

Your Side



of the fence

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How 'bout Stocking Florida Bass in My Pond?

By Gene Gilliland, Central Region Fisheries Supervisor



A question we get all the time is “Can I stock Florida bass in my pond?” Our answer is a qualified “maybe.”

The production of trophy bass

takes three things.

First is time. It takes on average 10 years to grow a 10-pound bass in Oklahoma. Bass need to get old to get big.

Second is maximizing growth over the lifespan of that fish. That means having abundant and appropriate size food for every stage of life. This usually means harvesting other bass to reduce competition and may also require adding additional forage.

“Trophy bass production takes three things: time, maximized growth and genetics.”

The third factor is genetics. The native Oklahoma or northern strain largemouth bass has the potential to grow to 8 pounds and occasionally even 10 pounds. But to produce double-digit bass consistently there needs to be some Florida genes in the pool. This is where it gets tricky. Pure Florida bass have the genetic potential to grow larger than our native bass but they are also more susceptible to die-off in the winter because their systems cannot tolerate rapid



The growth potential of Florida bass is appealing to many of Oklahoma's pond owners. This largemouth, weighing 14.8 pounds was recently certified a Lake Record at Arbuckle Lake. Photo by Steve Webber.

water temperatures changes. And with our shorter growing season, even though they have a greater growth potential, they may never achieve their maximum size because our climate will not allow it.

Another problem that has been reported with Florida bass in farm ponds is that they are harder to catch. Some pond owners who have stocked Florida bass have been very disappointed because they can't catch the trophy bass they have grown.

Enter the “Tiger” bass. Fish farmers in Alabama set out to try and breed a strain of bass that was more catchable, but still

had the potential to grow to trophy size. They crossed aggressive northern bass with Floridas to create what is known as an F1 hybrid.

Sounds like the perfect fish...but is it? Hybrid bass may survive our Oklahoma climate better than the pure Florida bass and the F1 does have the genetic potential to grow larger. But there is a catch. When hybrid bass mature and spawn, our research has shown that the Florida genes are diluted more and more with each subsequent generation. When the Florida genes are cut more than 50 percent, the fish lose most of

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Mission Statement:

Managing Oklahoma's wildlife resources and habitat to provide scientific, educational, aesthetic, economic, and recreational benefits for present and future generations of hunters, anglers, and others who appreciate wildlife.

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Stocking your pond is the first step toward producing trophy largemouth bass. Photo by wildlifedepartment.com.

their trophy potential. These subsequent generations perform little better than the native bass.

So what do we recommend? It depends on your goals. It has been shown that native bass will reach the 8 to 10-pound range with proper management. If you want lots and lots of trophy bass and are set on double-digit fish in the 10, 12, and possibly 14-pound class, then Florida or Tiger bass are your choice. We do not recommend the pure Florida bass for stocking anywhere outside the southeast quarter of the state (roughly bounded by Interstates 40 and 35). Anywhere else in the state you are better off with the F1 hybrid bass.

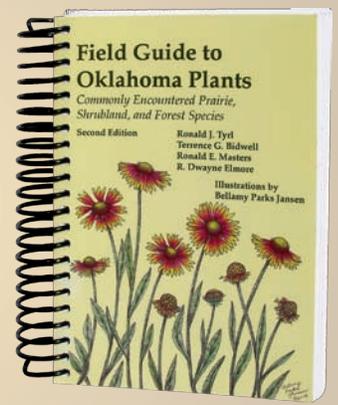
But buyer beware. If you are buying Florida hybrid bass, be sure you are getting

what you are paying for. Fish farmers must be very diligent to keep Floridas and natives apart. Any cross-contamination in the hatchery will produce offspring with a mix of genes. Ask your supplier for verification that the bass you are purchasing are what they claim them to be. Genetic testing and tagging of brood stock are the only way they can track fish on the hatchery to insure the integrity of their stocks.

