

Registry News

2001 Issue

The Nature Conservancy®

OKLAHOMA CHAPTER
Saving the Last Great Places



From the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program

LAND OWNERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

The focus of this 2001 issue of the Registry News is the variety of people that makes the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program a success. This includes Nature Conservancy staff, scientists with the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory, staff at the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, and most importantly the private and public landowners of Oklahoma who are voluntarily protecting rare, threatened, and/or endangered species and communities. The landowners are crucial to the success of the Registry Program.

In the following pages there are interviews with some Registry participants. Along with these interviews, there are articles about the Registry sites that were added to the program during the year 2000. We are also featuring a reprint of an article about the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program from the Tulsa World newspaper.

Our newest Registry sites include excellent examples of the Crosstimbers, wetland communities, a gypsum cave system, bottomland forest and a site with three state rare plants and an interesting history.

Our cover features elements of western Oklahoma found at the Selman Living Laboratory. This new Registry site is not only a protected site for a variety of bat species and the gypsum grassland that characterizes the site, it is also an ecological laboratory for the science students of the University of Central Oklahoma.

As we continue our quest to find and protect key natural areas around the state we look forward to meeting new landowners. We also look forward each year to recontacting our current Registrants. After all, it is the landowner who makes the true difference in protecting Oklahoma's natural diversity and heritage through the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program.

<i>New sites:</i>	<i>Registered</i>	<i>Size</i>
Lake Texoma	12-99	158 acres
Bearcat Glen	07-00	5 acres
Sandhill	04-00	70 acres
Sundown	10-00	60 acres
Maggie's Place	11-00	189 acres
Watermill	06-00	80 acres
Selman	05-00	320 acres



Bill and Joann Sala.



Perry and Leona Michaelis.



John Busch and Registry representative Kim Shannon.

WATER MILL ACRES

80 acres

McCurtain County

This site is important both from a biological standpoint and historically. Water Mill Acres is home to at least three species of state rare plants including the Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), Thread-leaf bladderpod (*Lesquerella angustifolia*) and Barbara's buttons (*Marshallia caespitosa*). Golden Glade cress (*Leavenworthia aurea*) is also known to occur on the property. The site is a combination of hardwood forest, open glades with exposed limestone, and occasional seeps. This diversity of natural community types is what supports such a variety of state rare plants.

Historically, the site was first used by Caddo Indians. The site was marked with a State Historical Marker sign for many years that told of the visit to this site in 1819 by the well-known naturalist Thomas Nuttall.

In the 1820s a gristmill began operating on the site. The mill, which still sits along Clear Creek, played an integral part in the lives of southeastern Oklahomans both as a grinding facility and for the social opportunities it offered for those who used it. The mill worked continuously, grinding wheat and corn, from the 1820s to 1936. It was rebuilt after a fire in 1936 and reopened from 1937 to 1944.

After the gristmill was closed in 1944 it was used as a recreational area for swimming, picnics, and fishing. It was closed for swimming in 1962. Although the mill is worn and unused today, it is still a site of many memories that is frequented by former area residents and artists.

The site is currently owned by Ann Dorries, who, with her late husband, acquired the property in 1986. She registered the site in April 2000.



The Red buckeye is often called Firecracker plant due to its red flowers.



The 1820s gristmill which sits on Clear Creek.

LAKE TEXOMA FOREST

158 acres

Marshall County

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the Lake Texoma project office became members of the Registry program this year. While the Corps owns and manages 103,000 acres around Lake Texoma this Registry site covers an important site of 158 acres near Woodville, Oklahoma.

This site offers an excellent example of a Crosstimbers forest community located on rolling upland adjoining Lake Texoma. On this site, tree cutting, other than poaching, has probably not occurred since 1940 when Lake Texoma Denison Dam was completed. Tree species on the site include Post oak, Cedar elm, Chittamwood, Viburnum, and Redbud with Post oak (*Quercus stellata*), Shumard oak (*Q. shumardii*), and Black hickory (*Carya texana*) being the dominants on the site. Along the slopes are openings that are dominated by Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*).

Three of the new Registry sites for 2000 are located in the Crosstimbers ecoregion that spans the central part of the state (see the map on the back page). While the Crosstimbers is very extensive across Oklahoma and into Texas, it is often difficult to find good examples of the



Oaks dominate this Crosstimbers forest.

forest communities of this ecoregion that have not been logged or cleared for development or agricultural purposes. So when new Crosstimbers sites are found that meet the criteria of the Registry program, we are especially pleased to add them to our list of protected Oklahoma sites.



