



Your Side of the Fence

Summer 2017

A Publication of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Private Lands Section

Grazing with Wildlife in Mind

By Alva Gregory, Private Lands Habitat Coordinator



Oklahoma's prairies are well-known for their grazing potential. While beef cattle production is the traditional objective for these

rangelands, many producers are now balancing livestock gains with their wildlife interests – especially ground-nesting birds like wild turkey and northern bobwhite.

Fortunately, grazing plans can be designed for these compatible goals. With a little compromise, producers can set stocking rates that still benefit livestock while also leaving adequate habitat for upland game birds. Adhering to a 50 percent utilization goal at the start of the growing season should provide adequate nesting structure, as well as winter cover.

Working with NRCS grazing specialists and Wildlife Department biologists to set moderate stocking rates is the

best way to prepare for the grazing season, but producers can continue their balancing act mid-season by monitoring the amount of grass being consumed.

One way to measure the amount of forage available in a pasture is to clip and weigh a representative 3-foot square area of grass and then using that weight to calculate the amount of forage across the entire pasture. But for time-strapped landowners, a simpler method

exists; one that uses supplies that may already be on-hand.

Two to three cattle panels, t-posts and small pieces of wire are the only requirements for creating a grazing enclosure. This enclosure, or small pen, allows the grass inside the pens to grow without any grazing pressure. An empty hay ring can be easily incorporated into the design, providing a more permanent shape for the enclosure. Producers can then compare the amount of grass growing inside



Alva Gregory/ODWC

Installing a grazing enclosure, or small pen, that allows grass to grow without pressure helps landowners balance livestock grazing needs with wildlife habitat.

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the pen to the amount of grass available to livestock and wildlife.

With this method, management decisions can be made without delay. When the grass growing inside the pen is the same height and density as that growing outside the pen, landowners know they have enough forage for both livestock and wildlife. When the grass inside the pen is twice as tall and dense as that

outside the pen, producers can then begin considering reducing grazing pressure in that pasture.

For smaller pastures, or those uniformly grazed, only a few grazing exclosures may be needed. Consider installing additional exclosures in large pastures, or where heavier grazing pressure occurs year after year. Exclosures should be moved each winter.

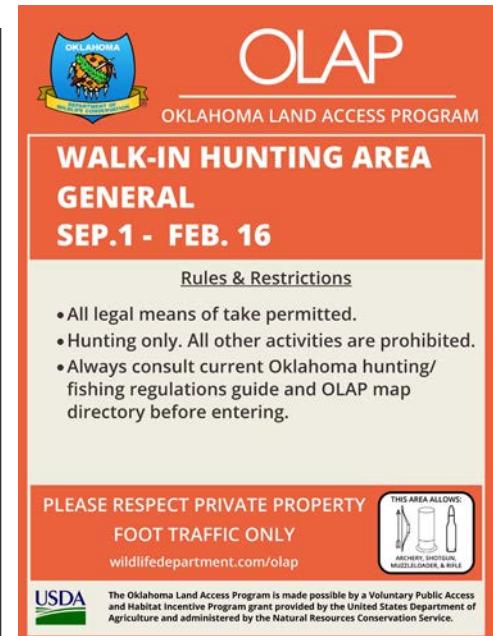
OLAP Creates Opportunities for Landowners and Sportsmen

By Jeff Tibbits, Wildlife Biologist

The Oklahoma Land Access Program is the Wildlife Department's new program that provides financial incentives to landowners that allow public access for hunting, fishing, stream access, and wildlife-viewing on private lands. Landowner payments will vary based on enrolled acres, location, access type, and contract length. Additional compensation will be available for properties enrolled in conservation programs, such as the Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program, and landowners forming cooperatives.

Both privately-owned and leased lands qualify for the program. Ideal properties include CRP-enrolled grassland, native rangeland, weedy crop stubble, forests, wetlands, and wildlife-friendly field buffers. Enrolled property boundaries will be posted with signs.

Enrolled landowners will be accorded limited liability by existing state laws, and Oklahoma state game wardens will periodically patrol OLAP properties. Landowners retain



The sign is orange with white text. At the top is the Oklahoma state crest with "OKLAHOMA" above it. To the right is the acronym "OLAP" in large letters, with "OKLAHOMA LAND ACCESS PROGRAM" in smaller letters below it. A yellow banner across the middle says "WALK-IN HUNTING AREA" in bold letters, with "GENERAL" underneath. Below that is the date "SEP.1 - FEB. 16". At the bottom left is a link "Rules & Restrictions". The main text area lists three rules: "All legal means of take permitted.", "Hunting only. All other activities are prohibited.", and "Always consult current Oklahoma hunting/fishing regulations guide and OLAP map directory before entering." At the bottom right is a small graphic showing a shotgun and a rifle with the text "THIS AREA ALLOWS: ARCHERY, SHOTGUN, MUZZLELOADER, & RIFLE". At the very bottom is the USDA logo and a note: "The Oklahoma Land Access Program is made possible by a Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program grant provided by the United States Department of Agriculture and administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service."

