

Your Side



of the fence

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Don't Free Lily- Too Late!

By Keith Thomas, Central Region Fisheries Biologist



Alligatorweed, water clover, water lettuce and yellow flag are just a few of the exotic aquatic plant varieties that are popping up in natural aquatic habitats throughout Oklahoma. The

desire to create a beautiful, aesthetically pleasing water feature in one's backyard has grown enormously over the past couple decades. Common non-native plant suppliers include large home improvement chains, internet nurseries, local nurseries, pet shops and neighborhood swap meets. They have all jumped on the band wagon to get a piece of the action. Water garden societies have sprung up literally over night in many parts of the state to handle the excitement.

So what's the big deal? What's so bad about growing beautiful, lush, tropical plants in the patch out back? Three problems come to mind when presented with this question. One, these plants are exotic and have no natural control organisms to keep them in check like they would in their native environment. Two, our mild winters may or may not kill them off. Many times they survive just fine. A quick cold snap or light snow might kill some of the plants, but not all of them. Spores, fragments or seeds can be left behind and will spring to life the following year. Three, what do you do with excess plants once they start outgrowing your pond? Gardeners hate to destroy their plants. They would rather sell them to others or pass them along to other



A three-acre sub-division pond choked with water lettuce in west Norman. Photo by Bruce Hoagland.

enthusiasts. What's worse, sometimes these exotics are released at the local lake or pond. What folks should do with excess plants is burn, compost or spray with an appropriate herbicide. This will ensure that the plants do not accidentally end up in the wild.

What happens when these invaders do enter Oklahoma's native habitats? Many of these plants grow unchecked and at exponential rates. Some of the water ferns such as *Salvinia* can double their coverage on a body of water in two weeks time. Without any checks or balances, many non-native aquatic plants will produce thick monocultures which out compete native plant communities. As a result, native aquatic

plants and animals may suffer due to loss of habitat. Floating plants can produce stagnant, anoxic water. Poor water quality can lead to fish kills and other aquatic life losses. Lake and home owner associations around the country spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to control nuisance aquatic plants affecting their property and recreation pursuits. Federal and state agencies spend millions each year on weed control projects. The latest incident here in Oklahoma occurred at Lakes Murray and Arbuckle which involved the submersed species *Hydrilla* - *Hydrilla verticillata*. This plant produces large, dense stands which inhibit water craft. It is easily transferred from lake to lake by entangl-

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.

ODWC Landowner

Assistance Programs:

Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP);
Technical Assistance Program
Doug Schoeling: (405) 301-9945
Mike Sams: (405) 590-2584
Dick Hoar: (918) 299-2334

Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)

Jerry Shaw: (405) 301-6885

Oklahoma Wildscapes Certification Program

Melynda Hickman: (405) 424-0099

Streams Management

Paul Balkenbush: (580) 924-4087

Farm Pond Technical Assistance; Farm Pond Fish Stocking Program

NW Region-John Stahl: (580) 474-2668
SW Region-Larry Cofer: (580) 529-2795
NE Region-Brent Gordon: (918) 299-2334
EC Region-Jim Burroughs: (918) 683-1031
SE Region-Don Groom: (918) 297-0153
SC Region-Matt Mauck: (580) 924-4087
C Region-Gene Gilliland: (405) 325-7288

ODWC Contacts

Wildlife Division: (405) 521-2739
Fisheries Division: (405) 521-3721
Law Enforcement: (405) 521-3719
Operation Game Thief: 1-800-522-8039
Information & Education: (405) 521-3855
License Section: (405) 521-3852
Web site: wildlifedepartment.com

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Lesley B. McNeff: (405) 522-3087
lmcneff@odwc.state.ok.us
or
Mike Sams: (405) 590-2584
mgsams@brightok.net

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A ditch covered up with yellow flag in north Norman. Photos by Keith Thomas.

ing itself around boat propellers and trailer frames. National and state park officials hustled to keep this weed from causing further problems.

Another example of a plant gone bad is Alligatorweed - *Alternanthera philoxeroides*. This plant is used as a filler plant in aquascape settings and has been discovered in two separate systems in Oklahoma. Choctaw Lock and Dam (#17) near Wagoner, OK and the Spring Creek chain of lakes in Oklahoma City, OK. This plant was on the "Species to Watch" list, but recently has been moved to the "Prohibited" list due to its increase in distribution and persistence. A biological control agent, the alligatorweed flea beetle was brought in from Florida to combat the infestation in OKC. So far, success! Large patches of alligatorweed have been whittled down to small clumps in the Spring Creek system.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry are responsible for education efforts against and enforcement on the importation and spread of non-native plants. Lists covering prohibited and species of concern are in Title 29, Chapter 6 of the Oklahoma State Statutes. A brochure, "Don't Free Lily" provides plant descriptions and images and is available on-line or from any ODWC

regional office.

