

# Oklahoma Wildlife Action Plan

## What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

## Oklahoma snapshot

**Landscape:** Oklahoma has the greatest biological and ecological diversity of any inland state. Its plant communities range from Bald Cypress swamps in the southeast to the vegetation of the Rocky Mountain foothills in the far northwest. The variety in between includes prairies, shrublands and forests.

**Management:** Nearly 97 percent of Oklahoma's landscape is privately owned. A key component for successful wildlife conservation lies in partnerships between landowners and conservation agencies.

**Wildlife highlights:** Existing native habitats support locally healthy populations of migrating shorebirds and songbirds, such as Oklahoma's state bird, the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. The eastern forests of Oklahoma support rich communities of songbirds, salamanders and bats. Oklahoma's rivers support an impressive diversity of fish and fresh-

water mussels unique to eastern regions of the country. In the prairies of western Oklahoma, globally rare species are found, such as the Texas Horned Lizard,



Watching wildlife in Oklahoma/ODWC

Loggerhead Shrike, Swift Fox and other prairie icons like the Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Long-billed Curlew and Lesser Prairie Chicken.

## Oklahoma's planning approach

Oklahoma's Wildlife Action Plan is a guide and planning resource to conserve Oklahoma's wildlife and habitats. It applies a habitat-based approach to address the state's 240 priority wildlife species. The document divides the state into six ecological regions and 22 habitat-types. It covers important conservation issues, recommends conservation actions, and identifies

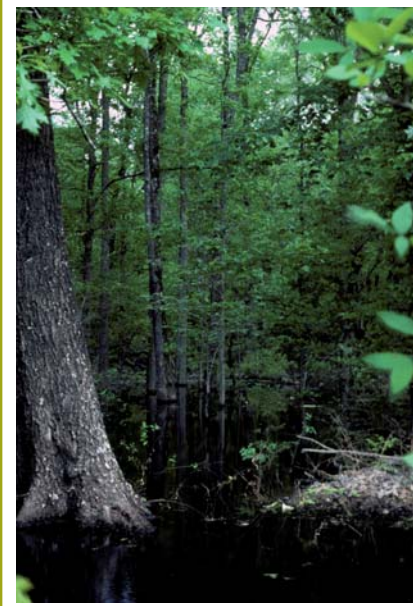
*"Oklahoma's Wildlife Action Plan is not about regulations. It is about innovate and positive ways to conserve wildlife and natural places to pass a healthy wildlife legacy to future generations."*

*– Greg Duffy, Director, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation*



Juvenile Texas Horned Lizard/ODWC

potential conservation partners in each region. By focusing on the health of Oklahoma's natural areas, actions may benefit multiple wildlife species before their populations become more rare and more costly to protect.



Bottomland hardwood forest/ODWC

## Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Oklahoma

Oklahoma's Wildlife Action Plan reveals five recurring conservation issues:

**Information Gaps:** Inadequate information exists in Oklahoma about the historic distributions, acreages or population sizes of most

habitats/communities; there is incomplete information regarding the current acreage, condition and distribution of these communities, as well as incomplete information about many of the rare species within them.

### Habitat conversions:

Large percentages of local prairies, woodlands and bottomland forest landscapes have been converted to crop fields or to pastures of non-native grasses such as Bermuda

and tall fescue. In some areas, forests and woodlands of diverse structure and species composition have been converted to even-age forests or pine plantations.

**Water degradation and flow alteration:** Many aquatic and riparian communities have been altered by changes in flow patterns and diminished water quantity as a result of the construction of impoundments and the clearing / development of riparian zones and flood plains. Additionally, increasing human demand for water, both from within and outside of the state, affect these habitats and the wildlife communities they support.

**Fire suppression:** A reduction in periodic fires has negatively affected woodlands, prairies and shrublands across the state. Tree densities have greatly increased within woodlands, and prairies and shrublands have ex-



Prairie dogs/ODWC

Wildlife group	Total number of species	Species of greatest conservation need	Threatened/ endangered species
Freshwater mussels	54	24	4
Crayfish	27	7	1
Insects	15,000-18,000	15	1
Fish	179	51	6
Amphibians	52	15	0
Reptiles	82	23	1
Birds	389	73	6
Mammals	106	26	3
<b>Totals</b>		<b>234</b>	<b>22</b>

### Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Shortgrass Prairie</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burrowing Owl</li> <li>• Scaled Quail</li> <li>• Texas Horned Lizard</li> <li>• Swift Fox</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habitat Conversion</li> <li>• Landowner Partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convert existing Conservation Reserve Program fields to native prairie grasses.</li> <li>• Develop conservation easements, landowner incentive programs or tax incentives</li> </ul>
<b>Bottomland Hardwood Forest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prothonotary Warbler</li> <li>• Red-headed Woodpecker</li> <li>• Ouachita Map Turtle</li> <li>• Northern Pintail</li> <li>• River Otter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Gaps</li> <li>• Landowner Partnerships</li> <li>• Habitat Conversion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop current and accurate assessment of acreage, distribution and condition of habitat</li> <li>• Maintain/restore habitat through conservation easements</li> <li>• Develop habitat corridors to connect disjunct tracts of bottomland forest to important upland forest</li> </ul>
<b>Gravel-bottom Streams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peregrine Falcon</li> <li>• Kentucky Warbler</li> <li>• Orange-bellied Darter</li> <li>• Kiamichi Crayfish</li> <li>• Neosho Madtom</li> <li>• Mississippi Map Turtle</li> <li>• Swamp Rabbit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Gaps</li> <li>• Habitat Conversion</li> <li>• Landowner Partnerships</li> <li>• Diminished Water Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess current biological communities (fish, crayfish, mussels)</li> <li>• Provide technical and financial assistance to landowners to restore riparian vegetation and sloped banks</li> <li>• Remove or rehabilitate road crossings with new structures that allow movement of fish</li> </ul>
<b>Shortleaf Pine/Oak Woodland and Savannah</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prairie Warbler</li> <li>• N. Bobwhite Quail</li> <li>• Whip-poor-will</li> <li>• Long-tailed Weasel</li> <li>• N. Long-eared Myotis Bat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire Suppression</li> <li>• Landowner Partnerships</li> <li>• Habitat Conversion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study historic fire regimes to use prescribed fire to restore/maintain habitat</li> <li>• Encourage landowners to use prescribed burning as a tool</li> <li>• Develop programs to restore/maintain large tracts of habitat.</li> </ul>

### Recommended actions to conserve Oklahoma’s wildlife

perienced a dramatic increase in Eastern Redcedar to the point of invasiveness.

#### Landowner partnerships and education:

Greater incentives and more accurate information are needed to encourage private landowners to restore native communities. Farm Bill programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program have failed to restore native communities and have actually increased the planting of non-native and invasive



Yellowlegs/ODWC

*“We are looking at Oklahoma’s Wildlife Action Plan and subsequent funding as the key to our future success as stewards and caretakers of Oklahoma’s wildlife.”*

*– Greg Duffy, Director  
Oklahoma Department  
of Wildlife Conservation*

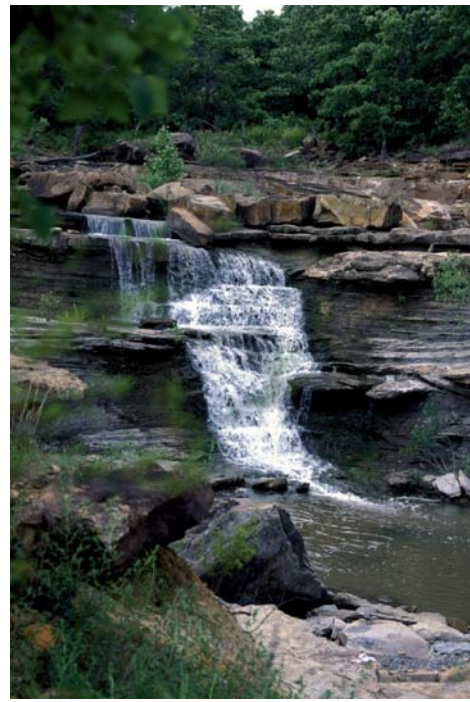
species. Restoration and enhancement of riparian habitats and wetlands has been a difficult sell with landowners. Landowners recognize the need for increased burning, but are faced with liability concerns. In addition, the biological affects of prescribed burning on rare species is still poorly understood by biologists.

## **Working together for Oklahoma’s wildlife**

Diverse interests developed this plan including wildlife professionals, academic professionals, farm organizations, utility companies, sportsmen’s groups, conservation educators, conservation NGOs, public land managers, Indian tribal members and members of the public.

An Advisory Committee represented 32 Oklahoma organizations. A technical group of nearly 400 individuals and members of the public provided additional input. A two-day workshop brought the technical group and public citizens together to lay the framework for the plan’s creation. Attendees reviewed a list of wildlife-in-need and identified regional conservation issues and actions. To encourage additional public participation, the state held two rounds of five regional meetings, both at the start and at the

end of the document’s development. All committee members and the public had an opportunity to review the document’s final version.



Gravel bottom stream/ODWC

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