

Your Side



of the fence

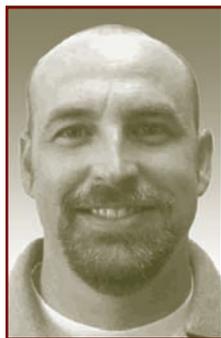
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Can't See the Trees For the Forest

By Mike Sams, Private Lands Biologist



A few years back we invited some landowners in eastern Oklahoma to sit around a table and answer some generic questions related to wildlife and land management. Listening to some of the discussion, I was surprised at how

much value landowners put into forest habitats.

Landowners whose goals were wildlife oriented thought forest was excellent wildlife habitat, in particular deer habitat. To the contrary, closed canopy forest habitat where little sunlight reaches the ground is pretty poor deer habitat.

While acorns and other mast producing trees provide highly sought after foods in forest habitat, production is sporadic. We only need to think back to last year to remember the last



acorn bust. The mainstays of deer diets (browse and forbs) are scarce in closed canopy forest because the shade from trees keeps them from growing.

The maturation of forest throughout much of the eastern U.S. has resulted in poor habitat



The restoration of savanna habitat has been identified as a critical component to restoring quail in eastern Oklahoma.

conditions for many species of wildlife including bobwhite quail. Much of Oklahoma's forest habitat once existed as woodlands and savannas. Savannas are rolling grasslands scattered with shrubs and isolated trees. Woodlands and savannas differ from forest in tree spacing and the amount of sunlight that reaches the ground. Because trees are spaced farther apart in woodlands and even more so in savannas more sunlight reaches the ground and more plants occupy the understory.

Woodlands and savannas existed as a result of fire, both naturally occurring and set by the Native Americans. As fire became taboo and was removed from the landscape, nothing was present to keep tree growth in check and woodlands and savannas slowly evolved into closed canopy forests. During our landowner conversation, it was interesting to hear one elderly gentleman remarked, "There used to be grass under those trees".

While habitat recommendations should be provided in the context of the surrounding landscape, prescriptions for wildlife in forest almost always involve tree removal. The extent and method of tree removal varies with the amount of trees you want to remove and the tools you want to do it with.

“As fire became taboo and was removed from the landscape, nothing was present to keep tree growth in check.”

Tree removal goals can range from just a few to create a forest opening to more than 65 percent of the trees to restore oak savanna. Ecological Site Guides, available from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, provide a description of what habitat once resembled and a blueprint of sort for those interested in habitat

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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The shade of trees prohibits the understory growth of many wildlife foods in closed canopy forest.

restoration.

Vegetation consistent with native prairie lays dormant under forest canopy and is quick to respond to sunlight following tree removal. The level and speed of response is directly linked to the amount of thinning and the soil disturbance associated with thinning.

Response of herbaceous vegetation, especially native grasses, is slower when thinning involves high soil disturbance. For instance, recovery of dozed sites is slower than sites treated with herbicides.

Tree removal, whether mechanical or chemical, can be expensive and requires aggressive maintenance. If your treatment involves cutting hardwood trees you will likely need a follow-up treatment of herbicide to control stump sprouting. Aside from controlling stump sprouting, maintaining forest openings/thinning can be best achieved with fire.

For more information on methods and cost-share programs available to improving you forest habitat contact me at (405) 590-2584.■

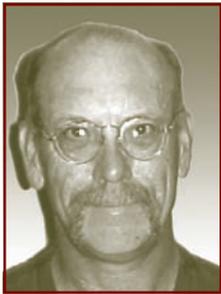
**A healthy balance:
While many people
in eastern Oklahoma
could benefit from
clearing trees, some
areas could use more
cover (see page 5).**



Landowner Spotlight

Steve Nall and Partners Work to Improve Herd and Habitat

By Ian Campbell, Wildlife Technician



Steve Nall has always wanted a place to hunt and recreate with his family and friends so three years ago when

he and two others were given the opportunity to purchase their hunting lease they jumped on it. The Canyon Creek Ranch located in Creek County consists of 1,100 acres with a diverse habitat of oak/hickory forest and tall-grass prairie.

Being familiar with the property, Steve knew there was potential for habitat improvement and began to search out advice and technical assistance from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC), the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Steve enrolled in the ODWC's Deer Management Assistance Program and began to collect spotlight and harvest data on the local deer herd and worked with ODWC biologists to develop harvest goals. Since his enrollment, Steve and his partners have become more selective in their buck harvest and began to harvest more does to improve the herd's sex ratio.