This Crosstimbers forest is located near the Alberta Creek Resort, which is southeast of Kingston, Oklahoma.

SELMAN CAVE SYSTEM

320 acres

Woodward County

The gypsum caves of western Oklahoma are important habitat for many animals. The Selman Cave System is important for the Cave myotis (*Myotis velifer*), Western big-eared bat (*Plecotus townsendii pallescens*), Eastern pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus subflavus*), the Big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*), and the Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), to name a few.

The cave is used by these bats for hibernation, mating, and as maternity colonies. Other animal species that inhabit or use the cave include tiger salamanders, frogs, cave crickets and some larger mammals such as raccoons and bobcats.

The cave system itself is an extensive gypsum cave system consisting of numerous openings and more than 5,000 feet of passageway.

The University of Central Oklahoma owns this property and uses it as a field station and research site. The Selman Living Laboratory promotes research and education in the biology of western ecosystems, cave biology, astronomy and archeology through hands-on experience.

Numerous research projects are being conducted onsite within the cave ecosystem and many other research and educational opportunities abound on this site.



The Sand lily (*Mentzelia-sp.*) is a common plant in Oklahoma. The Cheyenne and Dakota Indians held it in high regard for its healing powers.



Mrs. Selman, left, donated hundreds of acres to help establish the Selman Living Laboratory. Above, one of the many cave entrances to the Selman gypsum cave system.



CEDAR CREEK

Tishomingo

Thomas and Vera Taylor

Thomas and Vera have been in the Registry Program since 1990. Their property contains Cedar Creek, which provides habitat for the Seaside alder (*Alnus maritima*). In 1990 when Melissa Shackford first contacted the Taylors regarding the Seaside alder, Mrs. Taylor's response was "What took you so long"! She had known about the Seaside alder for over 30 years. Mrs. Taylor thinks the program is "wonderful!" and she shares her newsletters and magazines with the local middle school. She "treasures" the certificate and enjoys showing it to folks that visit.

Mrs. Taylor was born three miles from where she is living and is one of six kids. She's the only one that didn't move away - she loves living in the country. Her father moved the family to Tishomingo so they could attend Murray School. Murray School was still an Indian school and those who weren't Indian paid to attend school there. Murray School is now known as Murray State College. Mr. Taylor was born in Clarita, Oklahoma, and also attended Murray School before he was sent to stay with his mother and younger sibling so he could help them out while his father worked. Thomas and Vera met at Murray School in 1925.

Mr. Taylor bought their property in 1955 and built the house in 1957. It was in 1957 when Mrs. Taylor first discovered the Seaside alder. She first found the trees at Devil's Den back when it was open to the public. The family went swimming there just about every day. They met some interesting families there. While swimming at Devil's Den she would see this tree that produced catkins during part of the year and cones the rest of the year. She wondered what the tree was, and the search was on.

For ten cents she bought the book *Trees of Oklahoma* and looked through it until she found the Seaside alder. She was just thrilled to know such an unusual and rare tree was found in Oklahoma, where she lived!

Mrs. Taylor was then on a mission to let other folks in the area know about the unique Seaside alder. She purchased several copies of *Trees of Oklahoma* and put copies in the area libraries and 4-H Clubs. As part of her job with the County Extension Office she set up educational programs for county extension clubs and 4-H Clubs in Johnston County. As she says "I preached it all over the county because the kids needed to know about the special tree."

Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Taylor for being in the Registry Program!



Vera and Thomas Taylor



The Seaside alder is a shrub or small tree that is found in only two counties in southern Oklahoma. It is easily identified by its small cones that often persist through the winter. It is listed as a rare plant due to its very limited distribution in Oklahoma.

MAGGIE'S PLACE

189 acres
Creek County

Nestled in the hills of central Creek county is a classic example of Oklahoma's largest ecosystem, the Crosstimbers.

The site is owned by Dan and Mary Beirute. They purchased the property about three and a half years ago in order to have a place of their own to hike around. As Mary plainly put it, "we love land." Initially Dan and Mary had plans to build on their site, but for now they just love knowing that they have a piece of the outdoors that they can call their own and visit often.

