

2002 Edition

# Registry News

From the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program





# Registry News • 2002 Edition

The year 2001 was a year of changes for most people in the United States. Whether large or small, changes have been inevitable this past year. The Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program is also going through some changes, some small and others quite large. These alterations are a reflection of larger changes within The Nature Conservancy. At the national level, The Nature Conservancy is being restructured in order to realign our conservation efforts in a more strategic approach called Conservation by Design. This reorganization of Conservancy projects, staff, and long-term goals has led to change for the Registry Program.

Beginning in 2002, the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program will be managed by the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory, which is part of the Oklahoma Biological Survey, located in Norman, Oklahoma. Since the initiation of the Registry program, Heritage has been a significant and valuable partner. Over the years Heritage has supplied vital biodiversity data to assist with the site selection for properties included in the Registry Program. Heritage Inventory was established by the Oklahoma legislature in 1987 to serve as a centralized repository for biological information regarding Oklahoma's rich and diverse natural heritage. (For more information on ONHI, see their web page at <http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/heritage/onhi.html>)

In the upcoming months you can expect to see some changes in personnel and contact information for the Registry Program. Bruce Hoagland, Coordinator of the OK Natural Heritage Inventory, will oversee Registry. Besides changes in location and some new faces, the program will continue and undoubtedly flourish



*Bruce Hoagland (right) presents Loretta and Kirk Bowers their Registry plaque.*

at its new home. While changes are sometimes difficult, the changes to the Natural Areas Registry will enable the Program to fully develop. New concepts, ideas, and knowledge will be infused into the Program. This will undoubtedly lead to fresh projects and a renewed conservation commitment to the landowners of Oklahoma who strive to protect Oklahoma's diverse natural heritage.

The 2002 edition of the Registry News highlights some very exciting Oklahoma properties including our largest Registry site yet at 9,100 acres! From the Ozarks to the Antelope Hills, 2001 saw a diverse array of plants, animals, and natural communities protected. We are especially excited to be working with landowners in Western Oklahoma. The cover for the 2002 issue reflects the diverse array of flora and fauna that is now voluntarily protected in Western Oklahoma. The orchid is found at the new Camp Classen registry site

(page 6) and the Black-tailed prairie dog is from the Shinnery Springs property (page 4). Each of these species are important elements that comprise the biodiversity of our state.

While the many species that are protected across Oklahoma are important, even more important to this Program are the landowners and cooperating agencies that make the Registry Program a success. The efforts of staff at The Nature Conservancy, the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory, and the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation along with the landowners of Oklahoma have carried the Registry program far. Our combined and continued efforts will enable the Natural Areas Registry to flourish for years to come and assist other landowners with the protection of Oklahoma's abundant native plants and animals.

## Questions? Comments?

Beginning January 7, 2002 if you need more information about the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry, you can contact Kim Shannon or Bruce Hoagland at:

## Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program

Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory • 111 East Chesapeake Street  
Norman, OK 73019 • Phone: 405-325-1985



# Raptors Ridge

Ottawa County

40 acres

Nestled in the Ozark hills of southern Ottawa County is a relatively small tract of land that attracts some large raptors. During the colder months Bald Eagles frequently roost in the tall trees that line the shores of Grand Lake. The eagles are particularly abundant at this new Registry site owned by Jim and Carol Oster. Adequate roosting and nesting habitat

are important to the continued suc-



cess of these large and magnificent birds.

Because the bald eagle is doing so well in the United States, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to remove it from the list of endangered species. The bald eagle is currently listed as a threatened species. Their successful return from the brink of extinction is due in part to the cooperation of public and private landowners who provide various types of habitat. If the bald eagle is delisted, it will continue to be monitored throughout the United States to ensure its prolonged success in the wild.

