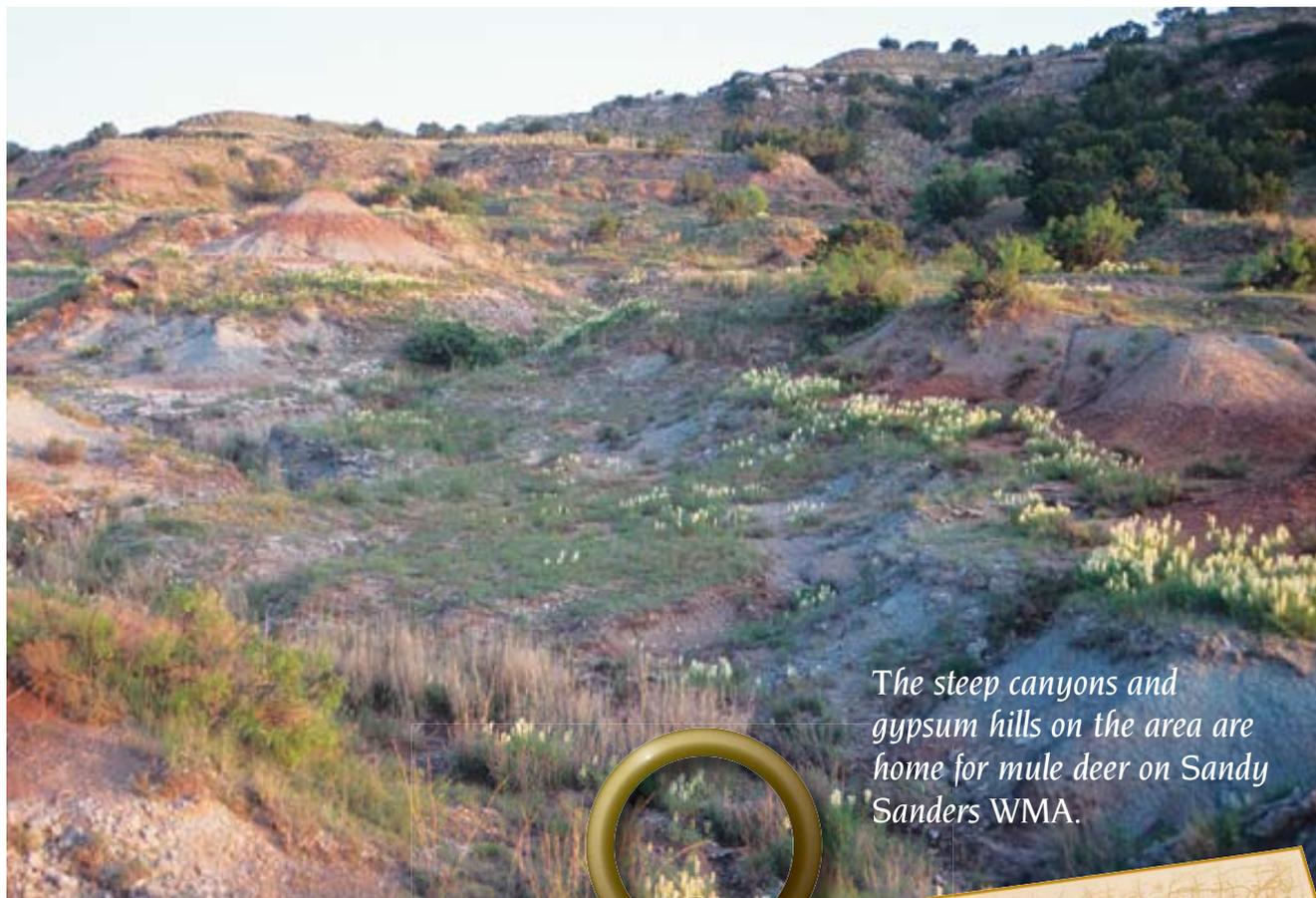


SANDY SANDERS

Wildlife Management Area

BY MICAH HOLMES



The steep canyons and gypsum hills on the area are home for mule deer on Sandy Sanders WMA.

PERSPECTIVE CAN BE A FUNNY THING.

