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Farm Bill 2002: What You Can Expect

By John Hendrix, private lands biologist

This past spring President George Bush signed the 2002 farm bill, a bill with a strong conservation makeup. The new farm bill called the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, contains language that will allow support for wildlife concerns in several farm bill programs.

The 1996 farm bill provided new programs and new opportunities for landowners to enhance wildlife habitat on their properties. The 2002 bill builds upon the 1996 bill and ensures significant funding towards conservation on private lands. In fact, the amount of conservation funding in the 2002 farm bill is the largest in the nation's history of farm bills. Most conservation programs of past farm bills will remain fairly similar, however the funding levels in some programs are significantly increased. The current farm bill also authorizes a new program called the Grassland Reserve Program that will begin in 2003.

Several changes can be expected due to the implementation of the 2002 farm bill. The Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) funding level may increase six times as much as the current funding level. This program is used by

landowners to treat identified soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on eligible land.

The 2002 farm bill eliminated the geographic priority areas and requires that at least 60 percent of the funds shall be targeted to live-stock production practices including grazing. All applications will be evaluated for funding based on state and local procedures to optimize the local environmental benefits. The minimum length of a contract has been reduced to one year after the implementation of all practices, and the maximum length of the contract remains the same at 10 years.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollment acreage cap will be raised to 39.2 million acres nationwide and expands the farmable wetland pilot program to become available nationwide with an aggregate cap of 1 million acres. This allows producers to enroll entire fields through the continuous CRP as buffers in cases whereby more than 50 percent of the field is eligible for enrollment and the remainder of the field is infeasible to farm. This program offers a continuous sign-up period and a general announced sign-up period. The

continuous sign-up period is for specific high priority conservation practices like, filter strips, riparian buffers, shelter belts, and grass waterways to name a few. This option allows a landowner to enroll areas into the program without a nationwide bidding process. Landowners who participate in this program will receive an annual rental payment on the approved acreage. In the general announced sign-up period, landowners must compete with other landowners in a bidding process nationwide to be accepted into the program.

Funding increases in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) will allow the overall cap to reach 2,275,000 acres nationwide. Oklahoma has been very successful with this pro-

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**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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(DMAP)**

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Habitat Enhancement Equipment Available for Landowners

By John Hendrix, private lands biologist

An increasing number of Oklahoma landowners want to improve their wildlife habitat, but so often equipment is the limiting factor to their success. Without going to great expense to purchase several pieces of equipment, landowners are often left with few options to enhance wildlife habitat.

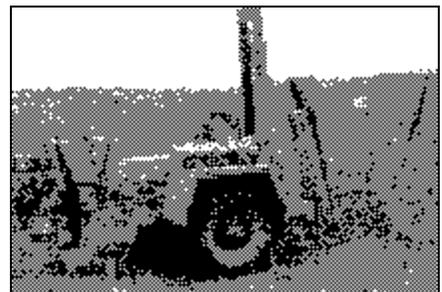
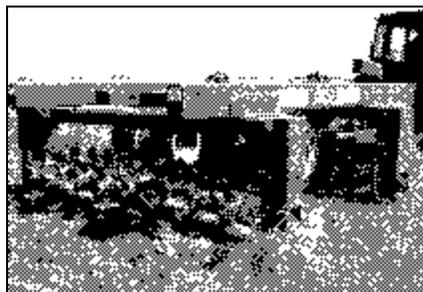
With help from the National Wild Turkey Federation, Quail Unlimited, Charles Blankenship (Big John Tree Spade Company) and private donations, the Department has acquired some specialized equipment for habitat enhancements. The Department has two tree spades with support equipment and one roller chopper that are available for landowners to use for wildlife habitat enhancement projects. The equipment can be rented for a small fee that will be used for annual maintenance costs.

The tree spade can be used on riparian habitat projects, establishing turkey roost sites, and to create shrub motts for quail and small game. Much faster than hand-planting individual tree seedlings, the tree spade is ideal for moving shrubs like sand plum or sumac and trees up to four inches in diameter. Landowners renting this equipment will be provided an operator to run the machine. The preferred time for transplanting is during winter months when shrubs and trees are

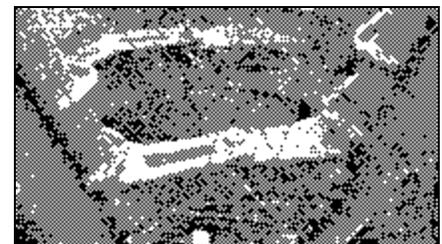
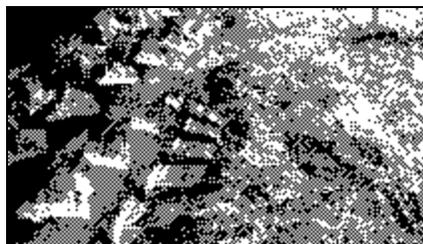
dormant. Landowners can reserve rental dates for the tree spade between December 15 through March 1 annually.