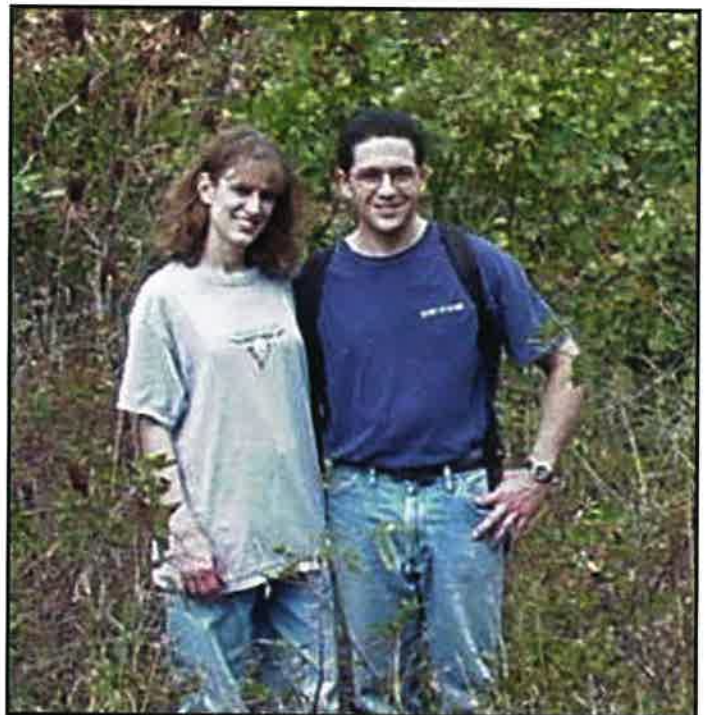
And it's a beautiful representative of the outdoors, too. There are two creeks that run through the property. Along the rocky creek banks are concentrations of old trees, the reigning "Kings of the Crosstimbers," Post oak (*Quercus stellata*) and Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*).

The cedars are of particular interest because they are found in greatest concentrations on the property right where they should naturally occur; along rocky creek banks and bluffs instead of scattered throughout the site as weedy invaders. The cedars have been kept under control due to the occasional presence of fire. Many of the Post oaks on the property have the potential to be very old. We hope to have many of the trees dated in the future.

The Beirute's site also offers important habitat for many kinds of wildlife including whitetail deer, lizards, numerous species of birds, coyotes, turtles and many others.



Sandstone ridges, bluffs and creek beds are the areas where most of the older cedars are found at this site.



Mary and Dan Beirute.

CHECK OUT THE REGISTRY PROGRAM ON THE
OKLAHOMA CHAPTER WEBSITE:
WWW.TNC.ORG/OKLAHOMA

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY REGISTRY PROGRAM

Article published October 21, 2000
in *The Tulsa World*

Written by Shaun Schafer, World Staff Writer

The Registry Program and the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy have been fortunate to find a new friend in Shaun Schafer. Shaun accompanied us for a day to a variety of sites for their annual site visits. His enthusiasm during our trip is reflected in his wonderful article that we have reprinted for you.

The Humphrey Prairie is a drop of green in a sea of gold. In the monoculture of wheat farming and cattle ranching, this 160-acre plot in northern Oklahoma's Garfield County easily gets lost. Approaching it from a county road on a summer day, it's notable for the wispy, green grasses and stunted shrubbery in the middle of the wheat belt.

In the eyes of conservationists, however, this small site is just as valuable as the crops that surround it. Rare prairie grasses thrive on the patch, said Kim Shannon, botanist for The Nature Conservancy.

The Humphreys, a father and three daughters, signed the field up for the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program as a way to preserve species that they were surprised to find living there, said Holly Farris Erwin, who oversees the Registry Program along with Shannon.

Finding something unusual on what would seem otherwise pedestrian is a common story among the 52 Registry sites in the state, Farris Erwin said.

"A lot didn't know they had something special until we contacted them," Farris Erwin said. "These properties all have a state rare, threatened or endangered species" living there.

Funded by the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation and administered by the Oklahoma chapter of The Nature Conservancy, the Registry represents a citizen-based attempt to preserve Oklahoma-native plants and animals threatened with extinction.

Created by the Legislature in 1984, the program relies on private landowners to voluntarily protect areas with unique natural features. Potential Registry sites may be recommended by any interested individual or organization. Scientists with the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory then evaluate a site to determine if it is appropriate for the Registry.

Once approved, registrants sign a nonbinding

To, Kim, thanks for everything!
Shaun Schafer



Shaun Schafer of the Tulsa World.

agreement that reflects their commitment to protect the area and notify The Nature Conservancy of any changes in land use or ownership.

Unlike other conservation efforts, the Registry is a low-profile program. Registration is only publicized with the landowner's permission. Directions to the site are not published and registration provides no public access and use. Other than an 11-inch by 11-inch sign marking the property as part of the Registry, and maybe some advice on managing the land, the sites are essentially left alone, Shannon said.

