

## MINUTES

Of the Regular Meeting on October 2, 2023, of the

### OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Held at the Hilton Garden Inn, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, on October 2, 2023. Commission meeting dates are filed with the Secretary of State, Office of Administrative Rules before December 15, annually. The agenda is listed on the Department's website and was posted at the entrance of the Wildlife Department Building on September 21, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. and on the door of the Hilton Garden Inn, Garden Room D on September 25, 2023. A public notice was published in the Bartlesville Examiner on September 20 & 30, 2023.

Chairwoman Leigh Gaddis called the Commission in session at 9:00 a.m.

Rhonda Hurst, Executive Assistant, called the roll.

MEMBERS PRESENT:      LEIGH A. GADDIS, Chairwoman  
                                  JAMES V. BARWICK, Vice-Chairman  
                                  C. RICK HOLDER, Secretary  
                                  D. CHAD DILLINGHAM, Member  
                                  MARK H. MABREY, Member  
                                  JESS M. KANE, Member  
                                  TIM DIEHL, Member

MEMBERS ABSENT:      JOHN P. ZELBST, Member

J.D. Strong, Director, introduced the following guests: Rick Grundman, Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation (OWCF); Colter Chitwood, Assistant Professor, OSU Department of Natural Resources Ecology and Management; Bradley Cowan & Ladney Keener, Locust Grove Archery Team Coaches and Lynn Quattro, Assistant Chief of Freshwater Fisheries at the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

Director Strong recognized Russ Horton, Assistant Chief of Wildlife Division for 35 years of service and Wade Free, Assistant Director for 40 years of service.

Nels Rodefeld, Chief of Communication and Education, stated that the ODWC Outdoor Education program is heralded as one of the best in the nation. Director Strong said he was recently at a conference in Canada, where a luncheon was hosted by Morrell Archery Targets, and he was asked to speak because of the stellar reputation Oklahoma has for its Archery In Schools program. Mr. Rodefeld introduced Kelly Boyer, Communication and Education Specialist, who is the Archery In the Schools program coordinator. Mr. Boyer introduced the Locust Grove High School and Middle School archery teams and their coaches, Ladney Keener and Bradley Cowan. These two teams won multiple awards at the national level. The High School brought home the 1<sup>st</sup> place grand state team and two individual first place spots for Jager Ingram and Easton Wall. The Middle School was 2<sup>nd</sup> place team grand state, National champion team NASP bullseye and the National runner up team NASP IBO 3D challenge.

Nels Rodefeld introduced Lynn Quattro, Assistant Chief of Freshwater Fisheries at the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, who presented the Communication & Education Division with an American Fisheries Society Sportfish Restoration Award. This award was for the 2022 ODWC Operation Retention project which resulted in a huge increase in hunting and fishing license sales and catapulted Oklahoma into a top 3 state for license sales.

Bill Dinkines, Chief of Wildlife Division, introduced Jeff Pennington, Central Region Supervisor, who gave a presentation on Wildlife Management Area activities in the Central Region. Mr. Pennington also highlighted the areas that are close to the Oklahoma City and Tulsa metro areas and the benefits and challenges faced by these high use areas.

Bill Dinkines introduced Colter Chitwood, Assistant Professor, OSU Department of Natural Resources Ecology and Management. Mr. Chitwood gave a presentation and update on the ongoing turkey research in Oklahoma.

Motion was made by Commissioner Barwick and seconded by Commissioner Kane to approve the minutes from the August 21, 2023 Commission meeting. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

Director Strong also gave a brief update and highlighted the Congressional report submitted by Brittnee Preston, the Department's part-time Federal and Congressional Liaison. This report was sent to all Commissioners and will be kept with the minutes of this meeting. Mr. Strong gave a Director's Report on calendar items and agency updates. This report was given to the Commission and will be kept with the minutes of this meeting

Foundation Executive Director, Rick Grundman, extended a sincere thank you to the Commission for their support and attendance at the 2023 Call of the Wild Gala and invited the Commission to the Gala Sponsor thank you fish fry that will be held at ODWC headquarters on October 19 from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Amanda Storck, CFO and Chief of Administration presented the Financial Statements for July 31, 2023 and August 31, 2023. Motion was made by Commissioner Dillingham, seconded by Commissioner Mabrey to accept the financial statements as presented and approve miscellaneous contributions. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

Chairwoman Gaddis determined that Agenda item #14 could be discussed in open session.

Clayton Eubanks, Assistant Attorney General, presented information on the proposed reversion of Schooler Lake. The Department is requesting to revert the ownership of the lake back to the heirs. Schooler is a 22-acre lake that has low lake levels and needs several million dollars in dam repair. The heirs are aware of the needed dam repairs. After full discussion on liability issues for the Department, a motion by Commission Dillingham, seconded by Commissioner Mabrey to approve the reversion with an effort to include a release for liability for the Department. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

Bill Dinkines presented a requested to dispose of real property located in Cherokee County, Oklahoma. This is a 10-acre lot with no vehicle access and no deed restrictions. The estimated value is \$10,000 - \$15,000. Motion was made by Commissioner Kane, seconded by Commissioner Holder to proceed with the disposal of property as presented. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