For more information about aquatic nuisance plants, please visit wildlifedepartment.com.■

So, what can you do to help limit the spread? Here's a helpful list.

- Purchase native aquatic plants
- Know the growth habits of your plants
 - Know what you are buying
 - Buy from reputable vendors
- Destroy unknown hitch-hiking plants attached to pots and plants you purchase
- Don't release unwanted plants into the wild
- Burn, spray or compost unwanted plants and trimmings



STOP THE SPREAD

Protect our waters from aquatic pests
Do not release plants and fish
into waterways

Landowner Spotlight

Managing Wildlife and Livestock in Harmony

By Doug Schoeling, Upland Game Biologist



Barry Bollenbach has

been a steward to the land for many years. His family's property in Kingfisher County consists of 4,000 acres

that is made up of river bottomland and rolling sand hills along with 1,000 acres of cultivated ground and 350 acres of introduced pastures. Over the last eight years Barry has managed to integrate livestock production and the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) in order to restore the healthiest of both systems.

Barry says that the habitat improvements have been a long process but the benefits have been well worth the hard work. Along with conducting prescribed burns every year, he has been able to remove cedar trees, which has helped increase the amount of grass and in turn improved the grazing on the property. Prescribed burns have helped improve quail habitat by providing more forbs intermixed with native grasses. Burns have also helped thin the grasses so that quail can travel with more ease.

Early spring burns also help potential weight gain for cattle. After a burn, grasses will green up more quickly and will have more nutrients available in fresher growth. The cattle then have the potential to put on weight faster and will concentrate grazing on a freshly burned area to give other areas time to put on more fuel for future burns.

One practice that Barry does to benefit



Barry Bollenbach stands next to one of the many Eastern red cedar trees he has taken down in order to improve wildlife habitat on his Kingfisher County property. Photo by Doug Schoeling.

the quail is disking around sand plum thickets. After disking, quail will have more room for escape cover from predators. Also, when forbs start coming up after the burn quail will be able to use these areas for bugging.

Another program Barry is enrolled in is the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). This program allows the landowner to manage their deer herd to obtain their own goals. Barry would like to manage for a healthy deer herd, but also grow more trophy bucks. In order to do this, he has been harvesting more does each year in order to help keep the buck to doe ratio in check. Since most of his firebreaks are planted in rye, deer have a food plot to use through the fall and winter. Barry has noticed more

quality bucks on his property and everyone hunting there is enjoying the benefits of the program.

Barry is also a member of the Grand National Quail Foundation. He has been hosting quail hunting parties in order to raise money for this foundation. The Grand National Quail Foundation has been promoting quail hunting and the research and habitat work for a number of years.

With the help of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's landowner programs, Barry has been able to better manage his property for both wildlife and livestock.

It is for his efforts that the Department recognize Barry Bollenbach as this issue's landowner spotlight. ■

The Real Fishing Hot Spot- Your Own Backyard

By Lesley B. McNeff, Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist



If you are a parent or grandparent you will understand this scenario: a warm spring day out by the farm pond. You sit and watch the kiddos throwing rocks in the water and

laughing at each other. All of a sudden, one of their poles dips and you cry out, "Fish on!" They run with excitement and grab their pole, struggling with the weight on the other end. After a fierce battle with the reel, a nice channel cat is pulled in. They grin so big their cheeks hurt while you snap a picture with their big catch.

Does this story bring a smile to your face? If so, you might be interested in the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's farm pond stocking program.

This program is designed to help owners of new or reclaimed farm ponds create a fishery by providing largemouth bass, channel catfish and bluegill to qualified pond owners. In order to receive fish from the Department, a number of conditions must be met.

All ponds must be at least a half-acre in surface size and the pond's owner must agree to allow law enforcement personnel to examine the pond prior to stocking and check licenses of those fishing at the pond. Additionally, no fish will be provided for private ponds which charge a fee for fishing, and no fish will be provided for ponds that have existing fish populations. All applicants to the program must have a current

Oklahoma fishing license as well as a Legacy Permit, even though they may otherwise be exempt.

The channel catfish and bluegill will be stocked first in order to allow them to spawn once before the largemouth bass are stocked. After they spawn, there should be enough forage for all fish so that predation will not be a problem. Biologists with the Department have found that the channel catfish- bluegill- largemouth bass combination is the top of the line as far as competition within the pond. Other species such as stripers, walleye and flathead catfish require much more forage in order to reach a harvestable size.

Some people ask about stocking crappie in farm ponds. The Department does not recommend this due to the fact that crappie tend to overpopulate in ponds and

compete with bass for food.