Taking advantage of state and federal habitat programs, Steve and his partners soon started on a number of habitat improvement projects. Within the first year they constructed firebreaks around the property, began clearing eastern red cedars and created numerous food plots. Since then they have also planted mast trees, constructed a wetland and conducted a prescribed burn. Steve thought the burn was one of the most effective management tools they have used.



DMAP participant Steve Nall

“Steve thought the burn was one of the most effective management tools they have used.”

Steve and his partners will run stocker cattle during the summer months in part as a means of habitat manipulation for wildlife. In preparation for running cattle, plans are to fence off riparian areas and some ponds to

maintain and improve water quality and wildlife habitat

While the property continues to be a work-in-progress, Steve has already started seeing the fruits of his labor as sightings of turkey and quail have increased. The dedication and enthusiasm of Steve and his partners to enhancing the local wildlife populations are why they were selected as this issue's outstanding landowners. ■

Dealing with Pond Vermin

By John Stahl, Northwest Region Fisheries Supervisor and Chris Cantellay, Fisheries Technician



A lot of comparisons can be made between farm ponds and a garden. No matter how conscientious you are with your pond, sooner or later you are going to be dealing with farm pond pests. For the

purpose of this article we will be dealing with water snakes, turtles, muskrats, and beavers.

Snakes sure can give us the creeps, but they do not cause any damage to your fish population. They tend to catch only the sick or injured individuals.

If snakes are becoming a problem by trying to get fish off of your line or stringer, there are some control methods. As with all farm pond pests, the animal can be eliminated with firearms. Please make sure to remember to use good common sense and know your background when shooting across or into water. Bullets bounce! Water snakes can also be caught on limb lines baited with small sunfish.

Turtles, like snakes, do not harm your fish. Turtles can be controlled with firearms, limb lines, juglines, and traps. Trapping information is available from the Wildlife Department. Remember, western chicken turtles, map turtles, and alligator snapping turtles are protected.

Muskrat, on the other hand, threaten ponds by burrowing activity. Muskrat burrows can create major leaks in the pond dam and may cause the dam to fail and wash out.

Muskrats are very prolific with a female having two to three litters per year, and

averaging six to eight young per litter. Control can be with firearms and traps.

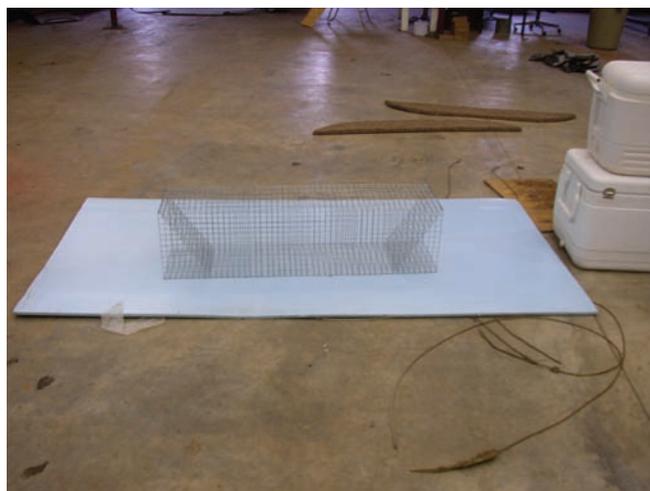
See the photos at right of a colony wire trap, placed in muskrat runs, and a floating bait set, just two of the various types of traps that can be used for population control. Conibear traps are illegal.

Since muskrats are a fur bearer, they can only be taken during their season. The muskrat season runs from December 1st through January 31st. However, a special permit is available from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to take muskrat out of season. The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, (Animal Service) can be contacted to send a professional trapper for nuisance animals: (405) 521-4039.

Beavers are a problem to farm ponds by tree cutting, burrowing, and endangering the dams. Beavers have four to six kits per year and the young stay with the adults for two years. Beavers may be controlled by firearms and trapping. The internet is full of information on leg hold trapping techniques for beavers or, again, you can contract the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture.

Farm ponds are like gardens and all gardens have or, will have, pests. When the problem shows up, handle it. If you wait, you lose. ■

Colony Wire Trap



Floating Bait Set



Forestry Assistance for Private Landowners

By Dan Stidham, Forester, Forestry Services Division, Oklahoma Agriculture, Food and Forestry



Pictured left to right: Mark, Kelly, Janzen, Madison and Monte Matli being recognized as a Forest Steward by John Burwell, Director of Oklahoma Forestry Services. Accompanying Mr. Burwell is Terry Peach, Commissioner and Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

For the past 17 years, the Forestry Services division of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) has helped landowners wanting to improve their property by managing and or planting trees to accomplish their ownership objectives through the Oklahoma Forest Stewardship Program. Forest

Stewardship is offered by Oklahoma Forestry Services to help landowners consider all of the forest and related resources on their lands.