Bill Dinkines presented a donation of 80 acres in Payne County. The property is near but not adjacent to the Keystone Wildlife Management Area. The donor has restrictions that the property cannot be sold, hunting would be restricted to archery and shotgun with pellets (nontoxic shot) only and no public roads would be allowed. Commissioner Diehl expressed concerns about needing an environmental assessment. Commissioner Kane was concerned with the ability to effectively manage the property since it was not adjacent to a WMA. Several Commissioners had extreme concerns about the restriction to never sell the property. Motion was made by Commissioner Mabrey, seconded by Commissioner Diehl to approve the donation if the contract was void of any restrictions and an environmental assessment was conducted. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

Motion was made by Commissioner Barwick, seconded by Commissioner Dillingham to enter into Executive Session. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

Motion was made by Commissioner Barwick, seconded by Commissioner Kane to return to Open Session. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

Commissioner Dillingham stated that no action would be taken from the Executive Session discussion, and he wanted to express that the Commission fully supports Director Strong and the ODWC staff. He said they respect the employees in all division and appreciate the things they are doing right, but the agency is faced with many challenges. The Commission intends to become more engaged and work as a team with ODWC to address those challenges moving forward. The Commission will provide Director Strong with a list of a few priorities they feel are necessary to move the agency forward. Commissioner Diehl added that they want to make this a team approach, working together and appreciating everyone's talents.

Motion was made by Commissioner Barwick, seconded by Commissioner Diehl to establish, and approve new Commission Committee assignments effective January 1, 2024. Motion carried with Commissioners Mabrey, Diehl, Barwick, Holder, Dillingham, Kane, and Gaddis voting "Yes".

The November Commission meeting will be November 6, 2023, and will be held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

#### OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

---

Leigh A. Gaddis, CHAIRWOMAN

ATTEST:

---

C. Rick Holder, SECRETARY

**AGENDA**  
**Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission**  
**Regular Meeting**

**Public Meeting:**     **Monday, November 6, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.**  
Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation  
1801 N. Lincoln Blvd.  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

In compliance with the Open Meeting Act, this meeting is scheduled to be streamed live and recorded at [www.youtube.com/user/outdooroklahoma](http://www.youtube.com/user/outdooroklahoma)

The Commission may vote to approve, disapprove, or take other action on any of the following items. The Commission may vote to authorize public comment on any agenda item requesting a rule change.

1. Call to Order – Chairwoman Gaddis
2. Roll Call – Rhonda Hurst
3. Invocation – Russ Horton
4. Pledge of Allegiance – Russ Horton
5. Introduction of Guests
  
6. Recognition of students from Altus Public Schools on their achievements at the National Archery in the Schools Program’s state and national tournaments – Nels Rodefeld, Chief of Communication and Education Division and Kelly Boyer, Communication and Education Specialist.
  
7. Presentation of the Outdoor Writers Association of America awards for first place in the Family Participation/Youth Outdoor Education category and second place for the Hunting or Shooting Sports category to Blake Podhajsky, Communication and Education Specialist – Nels Rodefeld.
  
8. Presentation of the 2023 Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies awards – J.D. Strong, Director  
  
Riley Willman, Delaware County Game Warden, SEAFWA Game Warden of the Year  
Betsey York, Human Dimensions Specialist, Special Recognition Award  
Jennifer Benge, Communication and Education Technician, Gold Award for Diversity and Inclusion Efforts
  
9. Recognition and commendations to ODWC Game Wardens who were instrumental in the manhunt for the suspect that shot the Cleveland County Deputy – Colonel Nathan Erdman, Chief of Law Enforcement, and Captain Gary Emmons.
  
10. Presentation, consideration and vote to approve, amend, reject or take other action on a donation of a Patriot Airboat from the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation (OWCF) – Rick Grundman, Executive Director, OWCF and Colonel Nathan Erdman.

11. Presentation, consideration and vote to approve, amend, reject or take other action on a donation of \$28,000 from the National Wild Turkey Federation – Bill Dinkines, Chief of Wildlife Division and Annie Farrell, District Biologist, National Wild Turkey Federation.
12. Consideration and vote to approve, amend, reject, or take other action on minutes from the October 2, 2023, regular Commission meeting.
13. Director's Report – J.D. Strong
  - a. Federal and Congressional Update
    - Oklahoma Legislative Update – Catherine Appling-Pooler
  - b. Calendar Items – discussion of upcoming department calendar items.
  - c. Agency Update – an update on current activity within each division of the agency.
14. Presentation of the September 30, 2023, Financial Statement and consideration and vote to approve, amend, or reject miscellaneous donations – Amanda Storck, CFO and Chief of Administration.
15. Consideration and vote to approve, amend, reject or take other action on a FY24 budget revision – Amanda Storck.
16. Presentation on the ODWC Federal Aid process – Amanda Storck and Andrea Crews, Federal Aid Coordinator.
17. Presentation on quail and pheasant survey results and season forecasts – Bill Dinkines and Tell Judkins, Upland Game Biologist.
18. Discussion and annual personnel review of the Executive Director, which the Commission by majority vote may decide to discuss in Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. 307(B)(1); with any action thereon to take place through discussion, consideration, and vote in Open Session – OWCC Vice Chairman Barwick, and Chairman of the Performance Review Committee.
19. Consideration and vote to approve, amend, reject or take other action on dates for the 2024 Commission meetings as follows: January 2 (Tuesday), February 5, March 4, April 1, May 6, June 3, July 1, August 5, September 3 (Tuesday), October 7, November 4, December 2.
20. New Business – Discussion of any matter not known about, or which could not have been reasonably foreseen 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting.
21. Announce the December 4, 2023 Commission meeting will be in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
22. Adjourn