Along with Bald Eagle habitat, the Oster's property provides roosting and foraging habitat for various bat species. There are 2 small caves on this site that are used by bats for roosting during their nightly outings for insects. Because the caves are relatively small, they are most likely not



*The tall trees on steep hillsides that overlook the lake make for excellent roosting sites for the Bald Eagle.*

used as a maternity site or for long-term habitation. Nevertheless, the caves provide important rest stops for bats while on their nightly quests for food.

Registry welcomes Jim and Carol Oster to the program!



*American elm, Green ash, and Hackberry are the dominant tree species on this bottomland site.*

# Oliver's Woods

Cleveland County

60 acres

The University of Oklahoma is one of 2001's new participants in the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program. Just south of the Norman campus, the University owns a small tract of land that is used for research projects. The site is situated near the South Canadian River and is a good example of a hardwood bottomland forest.

In 1946 Fred G. Oliver donated this property to the University of Oklahoma. Mr. Oliver donated the property with the stipulation that it remain in its natural condition and it be used primarily for biological experimental purposes and as a wildlife sanctuary. Since then this site has been used extensively for field research by OU faculty and as a field laboratory for students in the biological sciences. Other groups including the Cleveland County Bird Club and Boy Scout troops have used the site for study also. The Oklahoma Biological Survey manages Oliver's Woods.



# Lucky Springs

Cherokee County

229 acres

The Registry Program is fortunate to have a variety of sites that protect an assortment of plants and animals in the Oklahoma Ozarks. One of the most memorable sites in this area is owned by Dr. George Kamp and is aptly called Lucky Springs. This site is very interesting due to the combination of its biological and historic wealth.

From the biological perspective it is particularly interesting due to the presence of a fish species called the Plains Topminnow (*Fundulus sciadicus*). This small fish was historically found in abundance along the Platte River of Nebraska, parts of the Missouri River and in somewhat smaller numbers along the Neosho River. Today the fish is still successful and occasionally abundant along the Platte and

Missouri rivers but the populations of the Neosho River have dramatically declined in recent years. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has studied various population of this fish over the years and they are concerned about the Neosho River populations. They believe that these populations might be significantly distinct from other populations of plains topminnows, in which case it would warrant increased attention for conservation.

Recent studies of the Plains Topminnow by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife



Photo courtesy of USFWS

At maturity this fish is about 3 inches long.

Service, students and faculty from the University of Tulsa show that of the 38 historic localities for this fish within the Neosho River, the Plains Topminnow has been found at only 3 sites. Many of the historic sites that are now uninhabited



Clean and clear water are essential for the survival of the Plains topminnow. Luckily, many of these fish flourish in the spring-fed pools such as this one at Lucky Springs.



# Home Place

*Garfield County*

*157 acres*

Within the northern city limits of Enid, Oklahoma is a property of ecological importance. Over the years the city has slowly crept in on this site. Only a few years ago the Humphrey property was not inside the city limits. The continued growth of Enid and other cities like it make relatively urban natural areas around Oklahoma all the more important. Long before the urban landscape moved closer to the Humphrey property, it was surrounded by an agricultural landscape of wheat. Garfield County is often the leading wheat producer in Oklahoma. In 1995 Garfield County lead the state with over \$36 million of wheat produced. Intense agricultural uses of the land make sites that are still dominated by native plants and animals and natural communities very important.

The Humphrey site is a mosaic of natural features including some interesting aquatic features. Skeleton Creek runs through the property and there are 2 spring-fed ponds. While creeks are by no means rare in Oklahoma, it is uncommon to find one with a high quality riparian zone. This stretch of Skeleton Creek is especially nice because of the stabilized banks. The vegetation



*Skeleton Creek flows through the Humphrey property and along the eastern edge of Enid.*

along the creek is comprised of mature trees interspersed with shrubs, vines, and grasses, a combination that reduces the risk of erosion and allows a healthy variety of aquatic insects and larger animals to thrive in the creek.

The Humphrey family is not unfamiliar with the Registry program. Todd and Monte learned of Registry

from their Uncle, Jim Humphrey, who has another Garfield County site registered. We are proud to add this new Humphrey site, Home Place, to the Registry Program and hope to work with future generations of the Humphrey family.



