



Traveling the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma

By Melynda Hickman, Wildlife Diversity Biologist

Your Update on the State's Premier Wildlife Viewing Auto Trail

From prairie chickens to “horny” toads, scissortail flycatchers to prairie dogs, the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma links travelers on an auto-driving trail to sites that offer a wealth of unique and interesting wildlife species while taking advantage of western Oklahoma’s small-town hospitality. The Trail includes 13 loops, each loop designed to provide the traveler with three days of accessible wildlife species, unique geologic features, large-scale prairies, and gorgeous sunsets and sunrises.

For more information, log on to greatplainstrail.com. To request a road map detailing the Great Plains Trail, contact Melynda Hickman, wildlife diversity biologist for the Wildlife Department, at mhickman@zoo.odwc.state.ok.us or call (405) 424-0099.

Upcoming issues of *Outdoor Oklahoma* will feature timely, seasonal details on various loops of the Great Plains Trail to help tourists plan a drive across the captivating landscapes of western Oklahoma.

What's Happening on the Loops this Early Spring

You can sense the changing of the seasons in western Oklahoma with the movement of migrant birds northward on the Central Flyway. Some amphibians and reptiles are stirring, and spring wildflowers that bloom close to the ground are covering the grasslands and slopes of mesas and canyons. In western Oklahoma, the “booming” of the male lesser prairie chicken proclaims the beginning of spring.

Wildlife and landscapes of the early spring are highlighted here, with the loops that offer the best opportunities for encountering and experiencing these outdoor sightings in western Oklahoma. Be sure to dress in warm layers, and bring binoculars and cameras for your Trail adventure.



Lesser Prairie Chickens

See lesser prairie chickens booming and dancing on the leks

Bats and Bluffs Loop

Destination - Selman Ranch Lodge & Cimarron Bluff Wildlife Management Area

Sand Hills Loop

Destination: Knowles Ranch

Playa Lakes Loop

Destination: Beaver River Wildlife Management Area



Frogs and Toads

Hear vocal concerts from frogs and toads sounding off in the wetlands of the west

Playa Lakes Loop

Destination: Any of the playas along the loop

South Canadian Loop

Destination: Oakwood Low-Water Crossing

Hackberry Flat Loop

Destination: Hackberry Flat WMA

Salt Plains Loop

Destination: Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge

Return of Turkey Vultures

This unusual looking bird is a sight to see in the southwest and northwest portions of the state.

Quartz Mountain Loop

Destinations: Quartz Mountains & Sandy Sanders WMA

Gloss Mountain Loop

Destination: Gloss Mountain State Park

Migrating Waterfowl, Wading Birds, and Whooping Cranes

Waterfowl are still migrating and you may spot them if you make a drive on one of these loops.

Salt Plains Loop

Hackberry Flat Loop

Migrating Songbirds

Western Oklahoma is a birdwatcher's paradise, with a variety of species to be viewed almost anywhere you go. Here's a starting point.

Sand Hills Loop

Destination: Boiling Springs State Park

Caddo Canyon Loop

Destination: Red Rock Canyon State Park

Off the Beaten Trails Offering Spectacular Wildflower Vistas

Cimarron Loop

Destination: Cimarron Scenic Route and Curtis Hill Scenic Route

Sand Hills Loop

Destination: Antelope Hills Scenic Route



Special Note for Travelers on the Great Plains Trail

Visitors to the following Wildlife Department-owned properties will be required to possess a current hunting/fishing license or the new annual Wildlife Conservation Passport (\$26): Schultz WMA, Beaver River WMA, Cimarron Bluff WMA, Ellis County WMA, Packsaddle WMA, Dewey County WMA, American Horse Lake, Sandy Sanders WMA, Lake Hall, Lake Carl Etling, Lake Evan Chambers, Mountain Park WMA, and Hackberry Flat WMA.

All licenses and the Conservation Passport can be purchased online at: wildlifedepartment.com:

—*Melynda Hickman is a wildlife diversity biologist for the Wildlife Department. Hickman plays an active role in conserving wildlife in Oklahoma as well as in educating Oklahomans on the value of wildlife to our quality of life.*