**People with disabilities may request accommodations by calling 405-522-6279 at least three days before the meeting.**

# October 2023 DIRECTOR'S REPORT



OKLAHOMA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION**

## CALENDAR ITEMS:

Nov 1	Rulemaking public comment period opens
Nov 9	Legislative tour of Pushmataha WMA
Nov 10	Veteran's Day Observed (State offices closed)
Nov 13-16	Grand National Quail Hunt, Enid
Nov 29-Dec 1	WAFWA Executive Leadership Meeting, Henderson, NV
Dec 4	Monthly Commission Meeting, ODWC Headquarters, OKC
Dec 7	Rulemaking Public Hearing at 7 PM, ODWC Headquarters, OKC

## AGENCY UPDATE

### ADMINISTRATION

#### Accounting:

##### Accounts Payable:

- # of Claims Audited and Paid - 315
- Total Dollar Amount of Claims Paid - 3,102,171.00

##### Purchase Card Program:

- Total # Agency Cardholders - 194
- Total # Agency Approvers (no cards) - 13
- Total Agency Monthly Standard Spending Limits - \$378,000.00
- Total Agency Spending Limits w/ Approved Increase Requests - \$562,500.00
- # of PCard Spending Limit Increase Requests Approved - 35
- # of P/Card Transactions Processed - 739
- # of ODWC In-depth Audited Transactions - 110
- OMES documentation requests for PCard transactions - 0
- Total Dollar Amount of P/Card Purchases - \$223,167.92
- PCard Program Refresher Training - 1
- New Approver Training at OMES - 0
- New Cardholder Training at OMES - 3

##### Risk Management:

- OMES Surveys or Premiums Completed - 2
- New Cases Reported - 6

##### Purchasing:

- # of Purchase Orders/CO issued - 49
- IT Acquisitions Processed - 17

##### Construction Site Visits:

- San Bois WMA - Mandatory Pre-Bid - 9/7/2023
- Eufaula WMA - Mandatory Pre-Bid - 9/8/2023
- Oologah WMA CAP-000911 Mandatory Pre-Bid - 9/13/2023

#### Federal Aid:

- Federal Reimbursement Request: \$2,457,651.07

- Program Income: \$33,228.35
- In-Kind Contributions: \$11,890.00
- Ongoing Federal Audit Repayment: \$749,975.56 cumulative
- New Grants or Amendments Submitted: 2
- Grant Reports Submitted: 11
- Fisheries and Wildlife division Pcard charges sorted into 429 unique combinations of Fund / Division / Grant number / Project number / Product Code / Area / Object Code for claim jacket preparation
- Subaward invoices processed: 14
- Key Meetings / Milestones: Submitted 25 revised financial reports to repay OIG audit questioned costs via overmatch; Met with City of Altus regarding new shooting range planning grant; Met with OSU fiscal staff regarding subaward invoice issues; Multiple PeopleSoft migration meetings; Ongoing coordination with subrecipients to receive payable FY23 final invoices; Federal Fiscal Year closeout activities
- Travel: Federal Aid Coordinator attended conference for WAFWA / Conservation Business Managers;
- Noteworthy: The majority of ODWC's federal grant funding would not be impacted by a potential federal shutdown

#### **Human Resources:**

- # Open Full-time Positions - 24
- Positions Interviewed - 10
- Candidates interviewed - 37
- Positions Announced - 5
- Candidates Screened - 460
- Filled Positions - 3 (0 new hires, 2 promotions, 1 transfer)
- See included personnel report that shows personnel actions for the month
- Temporary Employees Processed (Interns & Aids), - 4
- Full time employees on March payroll - 339
- DB Plan Members - 155
- DC Plan Members - 184
- Hourly employees on supplemental payroll - 33
- Retirement meetings and / or calculations - 2
- Work Comp Injuries - 1

#### **Other misc:**

- Continue to answer Workday questions
- MINRC meeting attended
- DEI course at Healthcare Authority
- I&D Consortium
- Conducted 2 mandatory supervisor training course: Performance Management Process and Progressive Discipline
- Coffee Chat presentation: Understanding Your Workday pay slip
- Retirement Seminar and SoonerSave was conducted 9/28/23 and had 66 enrolled in the DB session and 54 in the DC session
- Edited recordings from retirement seminar and made available to all employees via Workday Learning
- Facilitated Safety Team Meeting
- Updated curriculum for Effective Communication course

- Planned and facilitated kickoff meeting and 1st workshop for the LDP Level Two Class of 2025

**IT:**

Upcoming and Ongoing Projects:

- Worked 75 tickets.
- We continued work on our leased equipment inventory program.
- There was request for us to create a new Payroll Report for Peoplesoft.
- There has been an ongoing effort to create a program for Shotgun Shoots in the Schools that we continue to work on.
- Upgrading Drupal from version 9 to 10 to support more features and stay current on security patches.
- All interviews for the IT audit have been completed. We have an on-site walkthrough scheduled. Once that is complete they will give us an official write up to review or challenge if we see anything that needs to be addressed.
- We are currently doing server migration.
- IT decommissioned and transferred old hardware to get ready for the upcoming Purple Wave auction.

