

# APRIL 2021 APRIL 2021 • DIRECTOR'S REPORT

## CALENDAR ITEMS:

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Mar 8-12  | The North American Wildlife & Natural Resources Virtual Conference    |
| Apr 7     | OKSSSP State Shooting Competition, OK Trapshooting Asso, Banner       |
| Apr 9     | 75 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Denison Dam (Lake Texoma) celebration |
| Apr 14-16 | Lt. Governor's Turkey Hunt  |
| May 12    | Legislative Fish Fry  |

## AGENCY UPDATE

### • LEGISLATURE

- The chamber of origin deadline has passed and only about a third of the originally filed bills are still alive. Less than 20 "wildlife-related" bills are still active. See packet for updates on Title 29/wildlife-related bills. The next deadline is April 8<sup>th</sup>, where bills must receive a hearing in committees of the opposite chamber.
- Events/Activities:
  - ODWC presented to the Veterans Caucus on 3/25 (rescheduled from February) about our Stars and Stripes Project. The Game Warden Association sponsored the food for the meeting.
  - ODWC hosted Wildlife Committee Chairman Ty Burns and the Governor's Chief of Staff Bond Payne on a bear den visit.
  - Over the next few weeks we will work to schedule various fishing trips with interested legislators.

### • HUMAN DIMENSIONS

- We finished up calls for the 2020 Game Harvest Survey with a response of 2,302, and paper surveys still coming in. We will begin analysis in the coming month with a final report completed by mid summer. The online public data viewer will also be updated with 2019 and 2020 data.
- Data collection and analysis was completed by Sooner Poll to gauge support for a potential project to restore wild elk to the western Arbuckle Mountains. Recommendations will be forthcoming.
- The controlled hunts survey data is being compiled into a final report to be circulated soon. This report will help to determine if adjustments should be made to the price and the format in which we offer controlled hunts opportunities.
- The private lands survey was postponed until this spring, so we are working to get it ready to be sent in April. Final edits to questions and formatting were made in March.

## **FISHERIES DIVISION**

### February Statewide Fish Stockings

| Species       | Number Fish | Size  | Number Locations |
|---------------|-------------|-------|------------------|
| Rainbow trout | 24,811      | 11"   | 2                |
| Rainbow trout | 7,271       | 9-14" | 5                |
| Rainbow trout | 953         | >14"  | 5                |

### Activities

- Alligator Gar sampling continues, resulting in a large number of captured individuals that were likely spawned in 2019.

- Completed SSP gillnetting surveys at Lake Texoma and provided fish samples to Eastern Ok College, USFWS, and OFRL
- The Watonga dam repair project was awarded to Cedar Ridge General Contracting out of Woodward, OK for \$2,218,777.92.
- Two miles of road at Lake Chambers were reshaped in preparations to be rocked.
- Department Lakes and Boating and Fishing Access projects statewide were inspected following winter storm events.
- Preparations were made for the upcoming walleye production season, and supplies were ordered and gear was repaired.
- Paddlefish broodstock collections were conducted on Keystone Lake in cooperation with USFWS.
- Night electrofishing surveys were conducted in the Arkansas River for Sauger brood-stock
- The Skiatook nursery pond was filled in preparation for threadfin shad production.
- Staff conducted habitat projects on Pine Creek Lake (110 cedar trees into 10 brush piles), Cedar Lake (400+ pieces of piping into 57 fixed substrate fish attractors and 3 catfish spawning structures), Brushy Lake (placed three new brush piles and refurbished three existing brush piles), and Ellsworth Lake (numerous cedar trees).
- Staff gave multiple interviews to various media outlets concerning unprecedented weather events and the potential impacts on Oklahoma's fisheries.
- Oral presentation abstracts were written and submitted for Southern Division AFS annual meeting.
- Species management committees continue to meet and make recommendations regarding the development of species management plans, stocking recommendations, future research proposals, and possible regulation change proposals.
- Preparation for the upcoming Paddlefish, hatchery production and sampling seasons are ongoing, and includes maintenance of equipment and facilities.

## **I&E DIVISION**

- Marketing: Michael Bergin reports round one marketing automated emails have begun and include onboarding emails for new and returning annual license buyers, and reminder emails for customers that abandoned their online shopping cart. So, anyone who buys an annual license will be started on a three-part automated onboarding email series over a two week period catered to whether they are new or returning, and designed to help them find and understand our resources and continue as a hunter or angler. Additionally, anyone who starts a license purchase and leaves the process for at least 24 hours will get an abandoned cart email. These emails highlight resources like our Fishing Resources page, Outdoor Oklahoma Journal, social media outlets and other key webpages on wildlifedepartment.com. They also promote the important R3-enhancing features of Go Outdoors Oklahoma, such as Auto Renew and the app. Additionally, Michael Bergin worked with Academy Sports + Outdoors to continue the successful Refer-A-Friend (RAF) program for the upcoming spring turkey season.
- Division staff set up and ran the OKNASP Grand State Shoot in OKC. The shoot took place over a two day period, and 60 teams participated in the shoot (502 boys and 413 girls). Also, Kelly Boyer conducted a virtual tier 2 OKNASP state shoot for the schools that did not

qualify for Grand State. 131 teams participated in the virtual state shoot (883 boys and 626 girls).