Most often, landowners simply have something on the property that they want to protect, Farris Erwin said.

"Some are just avid supporters" of conservation efforts, Shannon said. "They just happen to qualify for the Registry Program."

Currently, 18,372 acres are enrolled in the Registry Program. As part of the Registry, Shannon and Farris Erwin attempt to visit every property annually, Shannon said. Most of those check-ups come between April and June, she said. A recent trip to sites in Garfield and Major counties provided a chance to show off some of the state's diversity, even in a small area.

After checking the prairie, the duo visited the Vickery bat cave in the Glass Mountains and checked a burgeoning prairie dog town nearby. Like the prairie,

both are sites that passers-by often miss, but they contain some exceptional items.

A yawning, black cavity in a wall of gypsum, the cave is home to about two million Mexican freetail bats. Vickery, one of several caves on the property of Mark Whitlaw, serves as a nursery cave each spring and summer. Female bats raise their pups there before going south to winter.

“Come August, it takes hours to empty the cave, Shannon said. “It’s amazing at about sunset.”

On another ranch, not far from the cave, is the growing community of the Houk Prairie Dog Town. The property, in Major County, is owned by Eric Helveston of Broken Arrow.

Black-tailed prairie dog populations once covered millions of acres in Oklahoma. Today they are found in a variety of small sites, including this community on a 73-acre plot. In 1999, at least 100 family units were busy burrowing into a hillside on the site, Farris Erwin said.

The prairie dogs evidently have been busy. Hearty eaters of grasses and flowers, prairie dogs whittle the vegetation down to their scale. Plants quickly adapt to the rodents. On this hillside, Mexican hat flowers that would normally bloom two to two and a half feet above the ground readily flower on two to three-inch stems.

Chipping and chirping, the prairie dogs scamper to their burrows as The Nature Conservancy vehicle arrives. Using binoculars, Shannon and Farris Erwin scan from one red dirt pile to the next.

“Look, they’ve gone across the road,” Farris Erwin said, pointing to the other side of the dirt road.

In the piles of dirt past the end of her finger, a solitary prairie dog crouches. The prairie dog makes a few hiccupping barks before descending into its own home.

“They’ve definitely gotten bigger,” she said of the community.

In the past 12 months, the registry has added four sites and 633 acres to the Registry. For more information on the Registry Program or to suggest a registrant, contact Shannon at the conservancy’s Tulsa office, 585-1117 or Farris Erwin at Pontotoc Ridge, (580) 777-2224.



Most of the plants found close to the prairie dog's burrows are unusually short due to their constant foraging. While this sunflower called Mexican Hat should normally be about 18" tall, it has adapted to life with the prairie dogs and flowers when it is only a few inches tall.



Shaun Schafer, World staff writer, can be reached at 581-8320 or via email at shaun.schafer@tulsaworld.com

Article Sources:

Valliant Telephone Company phone book, 1986; Front cover story about Clear Creek Water Mill.

Website: University of Central Oklahoma, Department of Biology, Selman Laboratory; <http://biology.ucok.edu/SelmanLL/Selmanindex.htm>

Website: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Tulsa Ecological Services Field office; <http://fw2es.fws.gov/Oklahoma/default.ht>

Personal communications with Shirley Day, Mary Beirute and Vera Taylor. The Tulsa World.

SUNDOWN WETLAND REFUGE

60 acres

Pittsburg County

This newly registered site is in western Pittsburg County. The wetland sits within a large cattle ranch operation. The wetland itself consists of a 40-acre pond and its surrounding vegetation. It is fenced off to keep

the cattle out of this relatively sensitive area. The wetland offers important habitat for migrating waterfowl and roosting habitat for Bald Eagles.

This wetland site is protected not only by the landowner and the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program, but also by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1998 the pond was restored with assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. Under this program the dam was rebuilt and upgraded to ensure that habitat for fish, birds and mammals would not be degraded or eventually lost.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program was started in Oklahoma in 1990. The PFW provides technical and financial assistance for the restoration and enhancement of important fish and wildlife habitat on private lands. Since 1990, the PFW, in cooperation with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, various County Conservation Districts, OSU Cooperative Extension Service, corporations, conservation organizations and many conservation oriented individuals, has restored or enhanced more than 16,795 acres of



Sundown's 40-acre wetland was restored with assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



The northeast end of Sundown wetland is a favorite spot for many species of waterfowl.

wildlife habitat, including more than 9,400 acres of wetland habitat. Projects are located statewide in nearly every county, totaling over 300 sites.