**License:**

- Processed over 530 orders, including 485 licenses/permits and 400 hard cards (mail and walk-in orders) - \$63,860 in revenue
- Shipped 266 in-house merchandise items (patches, books, etc), totaling over \$3,200 in revenue.
- Processed \$115,000 in miscellaneous revenue, such lease payments, fines restitution, etc.
- Reviewed 1,154 online and paper applications for various licenses and permits.

**September License Review**

Recreational Licenses were down 3% for the month compared to September 2022, but we remain flat overall in the category year to date.

Notables include:

License Type	Pct Change MTD (# Sold)	YTD Change
Resident Hunting	-15% (4,277)	-14%
Resident Fishing	-1% (5,194)	+2%
Resident Combo	-10% (741)	-18%
Resident Deer Archery	-19% (5,199)	-13%
Resident Youth Hunting	-2% (355)	+7%
Resident Youth Deer Archery	-15% (928)	-9%
Resident Bear Archery	+13% (391)	+10%
Nonresident Hunting	+64% (751)	+11%
Nonresident 5-Day Hunting	+4% (1,158)	+7%
Nonresident Deer Archery	-18% (1,411)	-7%
Nonresident Bear Archery	-8% (95)	-12%

Lifetime Licenses were down 18% for the month compared to September 2022 and are down 2% year to date (12,391 sold).

Notables include:

License Type	Pct Change MTD (# Sold)	YTD Change
Lifetime Combo	-16% (263)	-13%
Lifetime Hunting	-27% (22)	-17%
Senior Citizen Combo	-15% (340)	+1%

### Mid-October License Review (Sales through October 22)

Recreational Licenses were down 13% for the month compared to October 2022 and down 2% year to date.

Notables include:

License Type	Pct Change MTD (# Sold)	YTD Change
Resident Hunting	-27% (4,456)	-18%
Resident Fishing	0% (2,619)	+2%
Resident Combo	-9% (477)	-18%
Resident Deer Archery	-3% (11,483)	-8%
Resident Youth Hunting	-16% (932)	-5%
Resident Youth Deer Gun Antlered	0% (8,313)	-2%
Resident Youth Deer Gun Antlerless	-1% (6,785)	-3%
Nonresident Youth Deer Gun Either Sex	+32% (346)	+26%
Nonresident Youth Deer Gun Antlerless	+2% (114)	+3%
Nonresident Hunting	+26% (316)	+12%
Nonresident Deer Archery	+14% (2,537)	+3%

Lifetime Licenses were down 10% for the month compared to October 2022 and are down 3% year to date (13,199 sold).

Notables include:

License Type	Pct Change MTD (# Sold)	YTD Change
Lifetime Combo	-11% (258)	-12%
Lifetime Hunting	-50% (19)	-24%
Senior Citizen Combo	-5% (267)	+1%

### Property:

- Completed forklift training/certification for six staff in central office.
- Building repairs completed: Boiler condensation pipes small leak repairs and replaced faulty faucets in restrooms.
- Began collecting surplus items from the field.
- Deployed 6 new vehicles and received 6 turn-ins to prepare for auction. 3 new vehicles remain to be processed and deployed for 2023.
- Received new uniform samples from new vendor and approved embroidery/screen print. Additional meetings for progress on new online storefront.

### FISHERIES DIVISION

<b>Statewide Fish Stockings, September 2023</b>			
<b>Species</b>	<b>#Fish</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b># Locations</b>
Channel catfish	122,408	2-6"	9
Channel catfish	6,115	12	7
Channel catfish	165	18-22"	1
Hybrid bluegill	1,568	6"	3
Rainbow trout, USFWS	2,405	10.74-11.11	1
Rainbow trout, Commercial	6,733	9+"	1
Rainbow trout, Commercial	166	14-24"	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>139,560</b>		23

#### Meetings

- Hatchery staff attended an aquaponics conference in Albuquerque, NM
- Staff attended the OWRB water planning meetings around the state.
- Pre-bid meeting for Jap Beaver renovation project.