A machine called a roller chopper, can be used for landowners wanting to set back rangeland succession and reduce the canopy of brush structure. Landowners wanting to rent the roller chopper must have access to a tractor with at least 80 hp that is required to pull the machine.

The rental process is a cooperative project between the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. One tree spade will be located at the Kingfisher County Conservation District office and the other tree spade and roller chopper will be located at the Woodward Conservation District office. An onsite visit by an ODWC wildlife biologist will be completed on your property prior to equipment rental. Landowners who may be interested in using this equipment and would like additional information can contact Wade Free, NW Regional Supervisor at 580/254-1527 or John Hendrix, private lands biologist at 405/880-0994.



The roller chopper (left photos) and the tree spade (right photos) are available for landowner use from December 15 through March 1 of every year. Landowners interested in renting this equipment can contact NW Region Wildlife Supervisor Wade Free at 580/254-1527 or Private Lands Biologist John Hendrix at 405/880-0994.



Streambank Stabilization and Habitat Improvement for Oklahoma Streams

By David Routledge, southeast region fisheries technician

Most of you have probably heard about the numerous pollutants in Oklahoma streams. Phosphorous is one that has received much attention recently and our state is introducing new restrictions on the amount of phosphorous that will be acceptable in our stream systems. However, many people don't know that sedimentation is the number one pollutant in Oklahoma waters.

Sediment is increasing in Oklahoma streams due to changes in land use practices. These changes include: road construction, expanding land development, loss of streamside vegetation and destruction of streambanks by cattle and motor vehicles. Most of these practices increase streambank erosion which affects the amount and rate of water that enters a stream via overland flow. Bank erosion causes a direct input of sediment into streams from eroding banks. In contrast, overland flows cross the surface of the land. Not as much water soaks into the ground after land use disturbances occur. Increased overland flow carries a higher soil volume from the surrounding landscape, which ultimately ends up in our streams.

The process of stream sedimentation occurs more quickly in areas where native vegetation has been removed from the surrounding streambank. Areas along the streambank referred to as riparian areas reduce erosion by slowing the flow of water across the surface of the land, shielding the soil from the water, trapping sediment, and filtering soil from the water. Vegetated riparian areas also moderate stream flows so they don't rise and fall too quickly following a rain event. Disturbances to riparian areas such as overgrazing or off road vehicle damage can cause a higher number of bank-full flow events, which leads to the majority of streambank erosion.

Increased rates of streambank erosion, overland flow, and riparian area disturbance all lead to an increase in the amount of sediment carried by the stream. This is problematic because stream water can only carry a limited amount of sediment. When the water can no longer carry all of the sediment supplied from the land, soil particles accumulate on the streambed. This accumulation of sediment decreases the abundance of food for fish, growth rates, and fish densi-

ties.

The most effective and cheapest way landowners can prevent streambank erosion on their property is to maintain a healthy riparian area along the streambank. Landowners should leave at least 50 feet of native vegetation along their streams. It is important to have a good stand of trees and shrubs that extends from the water up the streambank for a distance of 20 feet. Native grasses should be maintained for an additional 30 feet. These areas should also be fenced off so that cattle cannot damage the vegetation



Figure 1

Example of a rapidly eroding streambank in northeast Oklahoma. Sedimentation is the number one pollutant in Oklahoma waters due to the changes in land use practices.

or collapse the streambank. Vegetation in the riparian area will filter out sediment and other pollutants that are transported via overland flow. The roots of the plants soak up water from the soil and will hold the bank material in place and decrease erosion. The trees also provide shade that prevents water temperature from rising to levels that might adversely affect aquatic life.

To determine if you have a problem with streambank erosion you should look for banks of your stream that are almost vertical in appearance (Figure 1.). This is a good indication that the bank is eroding. Stable banks appear to be moderately sloped and well vegetated. You can determine if a bank is eroding by driving a long piece of re-bar into the bank and leaving it there for a few months. After this time, you should go back and measure the amount of re-bar that is sticking out from the bank and this will indicate

how fast the bank is eroding. For example if you measure one foot of rebar extending from the streambank after three months you know that the bank is eroding at a rate four feet per year. This can add up to a substantial loss of property and a significant increase in stream sediment over time.