Since 1993, the PFW has also been involved in developing Outdoor Environmental Classroom projects statewide.

The Registry Program is always glad to work with other agencies such as the Fish and Wildlife Service. We feel that our two programs complement each other well.

SANDHILL

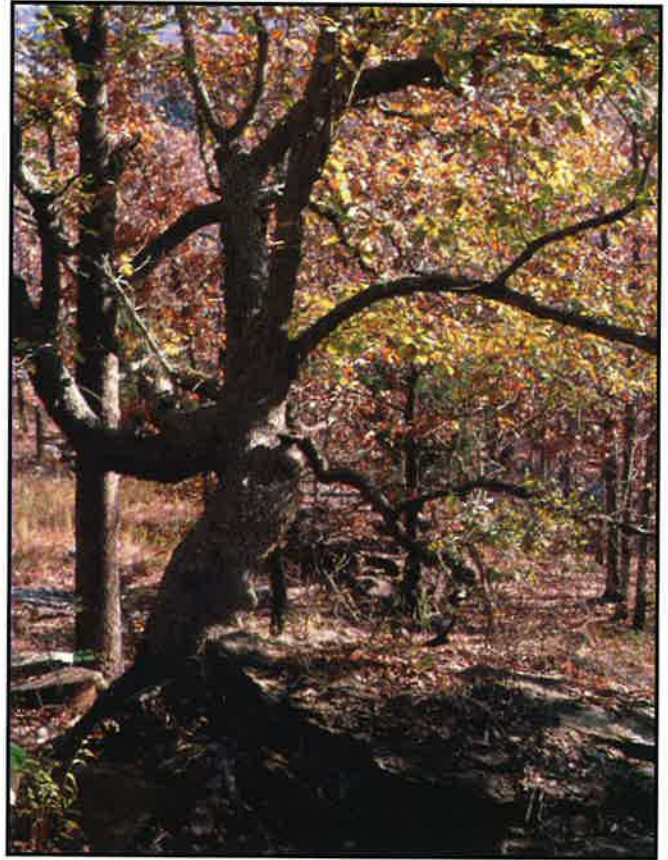
80 Acres

Wagoner County

George and Shirley Day registered their property in order to protect the abundant wildlife that depends upon the natural habitat their land provides. Their site consists of bottomland hardwood forest and a wetland that is fed year-round by two springs. Their registered property is adjacent to another piece of property they have owned for many years.

Along with providing food, water and shelter to the native birds and animals of the area, their property is also home to a few more unusual animals. For many years the Days have raised exotic animals. They have had burros, emus, potbelly pigs and others. At this time, they have only a few of the original animals left. As Shirley said, "just the old fellows are left, those that we promised a home to from the start." One such animal is Lucy, a burro that acts more like a dog than anything else.

George and Shirley recently built a home on their property, and they enjoy getting to see the many birds and wildlife every day. Shirley recently said that they could never live "in town," because they know there are too many natural features that need protecting. She feels that they are doing their part to help conserve Oklahoma by living in a rural setting to help ensure that their natural habitat is not developed.



Older oaks tend to have fewer branches. Their tops have usually been broken out by wind or weather events, and the bark on these older trees is usually twisted.

BEARCAT GLEN

5 Acres

Parson County

Heath and Andrea Henry's Bearcat Glen, while only a few acres in size, is ecologically significant for its old-growth Oak forest, primarily Post oak and Blackjack oak.