#### Activities

- Completed annual farm pond fish handout, which equated to stocking approximately 100 acres of water.
- Harvested and stocked two ponds of channel catfish for Salt Plains Lake and HB Parsons Hatchery.
- Made repairs to the tractor and big mower.
- Hatchery ponds were harvested to provide forage (Goldfish, Kio, Fathead Minnows) for LMB.
- Electrofishing sampling and Blue Catfish tagging at lake Ellsworth.
- Continued dirt work at Jap Beaver Lake.
- Inspected Jap Beaver Drain Line with CCTV-good/acceptable condition.
- Staff assisted at a fishing event for Quail Forever at the Big Fork Ranch.
- Staff organized and administered a planning meeting with the Skiatook Lake Association and the USACE to discuss the 2024 operation of the Skiatook Nursery Pond.
- Staff worked at the career fair booth at OSU with other divisions.
- Staff attended and presented at bowfishing regulation meeting with constituents, legislators, and BAA representatives.
- Analyzed Angler Survey, Creel Survey, and Crappie Population metrics for Lake Eufaula. These were presented to constituents along with a yield per recruit harvest model for a meeting with constituents.
- Staff Participated in a division-wide Shelbyville Cube building project.
- Outreach was conducted: several fishing clinics/derby's, educational events, county fairs, Fiesta de las Americas, educational events, answered angler and landowner questions.
- Analyzed tagging data for Blue and Flathead Catfish, Giving tag retention presentation at SEAFWA.

- Channel Catfish management sampling was conducted along with preliminary investigations into bait preference.
- Two papers submitted to OAS: Hole-punch mark retention for Centrarchids, hoop net gear bias and channel catfish population metrics for central region fisheries.
- Staff completed construction of pole barn providing the opportunity to store trailers and other equipment out of sun/rain/weather elements.
- Blue River staff installed solar lights and battery kits in two popular parking lots.
- Completed 3 angler creel surveys at McGee Creek Lake
- Mapped the spread of hydrilla at Ardmore City Lake and collected water quality profiles within topped-out stands.
- Staff attended the Shelbyville cube workshop and brought back supplies to the regional office.
- Blue River staff are preparing for trout season, maintaining access locations and firebreaks, as well as developing signage and pamphlet materials.
- Staff finished monitoring water quality on Keystone Lake to stay in front of possible striped bass die-offs due to high water temps and low DO that tend to occur in Keystone during hot dry stretches of the summer months. Water quality hasn't dipped to levels resulting in any kills so far this summer.
- Personnel assisted wildlife crew and crews with fishing clinic at New Life Church on Hudson Lake.
- Personnel responded to and investigated fish kill in a neighborhood pond in Broken Arrow.
- Staff along with the USACE conducted a habitat project at Blue Creek on Oologah Lake, where 12 brush piles were refurbished with cedar trees.
- Staff assisted with revising the ODWC SSP manual.
- Conducted electrofishing on Hugo, Tenkiller, Kerr, and WD Mayo reservoirs.
- Assisted with the spider block project at Stilwell High School.
- Relocated sunfish for USFWS pond.
- Performed a variety of ground and equipment maintenance at Dept lakes and offices.
- Staff have begun work on Fed Aid lake reports
- An algae bloom was observed along the Canton Lake dam which resulted in a minor kill of mostly drum and channel catfish. Staff coordinated with multiple agencies to monitor the situation until it dissipated.
- Weekly electrofishing samples were conducted on four farm ponds to determine the effects of stocking tilapia in a farm pond. Largemouth bass data and diets were collected. Data analysis is ongoing.
- A fish kill at Beaver Dunes City Lake was investigated. Low dissolved oxygen was determined to be the cause.
- Herbicide treatments were applied to Common Reeds twice at Lake Evans Chambers to increase fishing access.
- Community surveys were finished in the Neosho River watershed. In total, the Stream Program completed 165 community surveys across 55 sites in the Deep Fork and Neosho watersheds this summer. We're still entering data but tentatively we captured 89 species in the Neosho River watershed, 14 of which were species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) and we captured 43 species in the Deep Fork watershed, 1 of which was a SGCN.

- Black bass surveys were completed on Sycamore Creek. We removed otoliths from 178 Neosho Bass and 8 Spotted Bass for aging.
- Sites on the Little River were scouted and permission was obtained for upcoming black bass surveys in October.
- Reports for landowners, which describe the species we captured on their property during our community surveys, were prepared and sent to the landowners that expressed interest.
- Additionally, the staff members wrote the streams section for the black bass statewide management plan, species descriptions for the new Oklahoma fish poster, a support letter for Dr. Bruckerhoff's research proposal to the Climate Adaptation Science Center, and continued to assist with the development of the Shiny App creel survey function.

### **C&E DIVISION**

- Damon Springer, Shawn Gee, Kelly Boyer, Lance Meek, Jason Smith and Jennifer Benge conducted the District FFA Clay target shoots at Ft Supply and Altus.
- Colin Berg, Lance Meek and Shawn Gee assisted with a family fishing clinic at the Sooner Lake power plant.
- Kassie Harriet worked on promotion of hunting seasons, conducted virtual courses and oversaw the review of hunting photos submitted to The Tailgate on the website.
- Betsey York coordinated a booth for the the ODWC at the Fiesta's de las Americas, an event in southeast Oklahoma City celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month.
- Damon Springer, Shawn Gee, Kelly Boyer, Jason Smith, Jennifer Benge, Colin Berg and Amanda Thomas conducted the District FFA Clay Target shoot at Coweta.
- Colin Berg, Kelly Boyer, Shawn Gee, Lance Meek and Jennifer Benge conducted Hunter Education courses leading up to the youth deer gun season.
- Staff worked to produce new episodes of the Outdoor Oklahoma television show. The latest issue of Outdoor Oklahoma magazine featured the annual Big Game Report
- Jena Donnell coordinated efforts to notify Oklahomans that endangered whooping cranes are passing through the state. Additionally, Jena documented the population stabilization of the Red Cockaded Woodpecker in southeast Oklahoma.

