

2003 Edition

# Registry News

From the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program

Oklahoma  
Natural Areas  
Registry





# Registry News • 2003 Edition

## Losses and Gains in 2002

Where did 2002 go? This past year was a very busy one for the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry. There have been many accomplishments including new properties registered, a Registry field trip (see back page) and a brand new project. Unfortunately there has also been a setback or two this past year. The setbacks are especially disappointing because they are not only losses to the Registry program; they are also losses in the protection of Oklahoma's natural resources. These losses are previously registered sites that are no longer part of the program because the properties have either been sold to new landowners who do not wish to participate or sites that have been drastically modified and therefore have eliminated a particular species, a natural community, or both.

One such lost site was a tallgrass prairie remnant, Foyil Prairie in Rogers County which supported a population of prairie mole crickets. At one time this large cricket was considered for protection under the Endangered Species Act because its numbers had declined so rapidly during recent years due to loss of habitat. Unfortunately the cricket suffered the same fate at Foyil Prairie as it did in other parts of its declining range. The site was developed in late 2001 as a manufactured home community. One of the roads that now cut through this site is called



*Foyil prairie in 1999.*

Bluestem Lane, a reflection of Foyil Prairie's past. This was an interesting site to visit in the early spring because it was one of the few sites that had to be checked at dusk in order to verify the presence of the crickets. This small prairie was also important because over the past 50 years various scientists and students have used Foyil Prairie as a research site to study the prairie mole cricket and the tallgrass community in which it lives. The work and records accumulated from this site will now serve only as a historic record for a lost Rogers County registered natural area and a lost population of the prairie mole cricket.

On a more positive note, the Registry program's accomplishments during 2002 are numerous and exciting. Seven new sites were registered in Oklahoma, all of which are featured in this edition. Most of these sites have neighbors that are Registrants and they are important additions to ongoing protection efforts within Oklahoma. Seeing new sites, meeting new landowners and adding new participants to the Registry program is always a rewarding venture.

A brand new endeavor for the Registry Program, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory, is the production of a poster series that will feature the native plants of Oklahoma. The first poster is currently in the production phase and is scheduled to be completed by mid-April. This poster will feature selected plants that define Oklahoma botanically. Other posters in the series will include rare plants and the plants of various geographic regions across Oklahoma.

More updates regarding the gains the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry has made this past year are scattered throughout the following articles. While losses and gains are expected in any line of work, the gains are always more appreciated especially when the losses reflect a potentially damaging situation or a deficit to our natural world.



*Foyil prairie in 2002.*



# Sycamore Valley

Osage County

13 acres

Sycamore Valley is a rainy day site. It is a site that is defined by the water that flows through it. So visiting this property on rainy days seems to bring out the best of its biotic and abiotic features. Sycamore Valley is a bottomland forest that is populated with elms, two species of ash, maples, sycamores, oaks and hackberries that grow among the moss and fern-covered sandstone and limestone boulders. Most of the plant species found here flourish because of the natural watercourse that traverses Peggy Cox's and Bret Franzmann's newly registered natural area they call home.

Interspersed among the forest species are pockets of plants that are more typical of a tallgrass prairie. In these small sunny spots there are some grasses and a few wildflowers including Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Rose verbena



*Fall colors at Sycamore Valley.*

(*Verbena canadensis*), and Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*).

The presence of these prairie species could be an indicator that in the recent past this site may have been much more open than it is today. Even in areas where prairie is the dominant ecosystem, trees and shrubs along creeks are likely to encroach up hillsides and into prairies if those woody plants are not kept in check with natural forces such as fire. Change is the rule in nature, whether those changes are very fast or very slow. So while Sycamore Valley is a beautiful forested site today, it very well may have been more prairie-like not too long ago.

Peggy and Bret enjoy living in their bit of forest and sharing their property with those who are also interested in the great outdoors. Occasionally, school groups and others visit Sycamore Valley. Bret and Peggy have developed a discrete series of trails around and over the

large rocks along the creek. Some of these rocks have messages from the past carved into their surfaces. One rock near the creek has the year 1871 carved into it, while another has names carved into it. It's good to know that years ago others enjoyed this area and it's fun to imagine how they might have spent their time there. Maybe settlers stopped to rest as they moved westward across Oklahoma. Or perhaps it was just someone's favorite place to relax on a warm day, a place to dip toes into the water that defines what is now Sycamore Valley.