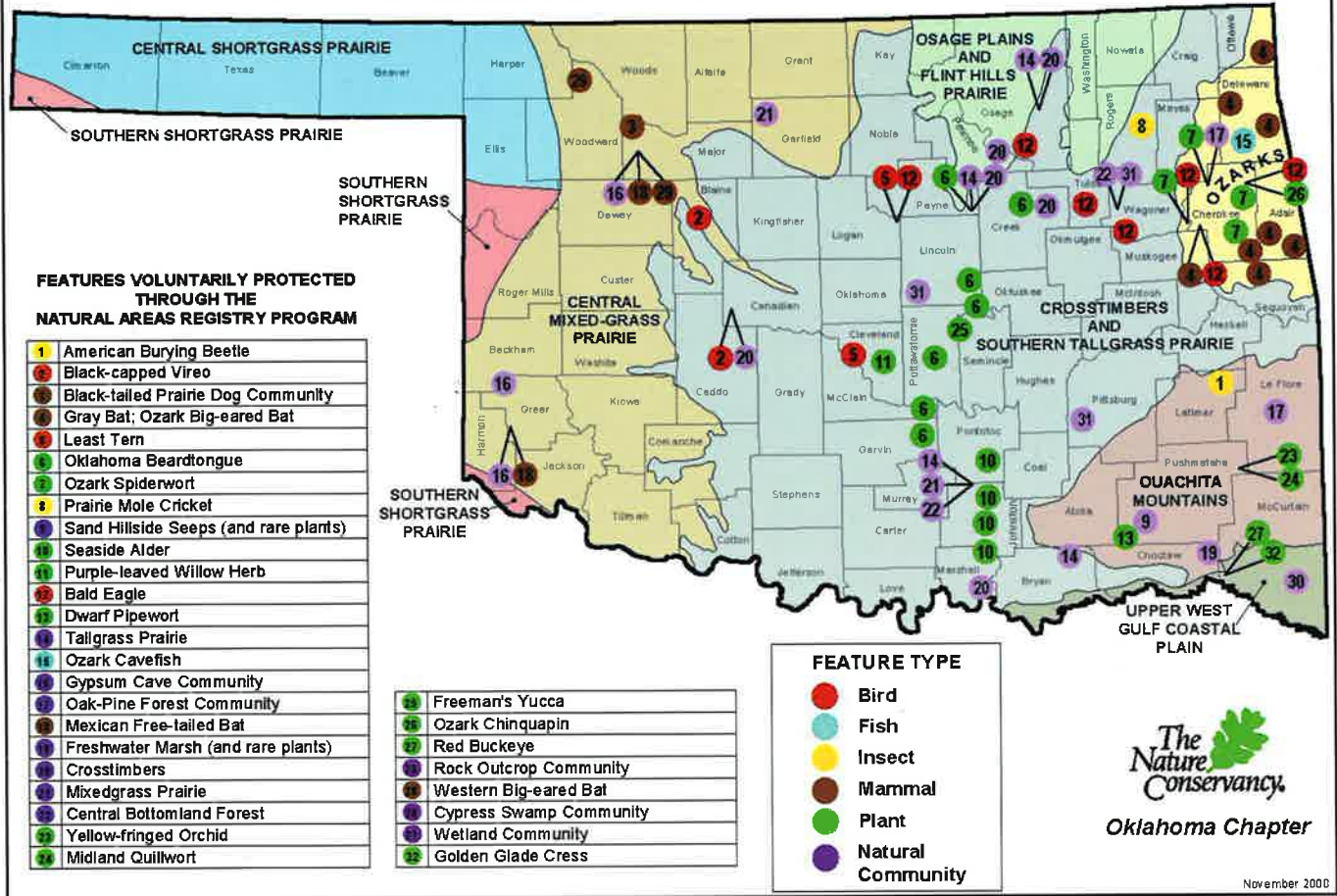
The rugged terrain of their property has undoubtedly prevented any farming, tree cutting or development in the past. The current forest is in an undisturbed state and includes numerous trees that would age at more than 200 years. The topography is unique and provides for a number of flat shelves that tend to be more open and glade-like.

We are glad to have the Henrys and their Crosstimbers property as members of the Registry Program.



Shirley Day, far right, and her family enjoy regularly exploring the great outdoors.

**REGISTERED SITES
OF THE
OKLAHOMA NATURAL AREAS REGISTRY PROGRAM**



This map shows the general location of Registry sites across Oklahoma. The newest sites are located in Creek, Marshall, McCurtain, Pawnee, Pittsburg, Wagoner and Woodward counties.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

NEED MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE OKLAHOMA NATURAL AREAS REGISTRY PROGRAM?

YOU CAN CONTACT US AT:

OKLAHOMA NATURAL AREAS REGISTRY PROGRAM

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, OKLAHOMA CHAPTER

Oklahoma Field Office
2727 East 21st Street, Suite 102
Tulsa, OK 74114
Phone: (918) 585-1117
Fax: (918) 585-2383

Pontotoc Ridge Preserve
Route 2 Box 72 B
Stonewall, OK 74871
Phone: (580) 777-2224
Fax: Same as above

Free Registry boundary signs are available for all Registry participants. They can be obtained through an Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program representative. The signs measure approximately 11" x 11" and are made of white plastic with green lettering, like the one shown. If you would like signs for your property, please call either of the numbers above.

Articles in this issue of Registry News were compiled and written by Kim Shannon and Holly Farris Erwin.