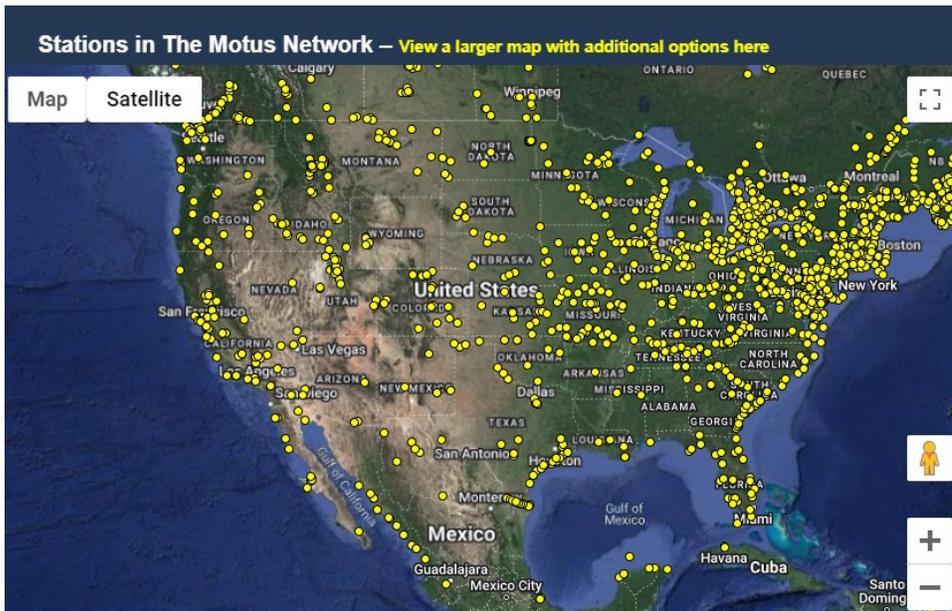
### **WILDLIFE DIVISION**

- Private land youth hunts are ongoing. Seven of 14 hunts are completed and while the participation rate is lower than we would like, success rate so far is 64% on antlerless hunts. There was one "buck" hunt, but only 2 of 11 youth harvested deer on that hunt – we will re-evaluate the buck hunt concept and may adjust for next year's hunts.
- Statewide youth deer season was marked by abnormally (miserably) hot weather and associated poor hunting conditions, but despite the hot weather, almost 3400 deer were harvested by youth hunters, and 47% of the harvest was antlerless deer.
- GIS staff presented at and participated in the Oklahoma South Central Arc Users Group Conference, and attended the monthly meeting for the Oklahoma Geographic Information Council

- GIS staff will also be participating in GIS day at OU on Thursday 16 November (10AM-3PM at Oklahoma Memorial Union).
- Wildlife Diversity Biologist Cheyenne Gonzales and intern Tammi Schrick led a team of volunteers in the successful completion of multiple Monarch Watch and Monarch tagging outreach efforts at Hackberry Flat WMA.
- Wildlife Diversity program staff completed approximately 40 township-based swift fox track surveys in Texas and Western Beaver counties. The results from these surveys inform Swift Fox population monitoring efforts for this Species of Greatest Conservation Need.
- Corps of Engineers staff completed lease agreement inspections on Hugo and Pine Creek WMA's.
- Translocation of 6 pairs of Red-cockaded woodpeckers from Louisiana to the McCurtain County Wilderness Area occurred October 24-25. A C&E article documenting this effort is forthcoming.
- Work to repair extensive and expansive road damage on James Collins WMA that occurred September 23-24 because of a localized, but severe, rainfall event is essentially completed. Unfortunately, this did impact early bow season hunter access.
- Through the end of the archery season, a total archery harvest of 82 bears was reported. This exceeds the former high archery harvest (78 bears) by 4. Depending on muzzleloader season success, we may exceed our current high total harvest of 85 bears.
- Most division staff attended a "stop the bleed" safety training, taught by Law Enforcement division staff. A hearty "thank you" to LE for providing this timely safety training.

#### **WMA Activities**

- Staff are busy with hunter contact and assistance
- 957 acres planted for fall/winter food plots.
- 198 acres mowed
- 240 acres of woody vegetation mulched
- 10 acres of chemical thinning
- Extensive road maintenance (essentially all WMA access roads) in preparation for hunting seasons and highest hunter utilization of WMA's
- Very heavy use and associated Maintenance / upkeep of shooting ranges
- Deer spotlight counts completed across the state
- Controlled hunts have begun at numerous WMA's across the state
- Deer and Elk hunts at Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge begin this month.
- MOTUS monitoring network equipment was installed at Sandy Sanders and Hackberry Flat WMA's. This equipment is part of a nationwide network of monitoring equipment to track wildlife (primarily birds and bats) that have been fitted with radio transmitters through various research projects across the US.



