



Wildlife Department Developing Walk-In Hunting/Fishing Program

By Doug Schoeling, Private Lands Biologist



Many of you may know that Oklahoma is a private land state; in fact it is over 95% privately owned. For the sportsmen of Oklahoma

this can be challenging when trying to locate a place to hunt. According to the annual Game Harvest Survey conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC), one of the top reasons people don't hunt is simply because they don't have a place to go. This is very concerning to me since we are funded by sportsmen and sportswomen who purchase hunting and fishing licenses and from an excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment.

Since the wildlife department would like to increase the number of hunters and anglers in Oklahoma we need to provide additional places for people to hunt and fish. A tremendous opportunity to increase the amount of land available to the public was afforded to ODWC when the 2014 Farm Bill provided money for states and tribes to provide public access on private lands. ODWC seized that opportunity to submit a proposal for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Voluntary Public Access - Habitat Improvement Program (VPA-HIP),

and were successful: our proposal was one of several state proposals approved by the NRCS, and we were awarded \$2,264,877 to begin developing and implementing a program that will allow access for hunters and anglers to private land across the state.

The ODWC is in the very early stages of developing this program, but with the great success that a walk in hunting program has had in neighboring Kansas, ODWC is confident that we can create a similar program with similar success. ODWC plans to lease private property across the state (with hopes of having lands available beginning with the 2016 fall hunting season). We plan to target areas close to major metropolitan areas and also areas which will provide opportunity to pursue species that reside primarily on private lands. ODWC is already trying to provide more opportunity for fishing access in areas "close to home", and this program will complement that effort with additional fishing as well as hunting access. This will be a "walk in only" program, so people will park along the road or in designated parking areas and

access these areas by foot. Anyone who uses these areas will be required to obtain a special permit in addition to a valid hunting and fishing license. Although we are still not ready to start signing leases, if you are (or think you might



The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation was recently awarded a grant to develop a program allowing access for hunters and anglers to private land across the state.

be) interested in leasing your property to ODWC for this program, you can contact Russ Horton at (405) 202-5901 or russ.horton@odwc.ok.gov. He will be glad to visit with you about the program and add your name to a contacts list. Once we begin leasing properties for this program, you will be contacted.



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