The proper mix of time, maximized growth and the right genetics can produce the bass of a lifetime in your pond. If you question about the specific details of trophy bass management, contact your nearest ODWC Fisheries Division office for more advice.■

FIELD GUIDE TO OKLAHOMA PLANTS- 2ND EDITION

If you are tired of not knowing what to call that plant with the yellow flowers and spines, then you need the newest edition of the Field Guide to Oklahoma Plants. Knowing the plants on your property is the first step in making management decisions for wildlife and agricultural goals. The second edition includes 68 more species in addition to the 203 species from the first edition. While not all species of plants found in Oklahoma are in the guide, the most commonly encountered are listed. You can obtain the new edition by calling (405) 744-5437 or email your request to elizabeth.condit@okstate.edu. The guide costs \$35 plus a \$5 shipping and handling fee.



Landowner Spotlight

Tuttle Man Fosters Conservation with Family

By Alva Gregory, Private Lands Technician



Jackie Hill Sr. of Tuttle, Oklahoma was looking for a place in western Oklahoma for his children and grandchildren to enjoy. What he found was 800 acres

with potential but in need of a lot of TLC to create the recreational retreat Jackie Sr. had hope to provide his family. The property consisted of overgrazed uplands covered in cedar and a 160-acre crop field. Mr. Hill sought help from the Dewey County Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) office for guidance in restoring habitat on his property.

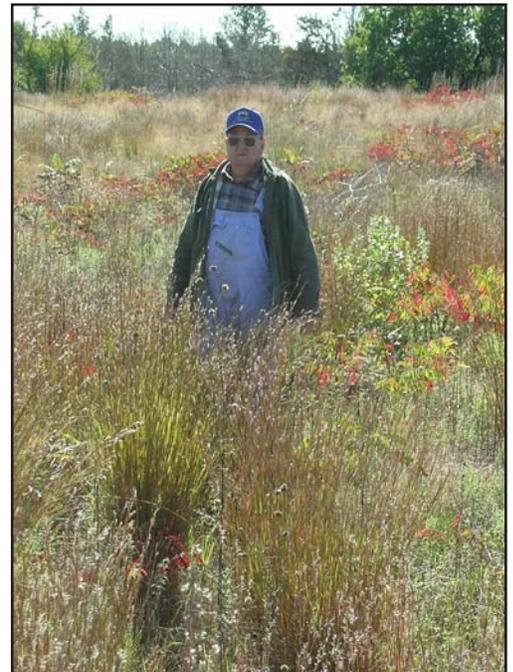
Through his discussions with Paul Clark, District Conservationist with NRCS, Jackie Sr. applied for the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. With acceptance into the program, Jackie and his sons sat down

with personnel from the NRCS and the Wildlife Department to develop a plan to restore the habitat on his land.

TLC quickly turned into what seemed like a daunting task as the plan evolved into projects of cutting cedars, planting native seed and constructing a small wetland. However, if Jackie Sr. thought it was daunting he didn't show it as he quickly got to work.

Within months Jackie Sr. found a local cedar tree cutter and started removing the many cedar that had all but gobbled up the native prairie. As cedar cutting moved to the riparian area, large oak trees never seen before were discovered. As cedars fell they were pushed into piles away from desirable trees and fireguard locations.

To date much of the property is on its second rotation of prescribed fire.



Jackie Hill Sr. shows how the removal of cedars and prescribed fire have benefitted his western Oklahoma property. Photo by Alva Gregory.



A view of the property after cedar removal. Photo by Alva Gregory.

“After we saw the benefits of the first burn more prescribed burns were planned,” said Jackie Jr., Jackie Sr.’s son “It is hard to believe the change from a cedar forest to a stand of native grass that is chest high could happen so fast on the property”.

Jackie Sr. and his sons, Jackie Jr. and Jeff, saw to the completion of the wetland, filter-strips of native grasses and forbs within the crop field and planted the fireguards as annual food plots. “This has truly been a family project”, said Jackie. “My sons have worked very hard on this property.”