*This site is also featured on the cover.*



*Peggy and Bret with their Registry plaque.*



# The Quacking Crow Ranch

*Cherokee County*

*20 acres*

Many Registry sites have interesting and personalized names, but this site has a particularly good one! When I asked the owners, Martin and Beth Rooney, what they wanted to name their Registry site, there was a bit of hesitation. But they offered the name of the Quacking Crow Ranch, their pet name for the property.

Can you guess how the Quacking Crow Ranch got its name? First of all this new site is not a ranch, not even close. It is a beautiful Ozark property along Spring Creek. So, any ideas about the name yet? Well, the quacking crow is actually a fish crow (*Corvus ossifragus*). This type of crow is often found with other crows that roost near a pond, creek or other body of water. The fish crow resembles the American crow and is usually only detectable in a murder (a group name specific to crows) of crows by its slightly different call. The “caw” of a fish crow sounds like a very nasally “caw” of an American crow, like a crow with a head cold, or perhaps even a quacking crow!

This new Registry site is important mainly because of the riparian community that defines Spring Creek. The mature bottomland forest that surrounds the creek is punctuated with areas of natural disturbance



*The Ozarks at their best.*

due to the changes caused by the seasonal fluctuations in the water level of the creek. The downed trees and limbs in the water provide important habitat for many small fish, larger fish such as the smallmouth bass and various species of sunfish. Along with the creek and the animal species it supports there are interesting plant species on the property. Under the forest canopy there are Climbing milkweeds (*Matelea* sp.), Texas





# Pine Bluff

*Cherokee County*

*102 acres*

There is a fortunate group of people among us who live dual lives in dual places. They work during the week at fairly typical jobs in large, urban areas and then escape to the more rural areas of Oklahoma on the weekends and holidays. These folks have simple and comfortable houses or cabins in the woodlands, along the streams and on the prairie hills across the state. It is at these rural residences that people relax, tend to their properties, work at their hobbies, and enjoy the natural wonders around them. Some of these rural retreats and, more specifically, the acreage surrounding these second residences qualify to participate in the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry.

In northern Cherokee County a newly registered site that is an Ozark retreat for Karen Harris and Pam Gulbis. Their property, which they call Pine Bluff, is composed of both upland and bottom-land forest with steep, rocky bluffs and scattered small streams that feed the Illinois

River. During the winter months Bald eagles roost and fish along the river. The Illinois River and other large rivers and bodies of water across the state are important winter habitat for the once endangered Bald Eagle. The combination of the important eagle habitat and the oak-pine forest are what qualified Pine Bluff for the Registry program.

Karen is particularly familiar with the Bald Eagle. She and her students (Karen teaches science courses at Holland Hall Preparatory School in Tulsa) assist the Oklahoma Army Corps of Engineers with Bald Eagle counts each winter. Karen and her students monitor sites along the Arkansas River for roosting and nesting eagles. By counting these birds each year, scientists with various agencies are able to protect and manage habitat for the eagles.

The data that Karen and her class have collected over the years has undoubtedly aided with the recovery of the Bald Eagle in Oklahoma and other southern states.

At work and at play, both Karen and Pam are able to make important contributions to the protection of the Bald Eagle and the Oklahoma Ozarks. Karen and Pam were the first registrants for 2002 and the Registry program is very glad to have them as new participants.



*This steep bluff of pines overlooks the Illinois River.*



*Karen (left), Pam (right) and Cody with their Registry plaque.*



*Raven, the Registry assistant, calls it "Pine Ruff".*





# The Pennington Creek Conservation Area

*Johnston County*

## Potential Threats

Pennington Creek is an important natural resource and, up until recently, a fairly well-kept secret in Oklahoma. But beginning in early 2002 a new potential threat to this creek and others in Johnston County have put Pennington Creek, some of its landowners and south-central Oklahoma in the spotlight. The new threat to the springs, streams and rivers of Johnston County is a potential water sale from the Arbuckle Simpson aquifer. This aquifer supplies water to the many streams and springs of south-central Oklahoma, including Pennington Creek, the Blue River and more. It is also already the water source for some cities and smaller towns in south-central Oklahoma.

The water that may be sold to central Oklahoma would be drawn from underground sources at a rate of approximately 11 million gallons per day. This rate of water withdrawal poses a potential threat to the many aquatic systems within the aquifer, including Pennington Creek. A decrease in the amount of water in the



*Seaside alders dot the banks of Pennington Creek in the Squirrel Island Ranch site.*

Arbuckle Simpson aquifer would eventually adversely affect the sensitive plant and animal species as the flow rates of the streams and springs of south-central Oklahoma decrease. The state is currently considering new geologic and hydrologic studies in order to determine what effect large water

withdrawals would have on the aquifer.