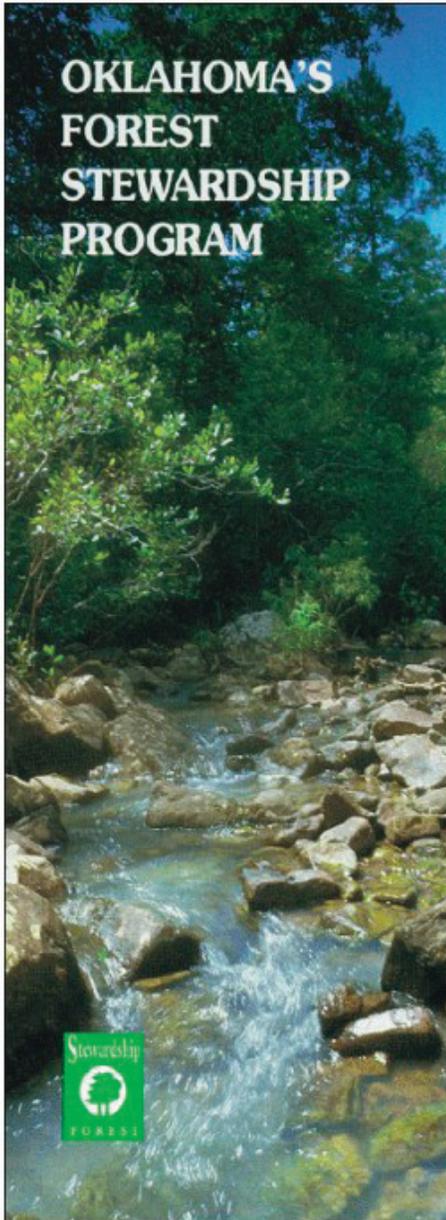
The program helps landowners plant trees and manage forests to meet their ownership objectives which include: controlling soil erosion, improving

wildlife habitat and water quality, protecting crops and livestock, managing their timber assets, and enhancing recreational opportunities. Landowners receive on-site technical assistance from an ODAFF forester and other natural resource professionals to help develop a comprehensive, long-range management plan for their property. After the on-site assistance is complete, the landowner receives a Forest Stewardship plan that addresses the landowner's objectives and the resource needs of the property.

“The program helps landowners plant trees and manage forests to meet their ownership objectives.”

Many landowners choose to implement recommended forest stewardship practices at their own expense. However, limited cost-share assistance may be available for some practices through various federal or state assistance programs. Your local forester can help you determine what financial assistance may be available in your county if you need help. To be eligible for most programs, the landowner must have an approved Stewardship plan that addresses at least two resource objectives, and agree to the terms of the program.

A landowner who successfully implements at least a portion of their Forest Stewardship plan and demonstrates good land management principles is



eligible for recognition as a Forest Steward. Being recognized as a Forest Steward qualifies the landowner to post a Stewardship sign on their property and receive valuable resource materials concerning conservation and management of their lands. One landowner who is an active Steward is Monte Matli who owns land near Enid in Garfield County (see photo, page 5). Mr. Matli has planted hundreds of trees for windbreaks and wildlife habitat, and is confident that he is building a legacy for his children.

Since the inception of the Program, more than 1,600 Forest Stewardship plans have been written and practices implemented on over 330,000 acres across Oklahoma addressing the issues of timber production, soil conservation, water quality and wildlife habitat improvement. The participating landowners have learned about forest resource management, obtained forestry assistance, increased the benefits they received from their lands, and set an example for other landowners and the public. ■

If you are interested in Oklahoma's Forest Stewardship Program and would like to visit with a forester in your area about your ownership objectives, contact the State Forester's office in Oklahoma City at (405) 522-6158.

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. Nowhere else can you receive helpful, in-depth information from experienced biologists and law enforcement officers who work in all corners of the state. With so much knowledge and insight at our disposal, we strive to provide you with information we think you may need. But, sometimes we do not address the management issues you want to know

more about. So 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, provide any comments below and send in your advice to the editor.

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New Subscription

Discontinue

Edge Feathering is for the Birds!