The fruits of their hard labor not only include increased sightings of deer, turkey and quail but a strengthened family bond. It is for this that we recognize Jackie Hill Sr. and his sons as this issue’s outstanding landowners. ■

CRP-SAFE Offers Stability

By Doug Schoeling, Upland Game Biologist



Despite record commodity prices in 2008, increasing prices for fertilizer and fuel continue to narrow profit margins for farm-

ers. These violent swings in profit margins coupled with a downturn in the world economy may have farmers looking for more financial stability. The new Continuous Conservation Reserve Program Practice CP38E is one option for farmers in a portion of western Oklahoma. Practice CP38E is part of a national initiative called State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (CRP-SAFE) that targets restoration of vital wildlife habitat. Oklahoma's version of CRP-SAFE is designed to restore mixed-grass prairie for grassland bird species such as northern bobwhite (quail), Cassin's sparrow and the lesser prairie chicken.

The program is limited to areas of critical habitat in a few watersheds found in Dewey, Ellis, Harper, Woods and Woodward counties. Oklahoma has been

approved to enroll 15,100 acres in the SAFE program. Landowners wanting to participate will be asked to enter into a 15-year contract with the Farm Service Agency. As a result of their participation landowners receive a signing bonus, cost share dollars for restoring habitat and annual rental payments over the life of the contract. Habitat restoration involves restoring current cropland back to native prairie habitat. Planting requirements include planting native warm season grasses, forbs and legumes. Plantings of sand plums and sand sage are required in some areas.

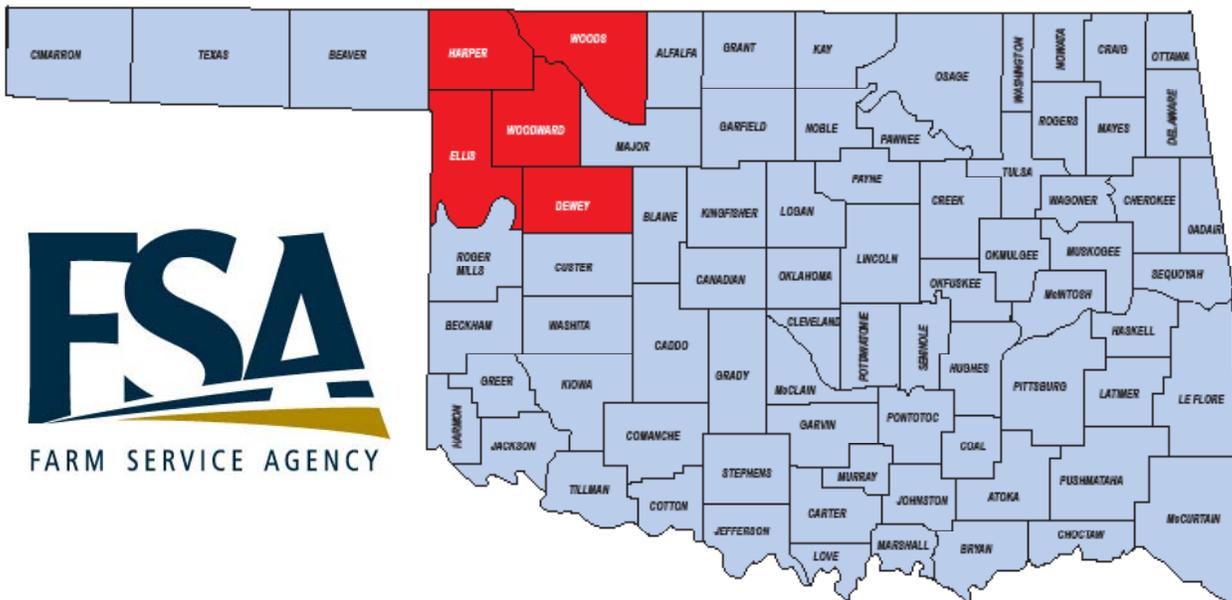
Improving habitat for grassland birds in the management of these restored prairies is a critical part of the project's goal.

In the absence of management prairie can become too thick for some grassland birds like quail. In order to prevent declining use, SAFE does require some

management. Management options involve either prescribed burning or mowing. This needs to be completed twice during the 15-year contract. The burning will improve the grass stand, increase the number of forbs and increase the amount of bare ground for the quail to travel through. The mowing can also be done but only half of the field can be completed on separate years. The mowing height has to be at least 6 inches and completed from February to March.