A group of concerned Johnston County residents and others have rallied together to try to protect Pennington Creek and additional bodies of water. These citizens have held many meetings with state legislators and hydrologists in order to discuss their concerns and learn more about the geology and hydrology of their land's aquatic systems. They have also petitioned against the water sale to the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. For more information about this dilemma, check out the Arbuckle Simpson aquifer web site at: [www.arbsimaquifer.net](http://www.arbsimaquifer.net).

## Protecting Pennington

Over the years, a variety of landowners along Pennington and some of its tributaries have registered their properties as natural areas. These Registrants include John and Mary Ellen Davis, Vera Taylor, Arthur and Lela Biggs, John and Elaine Bruno, and Billy and Wanda Bray. The newest Registrants in the area are highlighted on the following pages. A special word of thanks to the Registrants of Johnston and Pontotoc Counties for their commitment to protecting the natural wonders that define the land they call home.



*Granite boulders punctuate the creek throughout the Squirrel Island Ranch property.*



In the coming months, I hope to meet with more landowners of the area and register those who qualify. I am hopeful that by participating in the Registry program, the landowners that are concerned about the Arbuckle Simpson aquifer water sale will have an additional means of demonstrating to various state officials that they are sincere about protecting their property and the water that defines it.



*New Registrant Mike LaFavers.*

## Squirrel Island Ranch

*Johnston County*  
262 acres

Pennington Creek is truly one of Oklahoma's most beautiful places. The limestone and granite gravel-lined creek bottom make Pennington one of the clearest running streams in the state. This clean and clear-running water supports a variety of plants and animals that flourish in and around the creek.

One of the newest Registrants in the area is the LaFavers family. Mike and Bobbi LaFavers own nearly a mile of property along the creek. Like many people who live along Pennington Creek, Mike has long admired the creek and had always hoped to own property along it. Their stretch of Pennington includes a low-water dam that has an interesting history. The dam is believed to have been originally built around 1903. Various squabbles over the dam even led to it being blown up many years ago! Fortunately, life along the creek is much more peaceful today. Many thanks to the LaFavers for participating in the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry.



*The darker stripe of rock within this granite resembles a set of stairs.*

## Rainbow Falls

*Johnson County*  
70 acres

The Brunos are now two-time participants in the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry. In 1999 they registered Devil's Den, and they recently registered an adjacent tract of land that includes the stretch of Pennington Creek they call Rainbow Falls. John Bruno has been instrumental in assisting with new landowner contacts in Johnston County. His assistance and enthusiasm are greatly appreciated.



*The Brunos with their Registry plaque for Devil's Den.*



*Waterfall just below Squirrel Island Ranch.*





# Maxwell's Farm

Johnson County

197 acres

Clark Maxwell has acquired his property along Pennington Creek at a steady pace over many years, a parcel here and a tract there. Maxwell recently became a participant in the Registry program in order to make a point. By participating in the program and being recognized by the state for his role in protecting his share of Pennington Creek, Maxwell demonstrates his commitment to the stewardship of his land and its future. He and other area landowners hope that their participation in the Registry program sends a message to all that they are proud of their property and its natural beauty.

Maxwell's site qualified for the Registry program because of the habitat that Pennington Creek provides for a variety of plants and animals, including the Seaside alder (*Alnus maritima*). This small tree is currently being studied by various scientists

across the United States. In Oklahoma, this tree is rare and is found only in Johnston and Pontotoc counties. Major populations are found along the East Coast in Delaware and Maryland and some new populations also have been found recently in Georgia. These very disjunct populations across the United States are what intrigue scientists. Some recent studies suggest that the Oklahoma populations of the Seaside alder may be genetically distinct from other populations in the United States, which may warrant a name change for the Oklahoma plants to *Alnus maritima* var. *oklahomensis* to reflect the uniqueness of these trees.

Many thanks to Maxwell and the other new Registrants for protecting the Seaside alder along Pennington Creek and for participating in the program.