If you determine that you have a problem with bank erosion you are not alone. There are many landowners that experience this problem and are looking for ways to solve it. There are many different ways to stabilize your streambanks and some methods are relatively inexpensive and can be completed using many materials found on the landowner's property.

The following example describes a low-cost stabilization project that was completed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) on a 350-foot stretch of Spring Creek in northeast Oklahoma. This project was completed at a cost of \$5,000 (\$14.29/foot) using a variety of materials found on site. Your first thought was probably that \$5,000 is not

inexpensive and you are right. This is a significant amount of money but the landowner in this case paid a small percentage of this cost. The ODWC helped the landowner obtain a Partners for Fish and Wildlife grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This grant covered 75 percent of the project cost and the ODWC and the landowner cooperated using both money and in-kind services to cover the remainder. Depending upon the scope of the individual project and availability of funds, the level of cooperation that ODWC provides may not always be this intensive. However, the ODWC can always provide free technical assistance to landowners to determine the appropriate structures needed to solve their problem.

A modified cedar tree revetment was used to stabilize the bank noted

above. When this project began the bank was about eight feet tall, had a vertical rapidly eroding slope, and was void of vegetation (Figure 2.). The first step in the stabilization process was to reshape the bank to a 1:2 ratio (Figure 3) using a backhoe. Next, root-wads were placed in the bank to provide erosion armor and fish habitat. The tree trunks were buried about 40 feet into the bank (Figure 4) to prevent them from washing out during high flows. The bare soil was then covered with an erosion control mat anchored in place using wooden stakes (Figure 5.) The lower portion (toe) of the bank was lined with two rows of cedar trees that were cut from the landowner's property to add additional stabilization and to trap sediment. These were anchored in place using duckbill anchors and cable (Figure 6). A healthy riparian area was established by planting three rows of willow stakes on the lower portions of the streambank at two-foot intervals. The riparian area was completed by planting about 400 sycamore and 400 green ash trees on the remainder of the streambank. These were planted every four feet until the entire streambank was covered (Figure 7). The final step of the project was to build a fence to exclude cattle.

This is just one method that can be used to stabilize a streambank, many others exist including J-hook rock veins, W-weirs, log veins, cross veins, etc. Each of these structures are designed for certain stream types and a professional should be consulted before any structures are built. If one of these structures is placed in the wrong type of stream you can easily cause more problems than you had in the beginning.

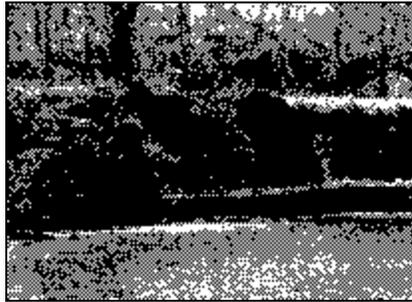


Figure 2.
Streambank condition prior to stabilization project on Spring Creek.

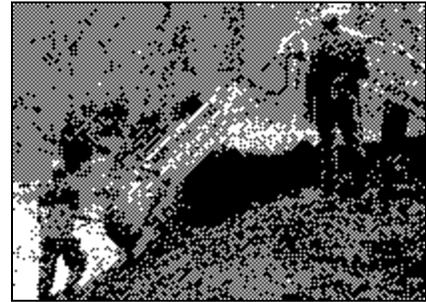


Figure 3.
Example of how to reslope the streambank to prevent erosion.



Figure 4.
ODWC personnel and landowners installing a root-wad.

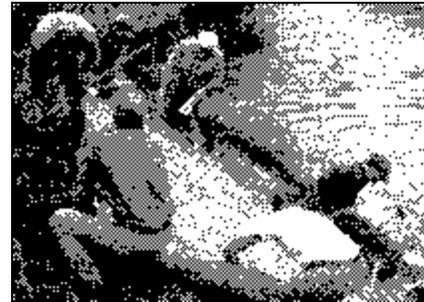


Figure 5.
ODWC personnel and landowners installing an erosion control mat.



Figure 6.
Cedar tree placement on a modified cedar tree revetment.