Strip disking can be completed from December to March and should help improve the stand diversity and the amount of bare soil. Discing promotes forbs that quail use for food and travel lanes.

Those from the project area that are interested in SAFE should contact their local FSA office. ■



Portions of the counties that are shaded in red are eligible for the CRP-SAFE program.

Habitat Matters

Restoring Native Prairie

By Eric Bartholomew, Quail Habitat Biologist



As I sit here on Halloween to write this article, I can think of many green monsters that will be lurking

in the shadows this evening as I take my kids trick or treating. For quail nothing is greener and meaner than Bermuda grass and tall fescue pastures. The frightening part is that these exotic grasses now occupy more areas of eastern Oklahoma than native brushy prairie -- the cornerstone of quail habitat.

Bermuda grass and tall fescue may seem relatively harmless from a distance, but to a quail trying to walk and find food on the ground, these plants make life more difficult if not downright inhospitable. While Bermuda grass and tall fescue can provide outstanding forage opportunities for the cattle, they provide nothing as wildlife habitat.



Native seed mixes with wildflowers provide critical habitat for declining pollinators as well as picturesque prairie. Photo provided by The Nature Conservancy.

When an introduced grass such as Bermuda grass or tall fescue is planted and begins to invade and compete with native prairie, quail habitat declines depending on the level of infestation, be it small patches or whole fields. Lets explore some options on controlling these introduced

grasses.

Tall fescue is a cool season grass, which makes it somewhat easier to control. It is actively growing while most of the more desirable native warm season plants are dormant (late fall and early

spring). If you have a situation where you have isolated patches of fescue invading your native prairie, control and eradication can be accomplished with spot spraying a glyphosate herbicide. Monoculture pastures of tall fescue will require whole field treatment.

The steps involved, timing, and application rates are the same regardless of infestation level, except step four for spot treatments.

Step 1 – Mow, graze, or preferably, burn the fescue in late winter for a spring kill or late-summer for a fall kill.

Step 2 – Allow the fescue to “green-up” to a height of at least six inches. Spray when the plant is actively growing; rapid green-up periods are the best.

Step 3 – Spray the field with one to two quarts per acre of glyphosate (Roundup) or 12 oz. of Plateau. In spring kills, wait two weeks after initial spraying, if there is still



The Nature Conservancy drills a native seed mix into burned off dead fescue duff as part of a large restoration project on the Nickel Preserve. Photo provided by The Nature Conservancy.



A spray rig is very helpful when spraying large pastures. Photo by Lesley McNeff.

green fescue, re-spray or spot spray the problem areas. For fall kills, spray during fall green-up then wait until the next spring and spot spray if needed.

Step 4 – For whole field, after a good kill is achieved and if the soils allow, plow and disc the area to prepare a seed bed and plant a native mixture of warm season grass and legume mixture. If the ground is erodible, steep, or unsuitable for conventional tillage, a no-till seeder can be used to drill directly into the dead fescue sod. Best results are obtained when the dead fescue duff is burned off.

Unlike fescue, Bermuda grass is a warm season species so treating it while it is actively growing will also kill much of the

desired vegetation. However, wildlife will be better off in the long run. Generally, speaking it will be difficult to completely eradicate Bermuda grass once it is established, however, once a field has been treated native grasses can out compete Bermuda grass for sunlight and nutrients. Once again it is up to the landowner to decide the level of infestation and required treatment. If you can spot treat areas, do it.

Steps involved in converting Bermuda grass pastures to native prairie:

Step 1 – Burn, mow or heavily graze the site during the late winter to prepare it for herbicide application. Remove as much plant litter as possible.

Step 2 – Purchase seed and herbicide and if needed, arrange for services such as tractor work and herbicide application.