*The Seaside alder produces small cone-like structures after it flowers in the fall.*



*Pennington Creek is wide as it meanders through the Maxwell property.*

## Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry



*Dan and Mary Beirute have registered property in Creek County. They recently received their plaque for their Crosstimbers community site called Maggie's Place.*



# OSU McPherson Preserve

*Payne County*

*160 acres*

Including large institutions in the Registry program can be a bit more challenging than working with individual landowners. The process of registering a property that belongs to a university, state agency or corporation starts simply enough with a site visit. From there the process becomes more complicated. Instead of only one or two people to review and sign a Registry agreement, there are usually multiple people, including attorneys who must review the agreement and authorize signatures. And that authorization process can take time. So when a newly completed agreement for the Oklahoma State University McPherson Preserve arrived at the Registry office, it was a particularly nice surprise. The Department of Botany at OSU owns the preserve and sponsored the new Registry agreement. Members of the department have also been managing the McPherson Preserve for the past six years or so.



*Prescribed burns are important tools used in the restoration process because they help control invasive plants such as the red cedar while encouraging biodiversity.*

The site is dominated by crosstimbers, a mosaic of Post Oak/Blackjack Oak forest and tallgrass prairie. It also has a creek with a waterfall. The site initially qualified to become part of the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry because there are populations of the Oklahoma beardtongue (*Penstemon oklahomensis*) in the scattered prairies. Stewardship and restoration projects at the property consist of the removal of many Eastern red cedars and prescribed burns on the northwestern portion of the property. Dr. Michael Palmer oversees much of the stewardship activities at the McPherson preserve. He and other professors also use the preserve as a study site for various class field trips.

I would like to extend a special note of thanks to Dr. Palmer for his assistance with the completion of the

new agreement with the OSU Department of Botany. Commending large institutions such as OSU for their role in the protection and restoration of Oklahoma's biodiversity is especially rewarding. Its voluntary participation may serve as a catalyst for otherwise reluctant institutions to participate in the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry in the years to come.



*The McPherson preserve was named in honor of the late Dr. James McPherson, who was a professor in the Botany department at OSU.*



*The waterfall trickles along during drier months.*





# A Reminder to Registrants

Have you moved recently? Has the status of your property changed lately? Have you acquired another tract of land that would be suitable to include in the Registry Program? Are you thinking about selling your property? Has a family member inherited a Registered site? Do you have a neighbor who might be interested in the Registry Program?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions please contact me, Kim Shannon so your records can be updated. Call (405) 325-7658 or (405) 623-8022 or email [kimshannon@ou.edu](mailto:kimshannon@ou.edu). Or if you'd prefer, put a note in the mail to me at the address that is on the back page. Keeping up with you is very important to me!



## The Registry Program Logo

The new Registry logo features one of Oklahoma's few endemic (native only to a specific area) plants, the Oklahoma beardtongue (*Penstemon oklahomensis*). This small, white-flowering, perennial is a member of the Snapdragon family (Scrophulariaceae) and can be found in tallgrass prairie

### Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry



remnants in several central Oklahoma counties.

This delicate yet persistent plant is an important part of

Oklahoma's natural heritage. Luckily, many central Oklahoma landowners protect the Oklahoma beardtongue through the Registry program and ensure its continued success.

The image for the logo was designed and drawn by Coral McAllister of the OU Zoology Department. Her assistance and talent made the logo a reality. Many thanks to Coral!

## The New and Improved Registry Website

When the Registry program moved to the Oklahoma Biological Survey in January 2002, its web site had to follow. You can find the new web site at [www.biosurvey.ou.edu/heritage/registry.html](http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/heritage/registry.html). The site features basic program information, a map of general locations of registered sites, and a photo gallery of participating sites from across the state. Take a peek at the site, watch for updates, and let me know what you think via email at [kimshannon@ou.edu](mailto:kimshannon@ou.edu).



## Muchos Gracias!

Many people assist with the various aspects of the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry program on a regular basis. Their input is much appreciated!

◆ Many thanks to Chris Hise of The Nature Conservancy for his assistance in western Oklahoma with landowners, site

location, history and biological information.

◆ Many thanks to Robb Gray of the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation for his expertise and assistance with the passage of a new Registry bill through the state legislature.

◆ Thank you to Holly Farris Erwin,

former Registry Specialist, for her willingness to play "20 Questions" on a regular basis and her continued support of the program.

◆ Special thanks to the faculty and staff of the Oklahoma Biological Survey for their support during the relocation of the program.



# Registry Program Statistics

This is a summary of the acres and elements protected by landowners through the Registry Program. It includes the number of actual sites that are protected along with the number of agreements that have been signed to protect those sites. There are more signed agreements than registered sites because some registered sites are large "macrosites" that include many landowners on adjoining properties who all protect the same plant, animal or natural community. An element is the species or natural community that is protected at a Registry site. Many sites have multiple elements that are protected while others have very specific habitat for one particular species.