*Mature trees, grasses and other plants stabilize the banks along this portion of Skeleton Creek.*



# Dempsey Divide

Roger Mills County

9,100 acres

Western Oklahoma is a part of our state that never ceases to amaze me both for its biological wealth and its scenic beauty. An excellent example of both of these realms can be found in central Roger Mills County at the Thurmond Ranch. At a quick glance the Thurmond's ranching business resembles most others but there are some major differences.

The first major difference for this ranch is the fact that there is a huge amount of information that has been compiled from a variety of disciplines. Biologically much work has been done by the Kansas Natural Heritage, the Sam Noble Oklahoma Natural History museum, the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory, and others. These agencies have compiled flora lists and have done work to identify a wide variety of animal species on the site. While having this wealth of biological information is a bit unique for a rancher, there is even more interesting information that has been accumulated over the years by the landowner, Pete Thurmond.

The second major difference revolves around Pete Thurmond's professional training and degree. Pete is an archaeologist. He and other professionals from the Oklahoma Archeological Survey (University of Oklahoma) have uncovered a vast array of artifacts and physical evidence



Historically, the earliest Oklahoma record of a "large panther" comes from a site not far from the Canadian River, east of the Antelope Hills in northern Roger Mills County.

from prehistoric campsites that are found along the creeks and springs at the Thurmond Ranch and at other nearby sites in western Oklahoma. Currently there are over 400 archaeological sites within a larger area called the Dempsey

Divide that includes the Thurmond Ranch. This area is full of prehistoric information due in part to its geological and hydrological composition.

Lying beneath the Thurmond Ranch is the Ogallala formation outcrop edge, with its combination of deep, sandy-textured soils, and Permian deposits

with its thin soil layer. The distinction between the plant communities along these differing soils is striking. Because this area offered a wide variety of medicinal and edible plants along with small game animals, these ecological boundaries or ecotones would have been the most efficient place for prehistoric hunter-gatherers to camp.

The Thurmond's property qualified for the Registry program due to the presence of a combination of both plant and animals species and natural community types. One of the more interesting plants associated with the natural wetland along one of the many creeks is a plant known as Sweetflag (*Acorus calamus*). The plant gets the name of Sweetflag due to the sweet and spicy smell of its leaves and its resemblance to Iris (also known as Flags). Various Indian tribes used the aromatic roots medicinally to treat ailments ranging from dysentery to sinus infections. The rhizomes are edible and can be used as a substitute for ginger, cinna-



Thurmond Ranch sign.



The varied geological features of this site give rise to numerous natural communities that support a diverse array of plants and animals.

mon, or nutmeg. The mature leaves act as an insect repellent.

While the Thurmonds actively manage

a herd of cattle on their vast property, there is plenty of room for Oklahoma's native fauna. State rare animal species

known to occur on this site include the Texas Horned Lizard, the Red-spotted toad, Swainson's hawk, and Mountain lions or cougars.

On a personal note, this new Registry site is important in one other way. To date, it is the largest acreage participating in the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry. At 9,100 acres the Thurmond's property is a vast site physically, historically, and biologically. It is also an important step for the conservation efforts of the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory and The Nature Conservancy in Western Oklahoma.

The Registry Program is very excited to have Dempsey Divide as a newly registered site and equally excited to have Pete and Susie Thurmond as conservation partners in western Oklahoma.

## Rachel's Woods

*Pottawatomie County*

*160 acres*

In central Pottawatomie County is a tract of newly registered land that is owned by Dan and Rachel Butler. This Crosstimbers-prairie mosaic site provides habitat for 2 state rare plants, the Oklahoma Beardtongue (*Penstemon oklahomensis*) and Barbara's Buttons (*Marshallia caespitosa*). These plants are found on the prairie that is scattered throughout the property.