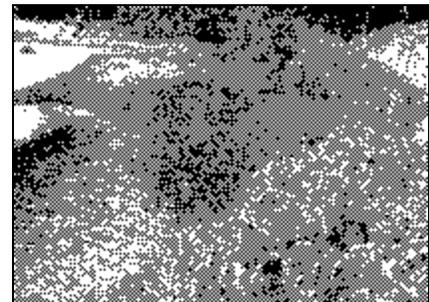


Figure 7.
Completed cedar tree revetment on Spring Creek

If you would like more information on streambank stabilization in your area contact Randy Hyler (NE Region Streams) at 918-683-1031 or James Vincent (SE Region Streams) at 918-297-0153. Both of these individuals are streams biologists for ODWC and they would be happy to help you find a solution to your problem or assist you with preventing streambank erosion before it happens.

2002-2003 Oklahoma Hunting Seasons



Dove	Sept. 1-Oct. 30
Rabbit	Oct. 1-March 15
Squirrel	May 15-Jan. 31
Quail	Nov. 9-Feb. 15
Pheasant	Dec. 1-Jan. 31
Deer Archery	Oct. 1-Nov. 22 Dec. 2-Jan. 15 (Jan. 1-15 antlerless only)
Deer Primitive	Oct. 26-Nov. 3 (antlerless days vary by zone)
Deer Gun	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (antlerless days vary by zone)
Special Antlerless Deer Gun	Dec. 20-22 & Dec. 27-29 (open only in certain zones)
Turkey (Fall 2002)	Archery Oct. 1-Nov.22 Dec. 2-Jan. 15 Gun Nov. 2-Nov.22 (open only in certain zones)

**Turkey
(Spring 2003)** April 6-May 6
(statewide, except S.E.
counties)

April 6-April 28
(S.E. counties: Atoka,
Choctaw, Coal, Latimer,
LeFlore, McCurtain,
Pittsburg &
Pushmataha)

Farm Bill continued from front page

gram and has one of the premier WRP sites in the country known as Red Slough Wildlife Management Area (located in McCurtain Co.). Properties eligible for WRP include restorable wetland areas that have been used intensively for cropping and forage production and adjacent land deemed necessary to protect the restoration project.

There are three ways landowners may sign-up for the WRP program. They can sign-up for a permanent easement, a 30-year easement or a 10-year easement. The permanent easement sign-up has been the most popular with Oklahoma landowners. The permanent easement sign-up will make a one-time payment to the landowner for the appraised value of the property and will also pay 100 percent of the restoration cost of the wetland. The landowner still has control of the property, with certain management restrictions to maintain the integrity of the wetland development.

Funding for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) has also increased. This program has been very popular in Oklahoma during the past few years. This program is available for landowners to receive cost-share assistance to enhance wildlife habitat on their property. The cost-share assistance is 50 percent and up to 75 percent on all approved practices for wildlife and contract lengths are a five to 15 years. Approved practices may be fire guard construction, riparian area protection or enhancement, native grass establishment, shrub plantings, buffer establishment, cedar removal in and around turkey roost sites, and timber management just to name a few.

Landowners can get involved with these programs by stopping by their local Natural Resources Conservation Service office to make them aware of the landowners operation. The NRCS can assist landowners with developing a plan for their property and assist landowners in applying for cost-share. Landowners can locate their NRCS office on the Web at <http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov> then choose the zones and teams option to determine the closest NRCS office.

Other programs are available in the 2002 Farm Bill to help landowners manage and conserve natural resources. For more information about these farm bill programs and other programs landowners should contact their local Natural Resources Conservation Service office, or log onto: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>.

Management Measures

October

- Wildlife Habitat**
- Begin to flood wetland areas
 - Flood greentree resevoirs only after frost
 - Collect deer harvest data as required by the DMAP program
 - Construct brush piles for winter cover
 - Plant wildflower seeds
 - Prepare bird feeders for wintertime feeding

Ponds

- Stock new ponds with fingerling catfish and bluegill

November

- Wildlife Habitat**
- Flood greentree resevoirs only after frost
 - Collect deer harvest data as required by the DMAP program
 - Construct brush piles for winter cover
 - Evaluate areas needing prescribed fire treatment
 - Evaluate forage resources and plan dormant season phase grazing

Ponds

- Catch and remove crappie

December

Wildlife Habitat

- Collect deer harvest data as required by the DMAP program
- Evaluate and record food resources for wildlife
- Strip disk to encourage native food growth
- Evaluate areas needing prescribed fire treatment
- Get prescribed burn equipment ready for use