Total Sites Registered: . . . . .67  
 Total Signed Agreements: . . . . .103  
 Total Registered Acres: . . . . .31, 979  
 Total Elements Protected: . . . . .42

Smallest Registered Acreage . . . . .2 acres  
 Protected feature: Mexican free-tailed bat maternity colony  
 Greer County

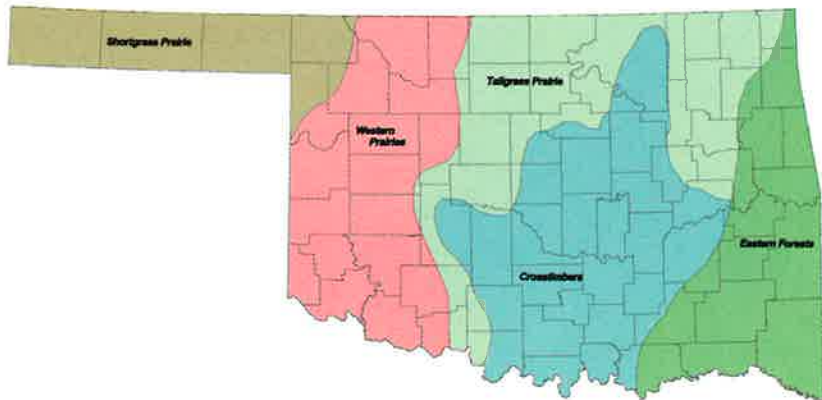
Largest Registered Acreage . . . .9,100 acres  
 Dempsey Divide  
 Protected features: Freshwater Marsh, Riparian zones, Sweetflag (*Acorus calamus*), Mountain Lion (*Felis concolor*), Texas Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma cornutum*)  
 Roger Mills County

First Registered Site . . . . .1984  
 L.B. Houk Prairie Dog Town  
 Protected Feature: Black-tailed Prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*)  
 Major County

## A New Project

Many states have posters that highlight the native plants or animals that thrive within their boundaries. Here in Oklahoma very few such posters have been produced. The Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry, in collaboration with the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory, has begun a poster series that will feature the native plants of Oklahoma. The posters are an important means of communicating with and educating the general public about the diversity and abundance of native plants that characterize Oklahoma and its natural heritage.

The first poster in the series will be a summary of the plants that define Oklahoma from east to west and north to south. Production of the poster is in progress and we hope to have the first poster, tentatively titled "Oklahoma's Botanical Heritage", available by mid-April.



*The first poster will include a map of Oklahoma along with photos of a selection of plants from each region of the map.*

Other posters in the series will feature plants that are specific to particular regions of the state and the rare plants of Oklahoma.

If you would like one or more posters, please contact Kim Shannon after April 1, 2003 at (405) 325-7658 or via email at [kimshannon@ou.edu](mailto:kimshannon@ou.edu).

## Sources

Caire, W., Tyler, J.D., Glass, B.P., and M.A. Mares. 1989. Mammals of Oklahoma. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma  
 Peterson Multimedia Guides: North American Birds, 1995. Houghton Mifflin Company  
 Web site: Arbuckle-Simpson Aquifer. <http://www.arbsimaquifer.net/>





*Field trip participants are amazed by the stream of bats above them.*

## A Batty Good Time

In late August 2002 the Registry Program hosted a field trip to a Natural Areas Registry site in western Oklahoma to watch an evening bat flight. The registered cave is home to between 2 to 3 million Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) and when they emerge from the cave to feed it is an amazing sight to behold! About 70 people attended the field trip, including Registrants from many different areas of Oklahoma. The highlight of the evening was a close-up and personal look at a few bats that were netted as

they left the cave. Dr. William Caire of the University of Central Oklahoma attended the field trip, gave the group a quick natural history lesson about the bats and answered questions. Those who were *very* curious were able to touch the bats under the supervision of Dr. Caire. The field trip allowed folks to see one of the many remarkable animals that are voluntarily protected by a private landowner through the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry.

## Questions? Comments?

If you need more information about the Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry contact Kim Shannon at:

## Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry Program

Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory

111 East Chesapeake Street

Norman, OK 73019-5112

Phone: (405) 325-7658

[www.biosurvey.ou.edu/heritage/registry.html](http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/heritage/registry.html)



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

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