For example, take a ride through the countryside on any given day with a group of people and they will each *see* something different. The deer hunter will spot the flicker of a doe's ear deep in the woods. The turkey hunter will take note of the big trees along the creek that must surely serve as a roost in the spring. The bird watcher will identify a songbird that no one else even noticed. Without even thinking about it, the angler will single out the best place to cast a spinner bait as your group passes a small pond.

When we attempt to *look* at the Oklahoma landscape through other's eyes, our horizons are expanded, our knowledge is deepened and our appreciation for all aspects of the outdoors grows.

If one wants to *broaden* their perspective there's no better place to start than Sandy Sanders Wildlife Management Area in southwest Oklahoma. Sprawling over 19,100 acres in Greer and Beckham counties, there is no other place like it in the state. Standing atop many of the ridges or buttes on the area the scenery is just as beautiful and nearly as free of human interference as it was 100 years ago.

Among sportsmen the area is most often *viewed* as a quail-hunting destination. Wide-open spaces and rough, rocky canyons make the area a memorable place to bust into a



covey of bobwhites. Quail are often present in good numbers, but so are hunters. Taking a long hike to more remote areas is not only good exercise, it's also a good way to find quail. Scaled quail are also present on the area and have been slowly, but steadily, increasing in numbers according to Ron Smith, wildlife biologist at Sandy Sanders WMA.

Of course there is more than just quail on the area, deer and turkey hunters will want to apply for one of the controlled hunt permits offered on the area each fall and spring. Archery season on the area is the same as the statewide season.

When a naturalist *looks* at the area, one thing sticks out – the red berry juniper. Also called the Pinchot juniper, these medium-sized, evergreen trees reach the far north-eastern edge of their range at Sandy Sanders. While a single plant species may not sound that impressive, these trees form a unique woodland community that attracts specific

For Additional Information and Area Attractions

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birds and other plants found in association with these trees. For instance, mountain bluebirds often spend the winter at Sandy Sanders feeding on juniper fruits and finding cover in the thick juniper branches. Without the red berry junipers there would be no mountain bluebirds – or at least not as many – at Sandy Sanders. This juniper woodland also supports unexpectedly large populations of painted buntings, Bewick's wrens and brown thrashers.

A perceptive eye can spot a wide number of unique species on the area, including porcupines, prairie dogs, ladder-backed woodpeckers, rare cacti and mule deer. Even the creeks that run through the area are home to some somewhat unusual species. Both the minnow-sized, pupfish and killifish are specially suited to thriving in the three, slightly-saline (salty) creeks that course through the area.

The topography of the area offers its own special sights to those who are looking. Over the years flowing water has cut deep canyons in the area revealing many layers of shale, gypsum and limestone, each with a little different texture and color. Melynda Hickman, natural resources biologist for the Wildlife Department, calls the area a "miniature Grand Canyon." She says that seen in the warm light of dawn or dusk the colors on the canyon walls seems to change and shift with each passing minute. The steep canyons are home to several species of snakes and lizards, as well as birds like the rock wren.

The Wildlife Department recognized the value of the area in 1986 when it purchased the property that was historically part of a large ranch. Hunters and anglers funded the purchase of the property by buying hunting and fishing licenses, as well as purchasing sporting goods. Sporting goods manufac-

RUSSELL GRAVES



The next big covey may just be over the next hill or across the creek, the only problem is deciding where to start.

turers pay a federal excise tax for items such as firearms and fishing lures. These revenues go into the Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration

Program, which distributes millions of dollars to worthy conservation projects throughout the nation. Additionally, funds from the Wildlife Department's natural resources program were also used to purchase the unique property.

Going on 20 years, Wildlife Department personnel have been seeking ways to improve Sandy Sanders WMA for both wildlife and people. Biologists have planted thousands of trees, carved out food plots, stocked several ponds with fish and designed a responsible grazing plan. The long-term health of wildlife populations plays the key role in all of these management decisions. Recently, biologists in the Wildlife Department's wildlife diversity program have spent many hours scouring the area recording and documenting the rich flora and fauna on the area. Biologists were surprised to find several "unexpected" species on the area including ash-throated flycatchers, sage thrashers and Baird's sparrows.