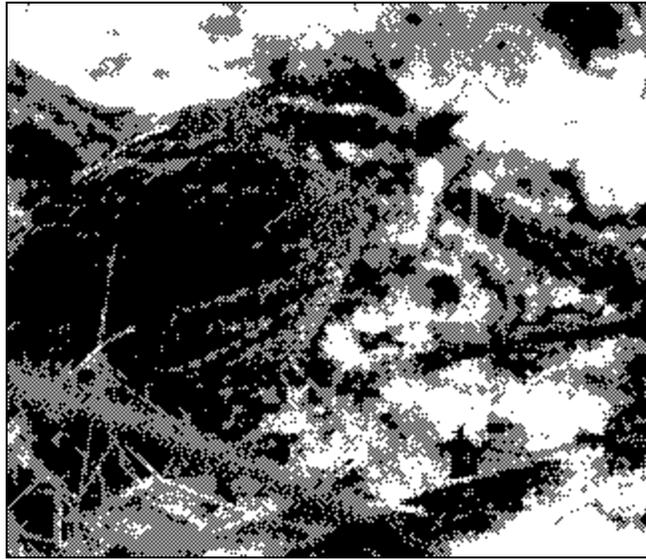
Ponds

- Remove crappie
- Trap beaver and muskrat

Pen-Raised Quail: Pros and Cons

For years, wildlife departments, researchers and private landowners have attempted to restore bobwhite populations by releasing pen-raised quail. Despite attempting various combinations of release methods the results have been dismal. Pen-raised quail, for a multitude of reasons, have a much lower survival rate than their wild counterparts making restocking efforts ineffective.

In addition, lack of survival instincts, human acclimation, genetic degradation and lack of fitness have all been suggested deficiencies of pen-raised quail. Although the introduction of diseases, displacement of wild quail, predator swarming and the introduction of inferior genes into wild populations are concerns of pen-raised quail, scientific evidence to date does not support these concerns. Despite this however, researchers have noted pen-raised quail are much more vulnerable to depredation than wild quail. Lack of instinct and poor fitness seems to be major deficiencies contributing to their lack of predator avoidance. As Dr. Fred Guthery of Oklahoma State University has said, "pen-raised birds are the equivalent of couch potatoes." Pen-raised quail are heavier and fatter than their wild counterparts, which renders them physically chal-



Pen-raised quail provide hunting and dog training opportunities but research has not found them to be effective at restoring wild quail populations.

lenged in the wild. Slower flight speed is one symptom of low fitness in pen-raised quail.

Despite the inability of pen-raised quail to replenish wild quail populations, they can be used to supplement harvest or aid in dog training. Releasing pen-raised quail can be a successful way of dealing with low quail years, heavy hunting pressure or small landholdings. What is com-

monly called "Put & Take," quail are simply released for the purpose of hunting. Such practices are common place among many of the commercial hunting operations that must satisfy many clients with birds, regardless of how fast they fly.

Many release methods and systems have been promoted for releasing quail, most without scientific testing. Given the high vulnerability of pen raised birds the best approach to "Put & Take" release is just prior to hunting or working dogs. This practice ensures all birds are present for the take without worry about

feeding a \$3 quail to a hawk or coyote.

Releasing quail to hunt during the hunting season and within the legal bag limits does not require a special permit. However, harvesting outside the legal season and/or bag limits requires a special permit/license issued through the Department of Wildlife.

Permit/license options for dog training and hunting outside the legal season and/or bag limit

Dog Trainers License

- License cost \$10 per year.
- Individuals involved in take must possess valid Hunting and Dog Trainer's Licenses.
- Written permission from landowner where release occurs.
- Must notify the local game warden prior to release.
- A receipt of the purchase or origin of the birds must be available.
- Birds must be banded prior to release.

Shoot-to-Kill Field Trial Permit

- Permit cost \$5 per year.
- Individuals involved in take must possess valid Hunting and Dog Trainer's Licenses.
- Birds must be banded prior to release.
- A receipt of the purchase or origin of the birds must be available.
- Individual dates of shoots must be submitted 30 days prior to earliest event.

Commercial Hunting License

- License cost \$100 per year.
- All those involved in take must possess a valid hunting license.
- Area must be inspected and approved by local game warden.
- Area must be fenced with a minimum of a four-strand wire fence and signed.
- A receipt of the purchase or origin of the birds must be available.
- Birds removed must be accompanied by an invoice with copy maintained by licensee.