- Cedar cutting contract is being bid for Canton WMA
- Planning and preparation for upcoming dormant season burns is underway
- Presentations / Programs / Meetings
  - STEP, Career Day, NSU Wildlife Club, Cheyenne Hunter Safety Course, elk City Outdoor Classroom, Invasive Species meeting – Beaver
- Pumping activities are underway on numerous WDU units
- Legislative Interim study presentation/update on status of Wild Turkeys in Oklahoma, and Invasive Species (Eastern Red Cedar).
- MANY amazing quality deer harvests from all parts of the state continue to be shared on various social media platforms

## LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

- At SEAFWA 2023 Oklahoma Game Warden Riley Willman won the overall Game Warden of the Year for SEAFWA. That has not happened for Oklahoma since 2001.
- We had wardens working for visibility patrols at Mt. Park WMA, around the area with the Whooping Crane. We stayed visible until the crane moved on further South on its migration.
- Investigator Emily Long won the “Best Presentation” at SEAFWA Conference for her presentation on the Whooping Crane case out of SW Oklahoma.
- In October we had the 11 First Responder Chaplin training members complete the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of their training. The 11 wardens attending were: Zach Paulk (D5), Lt. Joe Alexander (D1), Karlin Bailey (D2), David Garrett (D2), Logan Shimp (D2), Mark Hannah (D3), Zane Arnold (D4), Lt. Billy Bob Walker (D4), Brandon Lehrman (D7), Phillip Cottrill (D8), and Mike Baker (D8).
- District 8 took delivery of their new airboat. It was made possible by a generous donation to the Foundation from a local landowner. These partnerships make us even more effective at doing our jobs out there and cannot be underestimated at the difference it will make in the future. That brings LE airboat count to 3 now, 2 of those have been donated.
- Law will be ordering 22 Ford trucks and 1 Durango for 2024 budget year trucks. We are still waiting for exact pricing at the time of writing this report.



J. KEVIN STITT, GOVERNOR

J. D. STRONG, DIRECTOR

Wildlife Conservation Commission

Leigh Gaddis

Chairman

James V. Barwick

Vice Chairman

Rick Holder

Secretary

Tim Diehl

D. Chad Dillingham

Jess Kane

Mark H. Mabrey

John P. Zelbst

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** October 25, 2023

**TO:** OK Department of Wildlife Commission and Staff

**FROM:** Brittnee Preston

**RE:** Report on September and October Federal and Congressional Issues for November Commission Meeting

### Congress:

#### General activity:

- > The House passed HR 2872, the Federal e-duck stamp bill by voice vote. The Senate has already passed the same exact text but are expected to take up the House bill before it goes to the President's desk.
- > Senator Mullin's SJ Res 24, disapproving the ESA rule on the northern long eared bat has been submitted to the President. President Biden vetoed the bill.
- > The Senate attempted to override the President's veto of S.J. Res. 9 and S.J. Res. 24, disapproving of the ESA rules on the Northern Long-eared Bat and the Lesser Prairie Chicken, but the veto was sustained by a vote of 47-46 and 47-45, respectively. To override a veto, 60 votes or two-thirds of the members voting is needed to override.
- > The House passed H.R. 5110, Protecting Hunting Heritage and Education Act, by a vote of 424-1. This bill seeks to ensure that schools across the nation can continue to access Department of Education funding for archery, hunter education, recreational shooting, and other outdoor enrichment programming.
- > House Natural Resources Committee held a markup on several bills including:
  - o [HR 5009](#) — Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver reauthorization (WILD) Act
  - o [HR 4389](#) — Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act

#### Appropriations –

- > The end of the fiscal year was a rollercoaster with many factions attempting to find a solution to keep the government open beyond September 30<sup>th</sup>. The House GOP [reached](#) a short term spending deal with budget cuts and border policy changes but votes for the potential CR rule fell short on the floor and leadership pulled the vote. The House Republicans then considered making deeper budget cuts to the short-term spending bill to appease the far right but, this was always a non-starter in the Senate and would never be able to pass.
- > Throughout the final days of the fiscal year, a group of far-right conservatives were threatening to remove Speaker McCarthy, by invoking a motion to vacate, if he did not meet their budget cut requests. As you will read below, this was the ultimate sacrifice that McCarthy made to keep the government open past September 30<sup>th</sup>.
- > The Problem Solvers Caucus, a bipartisan group of members in the House, attempted to take matters into their own hands and released a budgetary framework to extend spending beyond the September 30<sup>th</sup> deadline averting a government shutdown. Their agreement would have extend government funding at

We manage and protect fish and wildlife, along with their habitats, while also growing our community of hunters and anglers, partnering with those who love the outdoors, and fostering stewardship with those who care for the land.

current levels through Jan. 11, 2024, to give Congress more than three extra months to agree on regular appropriations. The plan included the supplementary funding request from the White House and adhered to the debt ceiling spending caps agreed to earlier this year in the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Finally, it included a border security solution, which has been a big sticking point for the House GOP.