Example OLAP sign.

the right to temporarily deny public access while ranching or agricultural activities are occurring. Public access is limited to foot traffic only; vehicles are prohibited.

Opening September 1, 2017, the OLAP is a great way to earn extra income and support Oklahoma's conservation heritage. Learn more at wildlifedepartment.com/olap or contact Jeff at tibbits@odwc.ok.gov or call (405) 535-7382.



Water Matters

With Habitat, More Is Always Better

By Keith Thomas, Fisheries Biologist



When it comes to adding structure to your pond or lake, more is always better. The amount of material, time and money spent is up to you.

But what should the end product look like? If improving fishing opportunities in your rural pond is the goal, you probably aren't too concerned with the ponds' overall appearance. In this case, the woolier the better! But a clean, well-manicured pond – one without trees, shrubs, weeds or moss sticking out of the water – may be the goal in more urban areas. These differing goals create a dilemma between anglers and non-anglers living in a subdivided neighborhood. Regardless of your location, a healthy fish pond is one that provides adequate habitat.

Habitat is defined as an animal's living requirements and includes water, food, space and shelter. To start, let's describe each component as it pertains to your pond.

Water, I mean good water, is



Shelter, or structure, is an important habitat component for fishing ponds or lakes.

essential to growing a healthy pond. Muddy or stained water really hurts your pond's fish production. Because these murky ponds don't allow sunlight to penetrate the water column and substrate, they won't be able to support a lot of food items. This affects all your primary producers. Suitable pond depths and a clean water source will support your pond's food web. Clean water from run-off, a spring, or creek will help your pond flourish. Street runoff just won't do!

Food is the next important habitat consideration. A healthy, productive pond will supply multiple prey items ranging from primary producers, like phytoplankton, to aquatic insects, to juvenile fish and finally baitfish like minnows.

By making sure your pond has enough natural and artificial cover, the food issue should take care of itself. Adding more minnows or crayfish to your pond is fine, but realize you may just be feeding your big fish a snack!

Space simply refers to how much room the fish have to roam around and live. The more surface acreage your pond or lake has, the more feeding zones, spawning grounds and loafing areas the fish should have. The more space your fish have the larger they can grow, assuming the other habitat components are present. Overstocking a pond creates competition for space, which can stress the fish and make them more susceptible to disease or parasites. The basic

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Brandon Brown/ODWC

Water Matters, cont.

With Habitat, More Is Always Better, cont.

formula for growing healthy fish in a pond or lake is 20 pounds of bass per acre and 100 pounds of sunfish (perch) per acre. Catfish won't factor in to this formula unless they are your main predator species. If they are, substitute the number of bass in the formula with catfish.

Shelter means cover. I always tell landowners wanting to add shelter to their pond that "anything is better than nothing." Artificial structures like tire reefs, wooden pallets, broken concrete, sections of large diameter pipe and PVC trees are all good substitutes. You can construct your own artificial brush piles at low cost. Many home improvement centers or utility companies will sell you scrap or outdated materials at lower prices. There are also several "crappie trees" available on the market if you don't feel like fabricating your own. Artificial habitat is relatively cheap and the materials usually last forever. One important thing to remember - it's a whole lot easier to add structure to a pond when it is low or empty rather than full.

Natural items like cut trees, aquatic plants, gravel piles and dirt mounds all work well for boosting your pond's shelter. They are a little more labor-involved but create plenty of nooks and crannies for aquatic



ODWC

Artificial structures like PVC trees provide great fish habitat.

organisms. Cedar trees are usually plentiful in Oklahoma and work well to create hiding spots for juvenile fish as well as edges for large predators. Aquatic plants are another consideration, if you can find the right species and have a source. Longleaf pondweed, sago pondweed, hornwort and water star-grass are some of the better veggies. In general, allow 20 percent coverage of aquatic plants for

your pond. A word of caution, I would not add any plants to a pond 1 acre in size or smaller. It could easily turn into a jungle.

Now the fun begins! Good luck and remember to bend at the knees. Try to recruit all the helpers that you can - the work will go faster and their payment might just be a chance to wet a line.

Program Spotlight



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Free Habitat Advice from the Wildlife Department

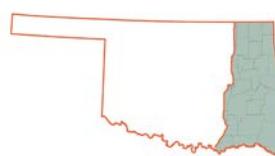
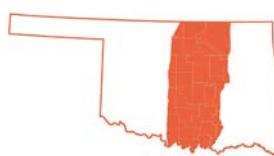
The Wildlife Department's private lands staff is dedicated to helping landowners help wildlife. Our biologists can develop free, customized, management plans to improve habitat for big game, upland game birds, waterfowl, or any of Oklahoma's wildlife species.