- Sarah Southerland joined Vicky Skaggs and Betsey York on SEAFWA's Minorities in Natural Resource Committee (MINRC). Sarah also worked to finalize the Limited English Proficiency Plan.
- Division staff set up and ran four OKSSSP regional shoots. Two shoots were held at Coweta, one was in Enid and another shoot was held in Duncan. The top 16 high school teams and 8 Jr. high teams will be participating in the state shoot in El Reno on April 7th.
- Don Brown is also assisting the Foundation with a redo of "Return of the Wetlands" booklet which highlights Hackberry Flat WMA.
- Colin Berg conducted two live interviews with Good Day Tulsa during the past month. He covered information on the Outdoor Oklahoma Readers Photography showcase, time to catch a potential state record, get ready for sand bass fishing and paddelfishing.
- Jena Donnell worked on a "Women in Wildlife" social media series for Women's History Month. She also made plans to launch a new photography contest, the Shutter Slam, aimed to generate awareness of Oklahoma's wildlife diversity. This new photography kicks off in late April. She also worked to provide important information to constituents and media outlets pertaining to a salmonella outbreak among backyard birds, and the recent discovery of zebra mussels in "moss balls" sold at pet stores and used for aquariums.
- Colin Berg held a video conference call with Rick Grundman and Donnie Jones from OGE regarding fishing clinics that could be conducted at OG&E power plants. Plans are underway to train OG&E volunteers to assist with the clinics which will take place in May, June and July.
- Kasie Harriet conducted a pair of virtual learn to hunt courses on places to hunt in different regions of Oklahoma.
- Several communication section employees helped Sarah Southerland execute ODWC's first virtual Rack Madness event. During that week our social media engagement increased 119% overall. The event would not have been possible without the help of wildlife and law enforcement employees who provided their expertise during live events and Instagram "take overs".
- Darrin Hill has been working with the Association of Conservation Information and serves on their Board of Directors. He has helped review several grant proposals and prepare for the annual ACI awards.

## **WILDLIFE DIVISION**

- Personnel are conducting prescribed burns as weather permits. The weather, particularly in western Oklahoma, has not been very conducive for burning. Also, a significant portion of the Atoka PHA recently burned due to a wild/arson fire. That fire was mostly a backing fire, and actually burned in a beneficial manner.
- Winter disking, primarily done to enhance/encourage sunflower production for dove feeding fields, was completed, and work is underway to prepare and start planting spring and summer plots.

- Turkey winter flock surveys were completed. Wild turkey population numbers appear to be down in much of the state, with the most notable decline in the western portions of the state.
- Personnel completed waterfowl surveys on area lakes, and water in wetland units was drawn down to promote early season wetland plant germination.
- Personnel advertised and opened ag leases.
- Significant time was spent preparing areas for the upcoming grazing season, including repairing water wells and waterlines damaged during the extreme cold weather in February.
- WMA staff are also busy getting areas ready for the upcoming spring turkey season.
- The bear research team worked 2 female bears with cubs, 1 male bear, and recovered 1 dead uncollared bear.
- Wildlife Services conducted aerial hog control on 2 WMAs in the special hog eradication area. They successfully removed 87 hogs in one day at Sandy Sanders and 275 hogs in one day at Waurika.
- Staff has spent considerable time entering data into the GIS portion of WMA Wildlife Management Plans, and the effort to get dashboards up and running has become the primary focus of the ongoing effort.
- Finalized acquisition of the Adair County property along the Barren Fork River.
- Regional personnel assisted Program staff with the herd health study. Weather related delays extended the study well into March.

#### **LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION**

- Game Wardens have been staying busy with fisherman and are gearing up for upcoming spring turkey season.
- We have hired 5 new Game Wardens, they will be starting their Game Warden career on April 12th. The five wardens are:
  - A. Jake Rowland – McIntosh Co. D2
  - B. Dylan Langford – Muskogee Co. D2
  - C. David Garrett – Adair Co. D2
  - D. Zane Arnold – Delaware Co. D1
  - E. Tucker Rolf – Cimarron Co. D8
- Almost all of the Wardens that wanted the Covid vaccine have received the vaccine. We are planning on returning to in person training after June 1<sup>st</sup>. We will still utilize online meetings for some of the trainings we do to make it easier and cheaper for larger numbers of wardens to attend the same training, thus cutting down on mileage and hours of driving across the state.
- Some of the equipment that was ordered last spring has finally started arriving, after numerous delays due to Covid. We still have 2 boats that should be arriving in the next couple of weeks. These boats will go to Keystone Lake (D4) and Broken Bow Lake (D3).