



Wichita Mountains
Wildlife Refuge

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge

Oklahoma

Rules and Regulations

A pamphlet that lists the complete regulations of the Wichita Refuge is available at entrance information stations and refuge headquarters.

Buffalo and longhorns are considered dangerous; it is advisable to stay near your car when they are around. The refuge is open range and motorists should use caution. Buffalo are hard to see at night because of their shaggy hair which does not reflect light, so you should drive accordingly.

Fire is always a threat, so handle with care and use an established fire grate.

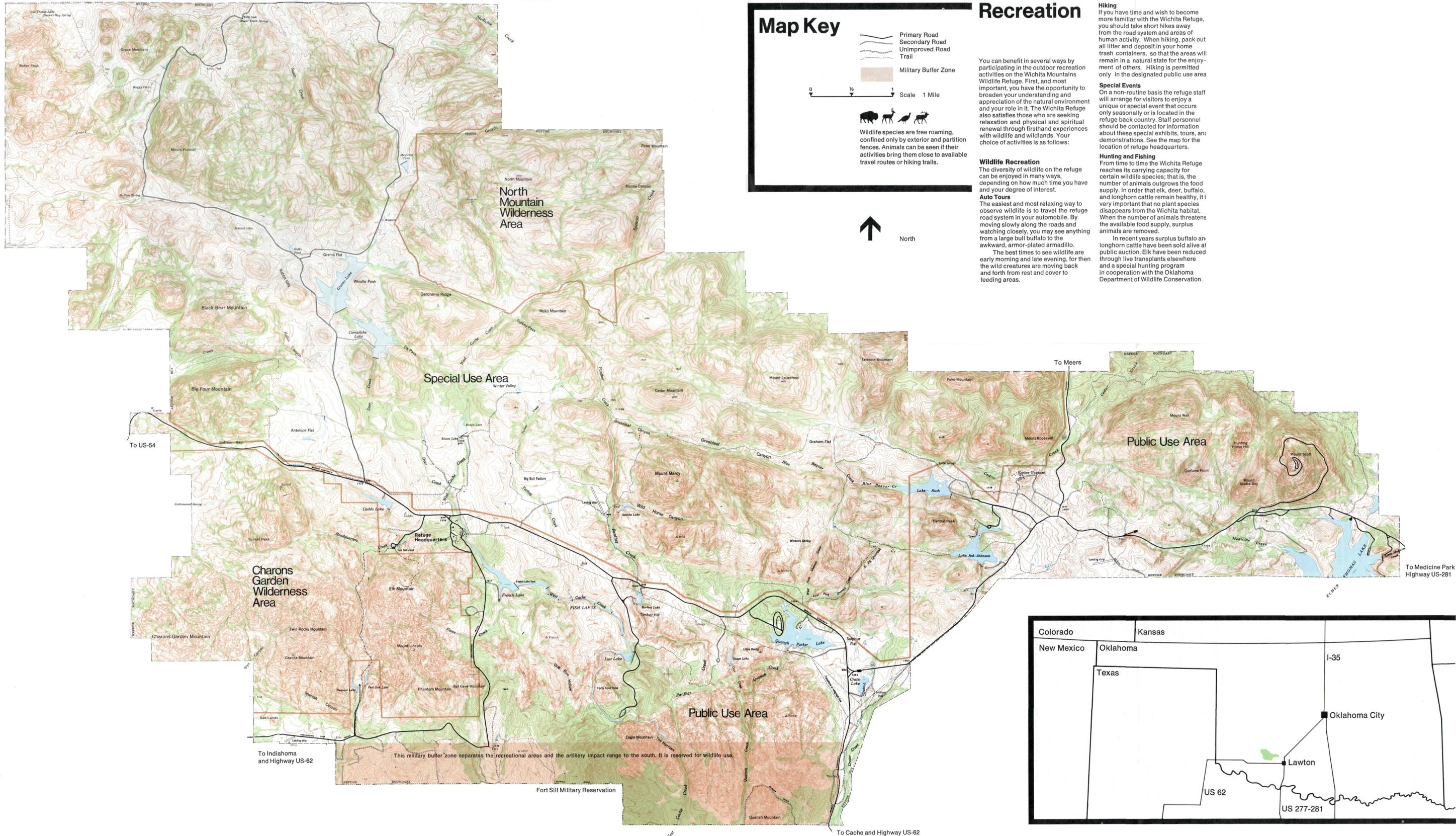
Motorists are required to stay on designated roads. Grasslands are for wildlife. They also harbor hidden rocks which can damage vehicles.

The cost of removing litter runs into thousands of tax dollars annually. Valuable refuge lands must not be used to dispose of trash. You and your fellow visitors can help keep this area of wild beauty clean and attractive. If you will *carry your trash home*, the Wichita Mountains will remain a place of natural enjoyment for generations to come.

This is your refuge. Take pride in it use it... do your part to preserve it!

Symbol Legend:
Look for these roadside symbols which indicate permitted and prohibited recreation activities.