Oklahoma Beardtongue is a small, beautiful spring-flowering annual that is a member of the Snapdragon family (*Scrophulariaceae*). It usually grows to be 12 to 24 inches tall and has a group of small white flowers at the top. The petals are fused together to form a tube. The fused petals form an upper and lower lip and there are dense yellow hairs inside the tube. Bees pollinate the flowers and are needed for the long-term success of the Oklahoma Beardtongue. These plants are found only in Oklahoma along a narrow north-south band through the central portion of the state. They occur

in large and small prairies that have never been plowed. Beardtongue often thrive in hay meadows that are cut in mid to late summer, after the seeds of this plant have formed and dropped.

Barbara's Buttons is a member of the Sunflower family (*Asteraceae*) and can be either a perennial or a short-lived annual. The flowers of this plant resemble a powder puff and the leaves are clustered at the base of this plant. The flowers are white to pinkish in color and are often found in the same prairies as the Oklahoma Beardtongue.

These delicate spring plants are reminders of Oklahoma's natural history. Loss of habitat is the major threat to these plants but with the conservation efforts



The Oklahoma Beardtongue is the smallest of the many beardtongue species that are native to Oklahoma.

of the Butlers and others like them, we can protect and preserve our natural heritage for future generations.

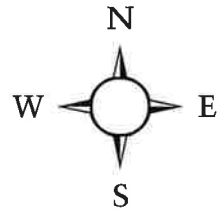
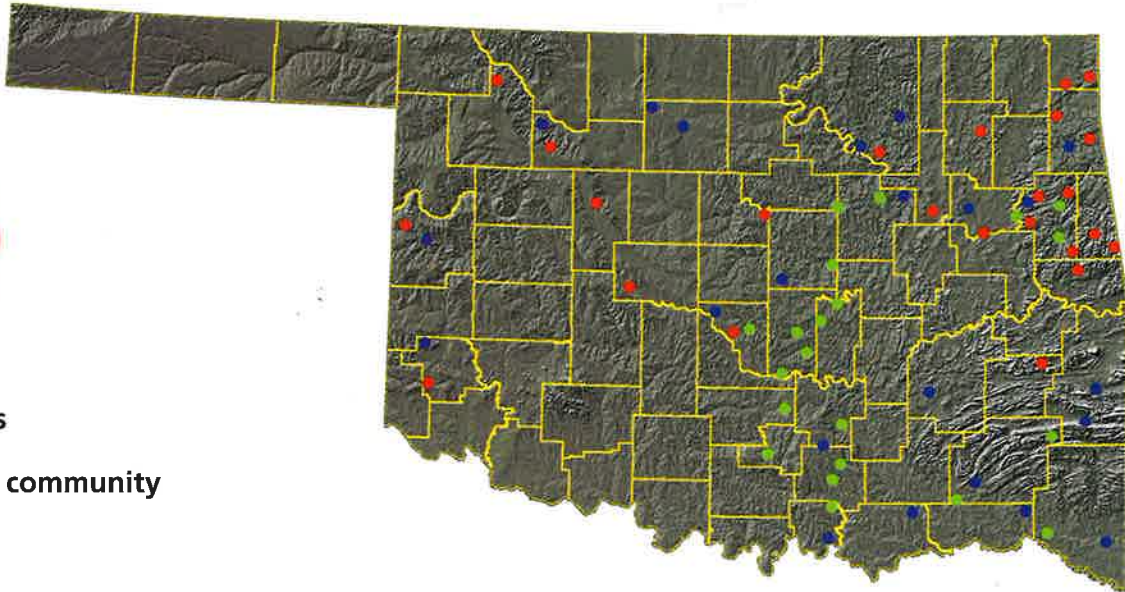


# Registered Sites of the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program



## Registry Sites

- animal
- natural community
- plant



## Questions? Comments?

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Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory

111 East Chesapeake Street

Norman, OK 73019

Phone: 405-325-1985

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 to the right. If you would like signs for your property, please call the number above.



*Articles in this issue of Registry News were compiled and written by Kim Shannon.*