

Landowner Spotlight

Walt Haskins Named Landowner of the Year

By Russ Horton, Wildlife Research Supervisor



The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation presented its 2017 Landowner of the Year Award to Mayes County ranch owner

Walter D. (Walt) Haskins. The award acknowledges outstanding conservation efforts on Oklahoma private lands.

Haskins is the owner and operator of the Mayes County Deer Ranch, a 485-acre property south of Locust Grove. When first purchased, the ranch looked very similar to the habitat throughout the county – extensive areas of mature, closed canopy mixed hardwood forest. But the ranch also had an extensive infestation of eastern red cedar (ERC). In Haskins own words, “...it was clearly in need of work.....” Using an intensive ERC eradication effort, and an ongoing prescribed burning program, Mr. Haskins has transformed his property.

As the name implies, quality deer management is one of Walt's primary management goals, but of equal importance is his

goal to manage for wildlife and recreational diversity through sound land stewardship and a passion for sharing the property with others. A small portion of the ranch is dedicated to well-planned and distributed food plots managed for supplemental wildlife forage. The majority of the property, however, is managed for high quality, diverse native vegetation, providing excellent habitat for the diversity of wildlife indigenous to the area.

Mr. Haskins enrolled in ODWC's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) soon after he purchased the ranch, and began

protecting young bucks while harvesting 35 to 40 does annually. To help reach those goals, Walt and his family began mentoring members of the local Boy Scout Troop, and over the years, many local Boy Scouts have gotten their first deer on the Mayes County Deer Ranch. He also continually utilizes the ODWC wildlife technical assistance program for guidance with habitat management planning and implementation. Through sound herd and habitat management, the doe-buck ratio goal was reached and continues to be maintained at the desired level, resulting in an annual harvest of



Gathered for the ODWC 2017 Landowner Conservationist of the Year Award are Russ Horton, ODWC research supervisor; Chad Hibbs, ranch manager; Bill Dinkines, ODWC assistant chief of wildlife; award winner Walter D. Haskins, Mayes County Deer Ranch; Wade Free, ODWC assistant director; J.D. Strong, ODWC director; and Alan Peoples, ODWC chief of wildlife.

several quality bucks. He has also created several (five and counting) ponds on the property for wildlife watering, wetland/waterfowl habitat management, fisheries management and recreation, and irrigation (for wildlife food plots). A major challenge now, and going forward, is a serious feral hog problem. Haskins, his hunters, and his ranch manager are tackling this through sustained

trapping and shooting efforts.

Along with his passion for wildlife and habitat management, Walt is equally passionate about sharing with others. For years he has worked closely with Boy Scouts of America, Troop 1, and every year scouts have opportunity to earn merit badges in Fishing, Camping, Environmental Science, or Fish and Wildlife Management.

Likewise, numerous family and friends are the beneficiaries of Walt's sharing nature, enjoying all that the ranch has to offer.

In summary, Walt's effort, dedication, and passion exemplify successful wildlife conservation on private land, and he is very deserving of recognition as the 2017 ODWC Landowner Conservationist of the Year.



OLAP Seeks Leases for 2nd Year

By Jeff Tibbits, OLAP Wildlife Biologist



The Oklahoma Land Access Program (OLAP) provides financial incentives to landowners who allow public access for hunting, fishing,

stream access and wildlife viewing opportunities on private lands.

The Wildlife Department received a \$2.26 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture as part of the 2014 Farm Bill, through the Voluntary Public Access - Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). OLAP aims to increase walk-

in access opportunities for sportspersons while including and rewarding conservation-minded landowners. Landowners have the flexibility to maintain their current farming or ranching practices while providing sporting opportunities. Enrolled landowners are compensated based on enrolled acres, location, access type and contract length. Added compensation is available for properties enrolled in conservation programs, such as CRP, to further reward landowners making efforts to conserve and sustain wildlife. A bonus is available to multiple landowners who form local OLAP cooperatives.

Almost anyone who owns or leases at least 40 acres can

qualify. Property boundaries are posted with signs, and parking areas will have informational signs indicating access dates and allowed activities. Enrolled landowners are accorded limited liability by existing state laws, and Game Wardens periodically patrol OLAP properties.

Landowners may temporarily deny access while ranching or agricultural activities are occurring. Access is limited to foot traffic only, and vehicles are prohibited.

For more information or to sign up, go to www.wildlifedepartment.com/OLAP.