To apply for the farm pond stocking program complete a separate application for each pond and return it to the address on the application. The game warden in your county will arrange an on site evaluation of the pond. When fish are available, you will then receive a notification by mail with the date, time, town and location where the fish can be picked up. You, a relative, or a friend can pick up the fish as long as the notification card is brought to the pick up point. Fish must be picked up at designated sites on designated days. Failure to pick up the fish as designated on the notification will result in cancellation of the application.

For additional information or to receive an application, please contact the Department's Fisheries Division at (405) 521-3721. ■



The farm pond fish stocking program can produce exciting results for everyone. Photo by Lesley McNeff.

Habitat Matters

Beauty is in the Eye of the Occupant

By Josh Richardson, Migratory Game Bird Biologist



When I'm out talk-ing to landowners there is one phrase I hear quite often. "This place will look a whole lot better when I get it all cleaned up."

Sometimes they are right, but often, when it comes to improvement for wildlife, they are mistaken.

I don't know why, but we as humans seem to think things are best if segmented. We do it with our houses (kitchen, bedroom, bathroom), we do it with our food (meat, potatoes, vegetables), our clothes, our time, and we especially do

it with our properties. Heaven forbid we mix things up. Imagine what someone would think if they found a refrigerator in your bathroom, or if you kept your clothes in

a pile in a cabinet. Think of the remarks that would be made if someone served a casserole as a formal dinner.

But wildlife likes it mixed up. Most wildlife prefer, and many of them need, a heterogeneous environment. This is just a \$100 way of saying that wildlife enjoy a diverse landscape. However, a property that has several different types of habitat (i.e. forest, riparian, and range) can still provide only marginal habitat for wildlife.

When I'm looking at a property and judging its suitability for wildlife the first thing I examine is its macro, or large scale, diversity. Things like fingers of timber left running out into agriculture fields, patches of native grass in forest openings, mottes of trees and shrubs that have been left mixed in with rangeland.

After looking at the overall macro diversity of a property, I then look at the micro diversity. As humans we

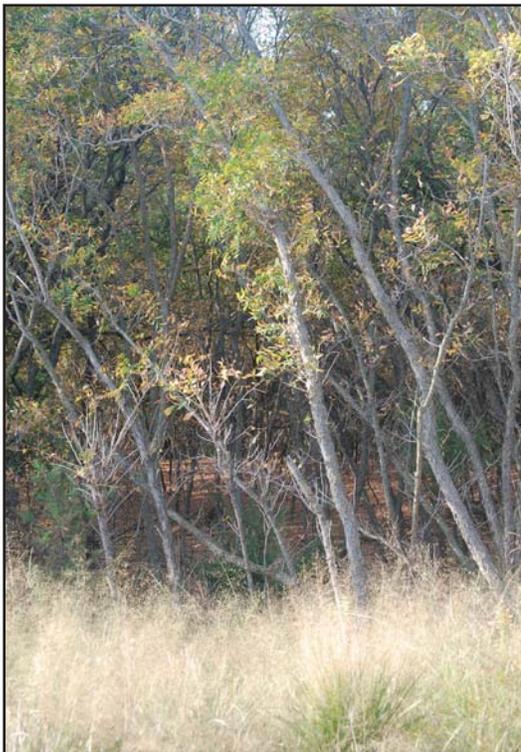


An example of habitat that is preferred by wildlife. Photo by Mike Sams.

like our monoculture yards to be mowed a uniform height, we like our trees in evenly spaced rows and separated by species.

But wildlife like a mixture of grasses and forbes of varying heights, areas of bare ground, and a mix of shrubby tree species like sand plum, sumac and shinnery oak. Diversity in forests consists of a mixture of species and age classes. Pecan orchards and oak parks may look pretty to us, but they don't really provide wildlife much benefit. Species mixture should include not only trees, but other woody and herbaceous vegetation. Collectively, this provides a combination of hard and soft mast, browse, as well as cover and shelter.