-  Red slash mark indicates activity is prohibited.
-  Automobiles
-  Campfires
-  Campground
-  Dam



Map Key

-  Primary Road
-  Secondary Road
-  Unimproved Road
-  Trail
-  Military Buffer Zone

0 1/2 1 Scale 1 Mile



Wildlife species are free roaming, confined only by exterior and partition fences. Animals can be seen if their activities bring them close to available travel routes or hiking trails.



North

Recreation

You can benefit in several ways by participating in the outdoor recreation activities on the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. First, and most important, you have the opportunity to broaden your understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and your role in it. The Wichita Refuge also satisfies those who are seeking relaxation and physical and spiritual renewal through firsthand experiences with wildlife and wildlands. Your choice of activities is as follows:

Wildlife Recreation

The diversity of wildlife on the refuge can be enjoyed in many ways, depending on how much time you have and your degree of interest.

Auto Tours

The easiest and most relaxing way to observe wildlife is to travel the refuge road system in your automobile. By moving slowly along the roads and watching closely, you may see anything from a large bull buffalo to the awkward, armor-plated armadillo.

The best times to see wildlife are early morning and late evening, for then the wild creatures are moving back and forth from rest and cover to feeding areas.

Hiking

If you have time and wish to become more familiar with the Wichita Refuge, you should take short hikes away from the road system and areas of human activity. When hiking, pack out all litter and deposit in your home trash containers, so that the areas will remain in a natural state for the enjoyment of others. Hiking is permitted only in the designated public use area.

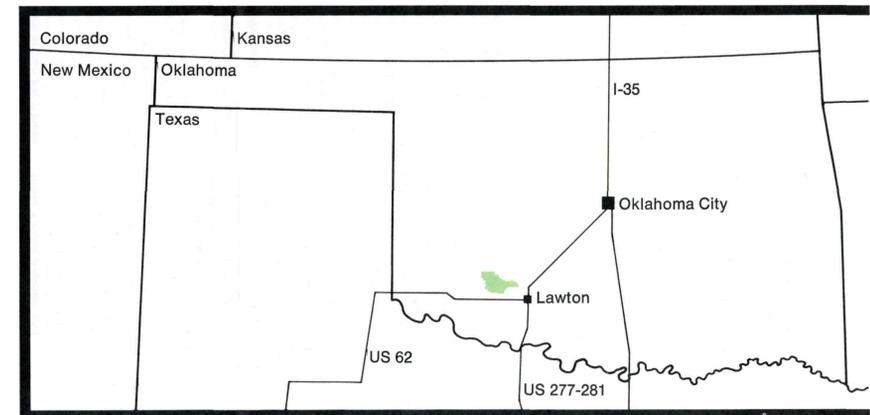
Special Events

On a non-routine basis the refuge staff will arrange for visitors to enjoy a unique or special event that occurs only seasonally or is located in the refuge back country. Staff personnel should be contacted for information about these special exhibits, tours, and demonstrations. See the map for the location of refuge headquarters.

Hunting and Fishing

From time to time the Wichita Refuge reaches its carrying capacity for certain wildlife species; that is, the number of animals outgrows the food supply. In order that elk, deer, buffalo, and longhorn cattle remain healthy, it is very important that no plant species disappears from the Wichita habitat. When the number of animals threatens the available food supply, surplus animals are removed.

In recent years surplus buffalo and longhorn cattle have been sold alive at public auction. Elk have been reduced through live transplants elsewhere and a special hunting program in cooperation with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.



island refuge in a prairie sea



Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge—wild, rugged, and weathered—is a symbol of the old west standing at the threshold of modern times. For centuries this remarkable land was the province of a few nomadic hunters and food-gatherers. Today the refuge serves all Americans by keeping in public trust a portion of our nation's wildlife heritage. Here in the unspoiled reaches of the refuge you have the opportunity to broaden your knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment. Through direct exposure to wildlife and wildlands, you may experience a personal re-creation and a renewed commitment to the values of environmental stewardship.

Treasure Preserved

For three-quarters of a century, the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in southwest Oklahoma has been a wildlife and wildlands treasure house. When this area of Oklahoma was opened for homesteading in 1901, a sizable portion in the heart of the Wichita Mountains range was protected from settlement. In 1905, by Executive Order of President Theodore Roosevelt, a game preserve was created on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Congress appropriated \$15,000 to enclose 8,000 acres, and the modern history of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge began.

The refuge was originally established to protect all species of wildlife, especially those in danger of extinction. Through efforts of the New York Zoological Society and the American Bison Society, 15 buffalo were brought here in 1907. Elk and wild turkey were also brought back to their former home. The few deer that found sanctuary in remote sections flourished under protection.

Efforts to protect and maintain the native species of wildlife have been amply rewarded. Big game herds have increased many-fold and are no longer endangered. So successful has the big game program been that the goal of simple preservation has been changed to one which calls for the maintenance of representative herds, with numbers in keeping with a balanced grassland environment.

Today in this 59,020-acre refuge you can also see longhorn cattle, bobwhite quail, eagles, migratory waterfowl, and many species of small mammals and birds.