Take the time to go see Sandy Sanders WMA for yourself soon. Breathe the fresh air, gaze at the horizon, kill a quail for your old dog, or take a bird watching adventure with a new friend. After all, it is never too early, or too late, to broaden your perspective. 🌿



LOUGHMILLER, CAMPBELL AND LYNN

Red berry junipers are the foundation of a unique woodland community on Sandy Sanders WMA.



FLAUGS, NORMAN G

Sandy Sanders at a Glance

Area Description:

Sandy Sanders WMA covers 19,100 acres of Greer and Beckham counties in southwest Oklahoma. The area is located 26 miles northwest of Mangum and 26 miles southwest of Sayre. Sandy Sanders WMA is a unique area consisting of rolling plains, gypsum canyons and flat mesas extending north from the sandy-bottomed Elm Fork of the Red River.

Mesquite, red berry juniper and mixed grasses dominate the area. The central third of the area contains dense stands of red berry juniper. Extending outward from the center, vegetation makes a transition to mesquite savanna and mixed grass prairie. The Elm Fork River flows year round; however, vegetation is limited to dense salt cedar. Three live creeks flow across the area. Creek bottoms are vegetated with taller, denser grass and scattered trees, including hackberry and American elm. The average annual precipitation for the area is about 21 inches.

Description of Fish and Wildlife Management Practices:

Management efforts focus on producing native cover plants and wildlife food plants such as ragweed and sunflower. Summer and winter food plots are planted on the area. Near the headquarters and the Elm Fork River, food plots are planted within trees rows and protected from grazing. Throughout the remainder of the area, plots are either disked to stimulate native plants or are planted to winter wheat. Three windmills and 13 guzzlers have been installed to provide watering facilities for wildlife. The area also has many ponds that are regularly stocked with channel catfish. Some stay full year-round while others are seasonal. Cattle grazing is used to increase wildlife food plants and improve habitat conditions.

Camping and Facilities:

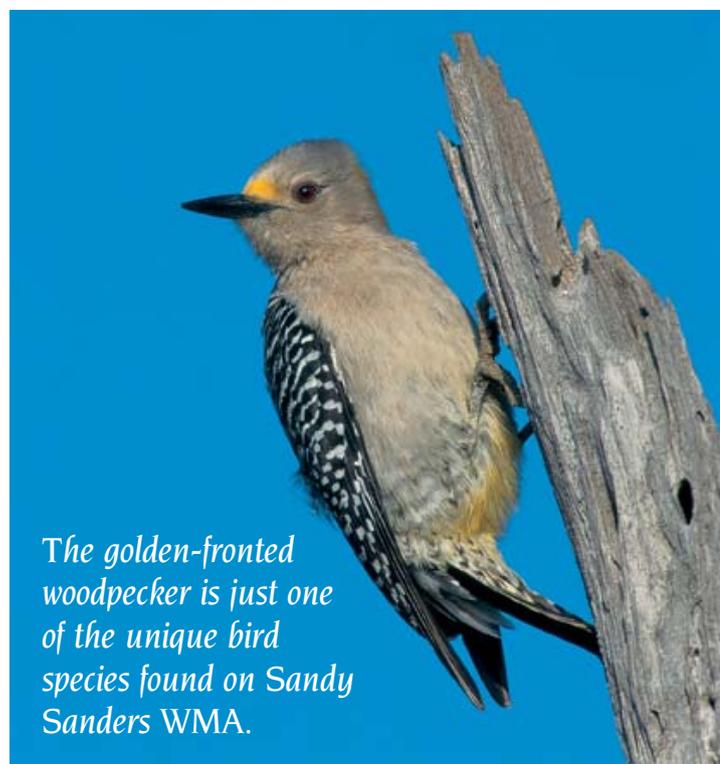
Ten designated primitive camping areas are offered on the area. Both lodging and restaurants are available in Mangum, Sayre and Erick.

Fishing Opportunities:

Fishing opportunities exist at area ponds and creeks. Ponds are stocked with channel catfish and some provide good bass fishing.

If you go:

Pick up a copy of the new Great Plains Trail map. The informative maps include information on Sandy Sanders Wildlife Management Area as well as other sights to see while you are on a western Oklahoma adventure. Call (800) 652-6552 to find out where to pick up a map near you.



BILL DRAKER

The golden-fronted woodpecker is just one of the unique bird species found on Sandy Sanders WMA.