Step 3 – Once the Bermuda grass is actively growing and at least 6 inches tall, apply glyphosate herbicide at a rate of one to two quarts/acre around June 1. Subsequent applications should then be made in July and August once the vegetation has recovered from the initial herbicide treatment. Following the final treatment the field can be disced and planted by broadcasting the native seed in late winter or early spring. If soil type and topography make it difficult to disk then the field should be burned off in late winter and native seeds can be planted using a no-till drill.

It is important to remember that once the native grasses are planted it may take one to three growing seasons for the plants to become established patience is very important when doing habitat work. In addition, spot treatment of the site will be required to maintain control of Bermuda grass and fescue since seeds will remain viable in the soil for several years.

Be sure to read and abide by product labels. Some of the herbicides require you to include a surfactant in the mix for more effective treatment.■

Free Subscription to Your Side of the Fence

Your Side of the Fence is a FREE publication produced three times a year by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation for Oklahoma landowners. It is our mission to provide practical information for managing wildlife on your property and address issues that affect you, the landowner. This is your opportunity to tell us what you think. What would you like to learn more about? Do you have any questions for any of our ODWC professionals? Are we doing a good job of providing useful, practical information? Please let us know. If you would like, send your advice to the editor.

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New Subscription

Discontinue

It Pays to Have a Supporting Cast

By Mike Sams, Private Lands Biologist



Some have said “It’s not what you know but who you know.” While I’m not one to downplay the value of knowledge, I am certain that who you know can

contribute to success, even in managing your natural resources. While maybe not a “technique” in the truest sense, developing partnerships in management can be one of the most effective means to reaching your management goals.

Take deer management for instance; alone, small landowners cannot effectively manipulate herd composition through harvest, but by partnering together they can. Your habitat management can also benefit from partnerships. A shining example is the work being done by Oklahoma’s Prescribed Fire Associations.

Prescribed Fire Associations were developed on the principle of neighbor helping neighbor. Neighbors are the glue of any good community and are the lifeblood in rural settings. It was once commonplace for neighbors in rural America to join forces to put up crops, hay and even the occasional barn or house. Now neighbors are helping one another conduct prescribed burns.

Prescribed Fire Associations serve to connect neighbors who are wanting to use fire as a management tool on their property. By joining forces through an Association, members share knowledge, equipment and helping hands. Some Associations have even aligned with

Conservation Groups that provide liability insurance.

Spearheaded by Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service the first Prescribed Fire Association, Big Pasture, established itself in 2001. Today 12 Associations have formed throughout Oklahoma and continue to accept members. Members typically pay dues for use in equipment purchases and are asked to assist on a certain number of burns before burning their land. In turn associations provide training opportunities for their members, equipment and manpower.

For more information about membership in a Prescribed Fire Association or to form a new Association, contact the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service or the Natural Resources Conservation Service in your county. ■

PRESCRIBED FIRE ASSOCIATIONS OF OKLAHOMA

1. Big Pasture Prescribed Burn Association
Comanche, Cotton, Jefferson, Kiowa, Tillman Counties
2. Northwest Range Fire Management Association, Inc.
Northern Dewey, Southern Woodward Counties
3. North Central Range Improvement Association
Noble, Northwest Payne Counties
4. Cross Timbers Prescribed Burn Association
Lincoln County
5. Arbuckle Restoration Association
Carter, Johnston, Murray Counties
6. Cimarron Range Preservation Association
Alfalfa, Woods, Northern Woodward Counties
7. Roger Mills Prescribed Burn Association
Roger Mills, Beckham Counties
8. South Canadian Prescribed Burn Association
Southern Dewey, Custer Counties
9. Salt Creek Prescribed Burn Association
Southern Pottawatomie, Southern Seminole Counties
10. Northern Pottawatomie County Prescribed Burn Association
Northern 2/3 Pottawatomie County
11. Canadian Rivers Prescribed Burn Association
Blaine, Canadian Counties
12. Indian Territory Burn Association
Craig, Delaware, Mayes, Nowata, Rogers Counties



Having access to equipment and manpower is a limiting factor for many landowners when it comes to conducting prescribed burns. By becoming a member of a Prescribed Fire Association, landowners can gain access to these valuable resources. Photo by Ben Davis.



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