By Eric Bartholomew, Quail Habitat Biologist



When it comes to managing for wildlife there are no silver bullets. However, there are some easy and quick methods of creating instant habitat for wildlife. One such method is called edge feathering.

Typical fields in Oklahoma go from grass or crops straight into mature timber, while this arrangement looks neat and clean, it is hardly wildlife friendly. This is called a hard edge and provides little in the way of low growing shrubby cover that quail and other wildlife feel more safe in. Felling undesirable trees helps to soften the edge making a transition zone from field to woods.

Landowners who have implemented edge feathering, have reported seeing more quail, rabbits, and other wildlife, with near instant results.

HOW TO:

Step 1. If sod-forming grasses (tall fescue, Bermuda grass, etc.) are present, these need to be killed with a contact or grass herbicide. This provides ideal growing conditions for annual food plants and shrubs.



Step 2. Mark the areas you are going to feather, to maximize your habitat potential you need to provide one-tenth to one acre of woody cover for every five to 40 acres of wildlife friendly habitat.

The minimum size for an edge feather should be 30' x 50'. It takes three 30' x 50' blocks to make one-tenth of an acre. Make sure you measure from tree trunk to tree trunk rather than from the dripline. All trees over 15 feet tall should be cut in the feathered area. An occasional mast-producing tree can be left such as oak, persimmon, mulberry, etc. However, leaving too many trees will not let enough light in to allow native grasses and forbs to grow. Leaving native shrubs such as sumac, plum, and dogwoods will only make your feathered edge that much better. Trees can be felled in short blocks or along the entire edge.

Step 3. Gas up your chainsaw and get to work. If possible, leave felled trees where they fall. Edge feathering trees may be dropped parallel to the fence line or field edge or cut and loosely stacked along the edge of the field. Do not push the downed trees



Photos courtesy of Bill White, Missouri Department of Natural Resources

into a pile. This makes the pile predator friendly and not quail friendly.

OPTIONS: It is best to cut your trees in the winter, besides who wants to run a chainsaw in the heat of summer. Spraying the stumps with an approved herbicide prolongs the benefits of edge feathering. If you don't have a chainsaw, a tractor or bobcat with a hydraulic clipper can be used.

MAINTENANCE:

- 1) Excluding livestock will prolong the life of your feathered edge.
- 2) Use herbicides to suppress invasive sod-forming grasses and to control noxious weeds.
- 3) These practices can be expected to last five to ten years. Enhance edge feathering by periodically cutting new areas or by re-cutting old edge feathering that has aged beyond its useful life. ■



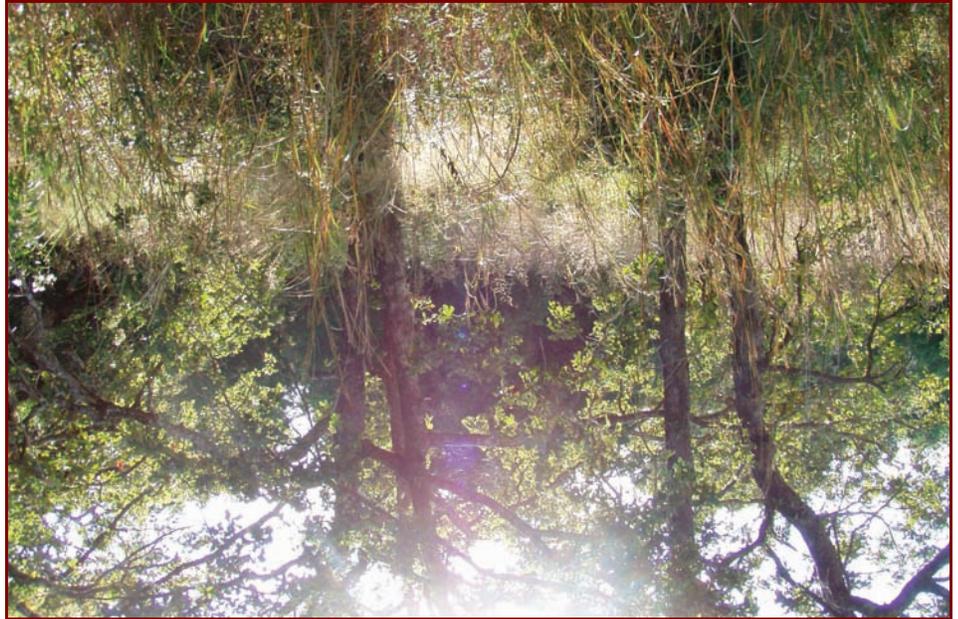


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What's Inside



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