



# Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program

## Overview

The Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) offered by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) is designed to help private landowners develop, preserve, restore, enhance and/or manage wildlife habitat on their land. Through WHIP, landowners receive technical and financial assistance to develop and maintain wildlife habitat.

## Benefits

The primary wildlife species targeted by WHIP are deer, turkey, quail, pheasant, prairie chickens, dove and waterfowl.

Although game species are the primary beneficiaries of WHIP, many other species, including Threatened and Endangered species and Species of Special Concern, benefit from WHIP activities.

## Eligible Objectives

Types of acceptable objectives include:

- **Habitat Protection:** primarily excludes or controls activities which can damage or destroy existing wildlife habitat. May include fencing to limit grazing and/or other habitat damaging activities.
- **Habitat Development (Vegetation):** involves planting permanent native vegetation (trees, shrubs, grass, etc.) that is needed to establish new habitat or bolster existing habitat.
- **Timber Management:** involves timber management practices (creating small openings, thinning timber, etc.) that improve wildlife habitat.
- **Wetland Enhancement:** involves protecting, enhancing, restoring and/or developing wetland habitat by constructing dikes, installing water control structures, etc. For program eligibility wetlands are defined as having  $\geq 75\%$  of the body of water not more than 18 inches deep.
- **Habitat Management:** involves improving existing habitat by removing undesirable species (brush management, eastern red cedar removal, etc.) or practices to help promote better habitat (firebreaks, etc.)

## How WHIP Works

Persons interested in entering into a cost-share agreement with ODWC must submit an application. Applications may be requested online at [www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com). Applications are accepted from September 1st to December 31st of a calendar year to be eligible for the next funding cycle.

A biologist will contact applicants to discuss objectives and to schedule an on-site evaluation. Then, if the site and project is suitable, the biologist will work with the applicant to develop a habitat improvement plan. The plan will specify the project(s) to be completed along with reimbursement estimates.

A panel of ODWC biologists reviews plans in June to determine if the project meets acceptable objectives and approves or denies projects accordingly. Available funds will be allocated to acceptable applications on the recommendation of the reviewing panel. Approval does not guarantee funding.

Applicants will be notified of results by or shortly after July 1. Landowners with approved projects will be sent a contract and habitat improvement plan to review and sign. A signed contract and habitat improvement plan must be submitted to ODWC within 30 days of notice of approval and prior to any reimbursable work.

Only a limited amount of funds are available to WHIP each fiscal year, therefore participants must complete all work scheduled on the habitat improvement plan by June 30 of the same fiscal year of approval to qualify for reimbursement.

Following completion the participant will schedule an inspection with their assigned biologist work completion will be verified and measured. Participants will be reimbursed the contracted costs within 90 days of receipt of the reimbursement form. In no event shall reimbursement exceed \$4,500 per participant per year.

## For More Information

If you need more information About WHIP please contact the ODWC at (405) 521-2739.