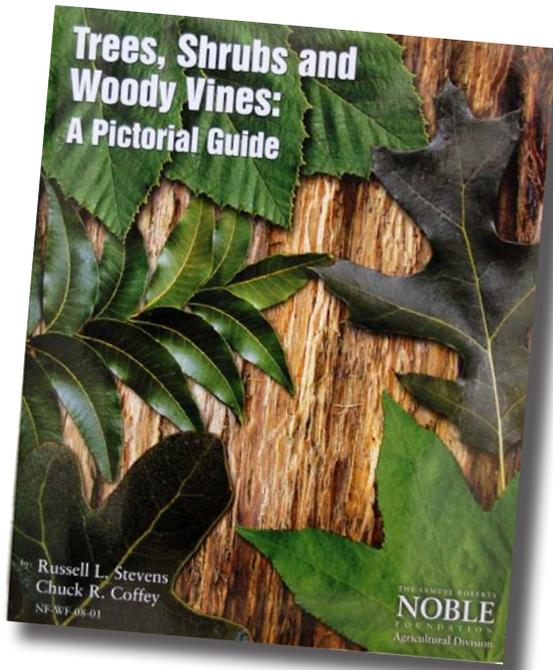
So if you have plans to improve your property for wildlife I would ask you to stop and reconsider. Are your improvements merely aesthetically pleasing, or are they going to enhance the value of your property for wildlife? It may not look pretty to you, but for the wildlife that live there the difference will be a beautiful thing. ■



Uniformity is not always a good thing, especially when it comes to wildlife habitat. Photo by Lesley McNeff.



One of two trailers that was purchased by Lincoln County Cooperative Extension for the Cross-Timbers Prescribed Burn Association (CTBA) as part of a grant from the Natural Resource Ecology and Management Department of OSU. The trailers will be used to house and transport burn equipment on a checkout bases for CTBA members. Under the direction of Verlin Hart, the CTBA has provided a valuable resource for landowners in Lincoln County. For more information about the Cross-Timbers Prescribed Burn Association, contact Verlin Hart at (918) 375-2559. Photos by Ed Stinchcomb, NRCS District Conservationist.



Trees, shrubs and woody vines are flowering plants that belong to many different families. There are about 330 species of woody plants in Oklahoma and about 980 in Texas. Recently the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation published their latest identification tool, *Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines: A Pictorial Guide*. It includes 134 of these woody plants, creating a fairly comprehensive reference book on the diverse woody plant flora of southern Oklahoma and north Texas region. Full-color photographs of woody plants are organized by Family, Genus, Species and common name in an easy to use 138-page 8.5- x 11- inch volume.

For each plant, photographs of the entire plant and any identifiable characteristic, when appropriate, are included with the Family, Genus, Species, common name, origin, growth form, flowering or fruiting periods, plant height and a brief narrative of plant descriptors or uses. The books will provide farmers, ranchers, wildlife managers, landowners and other plant enthusiasts with a means to easily and fairly accurately identify commonly occurring grasses, trees, shrubs and woody vines.

This book is available for \$25 plus \$4 shipping and handling. For more information or to order, call Noble's Ag Helpline at (580) 224-6500 or e-mail tlcampbell@noble.org. For an order by mail, send a check or money order for \$29 to the Noble Foundation, Attn: Tabby Campbell, P.O. Box 2180, Ardmore, OK 73402. Please include your shipping address. To order online, go to <http://www.noble.org/Storefront/default.aspx>.

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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.

Send to: YSOF Editor
P.O. Box 53465
OKC, OK 73152
Email: lmcneff@odwc.state.ok.us
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Mopping Up Cedar Trees

By Eric Bartholomew, Quail Habitat Biologist



Last year I had the opportunity to help with a prescribed burn on a friend's place. We were using fire to maintain the prairie and kill cedar trees. Fortunately, the wind and humidity were in our favor and we left several smoldering skeletons on the prairie. Unfortunately, there were some cedar trees that due to their size, simply didn't burn.

Typically given enough fine fuels such as leaf litter and small branches, cedar trees less than 6 ft in height can be consumed with a prescribed burn. Sometimes just part of the tree will ignite and leave the bottom browned or pruned. This usually kills the lower limbs but the tops are still alive. During subsequent burns those trees will continue to be pruned and really never get totally burned up. Act now and get that tree

before it can produce more seeds!

Tools required: Lighter, Propane and Propane Torch (weed burner). A dolly or 4-wheeler may come in handy as well to tote the propane bottle around.

By conducting a prescribed burn, all fine fuels should be consumed leaving only trees and shrubs that have a higher ignition temperature. This technique works best with trees that are scattered throughout a pasture rather than tightly packed together. If trees are tightly packed together, the oxygen that is necessary to carry a burn will not be as easily reached between trees. Starting a crown fire

in cedar trees can be extremely dangerous. Pick a day that has low relative humidity (between 20-40%) and winds less than 10

mph. The low humidity will help the trees burn and low winds coupled with no fine fuels will reduce the likelihood of spreading firebrands. Use the torch to light the tree and baby-sit it until it flames out. It may take several attempts to get the tree going but once it starts stand back and pay attention to the direction of the firebrands.

As always when using fire as a tool, use common sense and obey all local and state regulations. ■



These photos show a progression of mopping up cedar trees. Photos by Eric Bartholomew.



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Oklahoma City, OK 73152

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