Three fulltime biologists are stationed throughout Oklahoma to meet with landowners, discuss habitat goals, and identify management techniques that can be implemented to improve the quality and

quantity of their desired wildlife habitat.

Get tips for managing your wildlife habitat this summer by scheduling a free visit with our private lands staff.

The technical assistance is free, and the opportunities to improve habitat for wildlife are almost endless.



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Tech Note

Edge Feathering of Woodland Borders Benefits Wildlife

By Kyle Johnson, Private Lands Biologist



The borders or edges between a forest and grassland or forest and agricultural field have incredible potential for wildlife. But this doesn't just apply to

large forest areas. The borders of tree rows and smaller woodland patches also have almost endless habitat potential as well. For land managers looking to enhance wildlife habitat, edge feathering is an option that can benefit white-tailed deer, wild turkey, northern bobwhite and numerous nongame species.

The value of edge habitat for wildlife has been advocated for many years, but these transitions between two habitat types are not always suitable for quail and other species. All too often, the borders that exist between grasslands and woodlands or croplands and woodlands are abrupt and lack the diversity required to attract and hold wildlife. In most natural situations, the transition from one habitat type to another is gradual and contains a diverse mix of both habitat types. The



Kyle Johnson/ODWC

When croplands abruptly meet forested areas, habitat for quail and other wildlife is minimal. Woodland borders like this can be greatly enhanced through edge feathering practices.

edge width, as well as the mixture and height of plants, play a large part in whether the edge is wildlife-friendly or not. Edges with a natural transition can often be 150-foot wide or more with a subtle change from grasses and weeds to shrubs to short trees and eventually mature timber. Abrupt forest edges, whether adjacent to grassland or cropland, can still be attractive to many species, but a well-feathered edge can provide year-round use and even be a focal point in a species' home range.

Several edge feathering techniques are available. Extensive areas of forest can be thinned at varying levels to create a soft, feathered habitat transition. For example, the outer portion of the forest immediately adjacent to the grassland or cropland can be aggressively thinned with at least 75 percent of the trees removed. The thinning gradually decreases to 50 percent and 25 percent as the unthinned forest is reached. If each thinning zone is 50 feet wide, the total edge habitat created would be 150 feet.

Edge Feathering by Thinning



Figure adapted from Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

For properties with small patches of timber or narrow tree rows, a combination of natural revegetation and planting may be best suited to enhance the edge. Grasses and forbs could dominate the outer portion, with shrubs planted within the interior and short-stature trees adjacent to the mature timber.

Species such as blackberry, sand plum, sumac, and dogwood are excellent for the shrub zone while Osage orange, persimmon, redbud, gum bully, and chokecherry are great for planting adjacent to the mature timber. Although the edge width can vary, feathered edges which are too narrow may have little

impact on quail and other species. As a result, edges of at least 50 feet wide are recommended and larger is better.

Edge Feathering by Planting

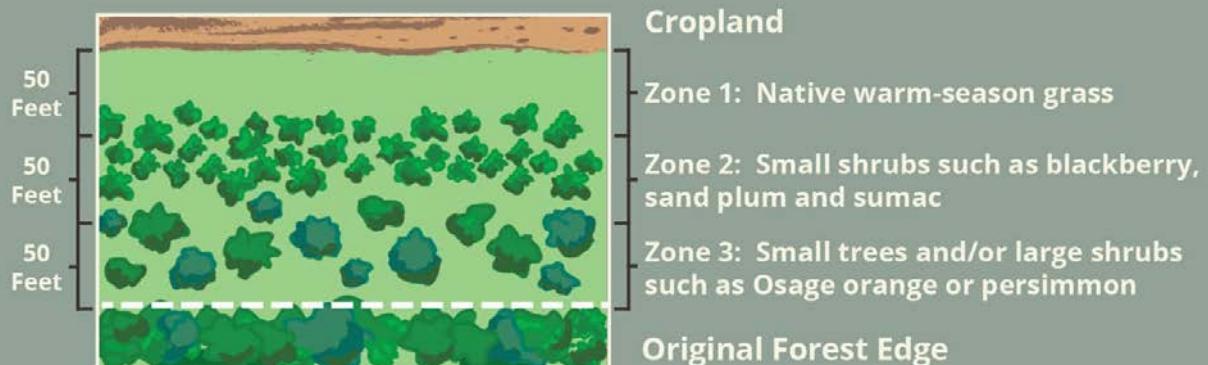


Figure adapted from Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources



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