- > The last week of the fiscal year, the Senate set into motion a path for the upper chamber to move on a CR first, which is generally not how spending bills originate. The Senate passed a clean CR to avoid a government shutdown by a vote of 77-19 a few days in advance of a shutdown. The measure would have extended government funding through November 17th and provide supplementary disaster assistance and Ukraine aid.
- > Speaker McCarthy reportedly told his Conference that he will not bring the Senate's CR to the floor for a vote. Instead, on the day before the last day of the fiscal year, the House GOP rolled out and passed a CR that would fund the government through October 31st but included deep spending cuts including nearly a 30% cut to defense spending. This came after the House's failed attempts to move four individual spending bills. They were able to narrowly pass three of the bills but the agriculture bill failed when 27 Republicans voted no. This is concerning given the Farm bill expired on September 30<sup>th</sup> and is a forecasting vote to a potential Farm bill vote.
- > A clean CR was passed at the 11th hour on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Speaker McCarthy chose to put forward a clean extension and was able to pass the bill with Democrat support. The CR extended funding through November 17th, included \$16 billion in supplemental disaster relief and extended the FAA reauthorization bill. Aid for Ukraine and a border solution was not included in the bill.
- > While a government shutdown was averted, it was only for 45 days. Within a couple of days, Rep. Gaetz (R-FL) filed a motion to vacate and ultimately Speaker McCarthy was removed. Now the House must navigate this process without a Speaker of the House.
- > In preparation for the next funding deadline, the White House sent a supplemental funding request for aid to Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan totaling around \$106 billion.

#### Speaker of the House updates-

- > Three days after Speaker McCarthy moved a clean CR, Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) followed through on his threat and filed a motion to vacate the chair setting up a vote to remove Speaker Kevin McCarthy from his position. McCarthy's supporters moved to table the motion but ultimately that motion along with the quest to retain the Speaker position both failed by votes of 216-210. Around 200 Democrats joined Rep. Gaetz and his supporters in ousting McCarthy. This is the first time in history that a Speaker has been removed.
- > The Speaker of the House position is now vacant and has been for weeks.
- > While the Republicans try to appoint a new candidate to take the reins. Rep. Patrick McHenry was appointed as the Speaker Pro Tempore in the interim. He has scheduled several Conference elections and put three different candidates forward only to fall short of the magic number of 217 supporters.
- > First, two candidates sought the position: Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) and Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH). With several others entertaining a run including Oklahoma's own Rep. Kevin Hern.
- > Ultimately, Scalise narrowly won the conference nomination with a vote of 113 to 99 votes. However, Scalise bowed out of the race for Speaker because he was unable to garner enough support from his Conference to ensure a successful floor vote.
- > By default, that put Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) forward as the Conference's candidate. However, he lost his first floor vote by a vote of 200-212 with 20 members of his party voting for several other members. Jordan lost a second floor vote by a vote of 199-212 with 22 other members voting for other candidates. Jordan lost a third vote for Speaker and almost immediately, the Republican Conference held a secret ballot on whether or not to keep him as their candidate. Ultimately, Jordan lost that vote.
- > A new group of seven members decided to run for Speaker. Oklahoma's Rep. Kevin Hern announced he would run for Speaker but Majority Whip Tom Emmers (R-MN) won the Conference nomination. Unfortunately, within a few hours, he had pulled his name from the race.
- > At the time of this report, Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA) is set to take his quest for the Speakership to the floor.

We manage and protect fish and wildlife, along with their habitats, while also growing our community of hunters and anglers, partnering with those who love the outdoors, and fostering stewardship with those who care for the land.

- > In the interim, Speaker Pro Tempore McHenry does not have the full power of the position, which has halted all bill assignments to committees and movement of any legislation on the floor.

#### Farm bill –

- > Farm bill discussions are swirling, and House and Senate drafts are expected soon.
- > The House attempted twice to take up their agriculture appropriations bill but tensions rose both times over funding levels and the upcoming Farm bill reauthorization. The House GOP pulled the bill from the floor without a path forward at this time.

#### Agencies:

- > The USFWS [announced](#) a grant opportunity under the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund: Conservation Planning Assistance program. Applications are due by December 13, 2023.
- > The USFWS [announced](#) a grant opportunity under the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund: HCP Land Acquisition program. Applications are due by December 13, 2023.
- > DOI [announced](#) a grant opportunity through the Cooperative Research Units Program Department of the Interior Geological Survey. The deadline to submit applications is July 31, 2024.
- > The USFWS [announced](#) a funding opportunity under the FY24 Candidate Species Conservation program. Applications are due by September 30, 2024.
- > The USFWS [announced](#) a funding opportunity under the FY24 Recovery Implementation program. Applications are due by September 30, 2024.
- > The USFWS announced a funding opportunity under the FY24 Recovery Challenge Funds program. Applications are due by December 19, 2023.

#### Coming up...

- > The FARM bill expired on September 30<sup>th</sup>.
- > The current CR expires on November 17<sup>th</sup>.

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION**  
**J.D. Strong, Director**

**Personnel Actions**  
**October 2023**

**New Hires**

**Promotions**

Doug Zentner – Fisheries Biologist to Central Regional Supervisor, 10/1/23

Heather Del Moral – Administrative Assistant to C&E Technician, 10/15/23

**Transfers**

Seth Bennett – Wildlife Technician to Hatchery Technician, Durant SFH, 10/1/23

**Resignations/Terminations**

**Retirements**

Max Crocker – Game Warden Supervisor, District 8, 10/31/23

Curtis Latham – Johnston County Game Warden, 10/31/2023