The Refuge Today

The Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge today is managed to meet two primary objectives. The first is to maintain a natural wildlife population in a natural environment. The second is to provide an opportunity for the public to observe, study, and enjoy wildlife in this natural setting.

The refuge now receives well over a million visitors annually. It is our hope that your visit here, no matter how long or how short, will be an experience rich in discovery and appreciation for the natural world and its living creatures.



Island in a Prairie Sea

The Wichita is an island rising out of the rolling vastness of the Great Plains. Far from being a panorama of colorful vistas and lonely beauty, this island refuge consists of a remarkable variety of environments—rolling grasslands, woody drainage ways and hillsides, rocky surfaces and bare mountaintops, streams and lakes. In each of these environments, animals and plants all act and interact with one another under the pressures of non-living forces—soil, water and geological changes—that have been active since the Wichita mountains were formed.

When one begins to understand all these creations, the refuge becomes more than a place of color or beauty. It becomes an ever-changing place in which plants, mammals, birds, insects, fish, and other tiny unseen creatures are engaged in a struggle for existence.

The best way to understand this *Island in a Prairie Sea* is to learn something about its five distinct environments, then visit them yourself to see and appreciate the complexity and inner beauty of the Wichita Refuge.

Rocky Outcrops

The jagged outcrops of rock seen on the Wichita Refuge are mainly of two types: gabbro, which ranges in color from dark gray to black; and red granite. Gabbro is an igneous rock formed millions of years ago by the cooling of hot lava forced to the surface. Red granite, the most common rock on the refuge, was also formed from hot lava, but at a later geological time than gabbro. Mt. Scott is composed of this granite. Because trees grow only on the gabbro, contact between these two types of rock can be detected by the tree line.

Stony Rocklands

The mountains of the Wichita Refuge were formed 300 million years ago, created by a tremendous uplift accompanied by large folds and faults. These mountains were much higher than those you see today. Erosion—caused by water, wind, and temperature—has stripped off the upper parts and deposited this material in valleys, creating stony rocklands. As erosion wears away the granite, rock boulders are formed, of which there are many in the area.

Hardy types of vegetation gain a foothold in this environment and accelerate the breakdown of the rocks, thus helping to produce soil.

Prairie Grasslands

Prairies result from erosion and adaption to climate, especially rainfall. Here on the dry plains trees seldom gain a foothold; if they do, they rarely survive the periodic droughts. But hardy native grasses, adapted to long periods of dormancy, flourish and thus conserve the land at their roots. The grass mat insulates the soil, conserving moisture and preventing soil erosion by wind and water.

Woodlands

In some areas trees have gained a foothold on the prairie. The post oak and blackjack oak are among the few species that can do this, being drought-resistant and sun-loving. In moist years, seedlings sprout and the woodlands advance onto the prairie. In dry years, the seedlings are stunted or die and the harder prairie grasses push back, reclaiming their former territory.

Water

Although it may seem arid, the Wichita Refuge actually contains numerous aquatic environments. Streams, springs, and man-made lakes supply water—the basis of life for the wildlife and vegetation of the refuge. Rainfall runs off by way of streams and filters



through the soil. Some of the water is collected and stored in the man-made lakes. Many species of animals make their homes in these aquatic areas. Some of the more abundant are frogs, crayfish, mussels, and fresh-water sponges. Fish also flourish in the numerous lakes of the refuge.

Unique types of vegetation also abound in this watery environment. These include cattails, water primrose, American lotus (lily pads), bullrushes, and water milfoil.



Wildlife and the Land
When buffalo were returned to this area, perhaps fewer than 300 of these mighty creatures could be found in the United States out of the millions that once roamed the plains. Extinction seemed imminent. Now, through careful management, the Wichita herd alone numbers over 600.

America's most authentic herd of longhorn cattle grazes at the Wichita Refuge. These longhorns are descended from 27 animals placed on the refuge by the Forest Service in 1927.

Elk were exterminated here about 1875. Today's herd of more than 300 is a result of 17 transplanted from Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

The native white-tail deer, the most common big game animal of the southern United States, is found in all sections of the refuge. Fox squirrels, raccoons, opossums, skunks, and smaller animals are common.

In an area where both eastern and western forms are found, bird observers have identified more than 240 species. The scissor-tailed flycatcher, Oklahoma's state bird, nests on the refuge. Bobwhites, roadrunners, and great horned owls are among the many permanent residents. The refuge's 20-odd lakes are host to migratory waterfowl during spring and fall flights. Both the bald and golden eagles winter among the refuge's crags.



Man and the Land

Although named for the Wichita Indians, the lands of today's refuge were once the hunting grounds of other tribes. Kiowas, Apaches, and Comanches roamed the mountains, and many peaks, lakes, and streams bear their names.

Quanah Parker, a famous chief of the Comanches, chose the Wichita Mountains as a place to build his home, which stood for many years just south of the refuge boundary.

In the 19th century, these mountains were the scene of frenzied—and unsuccessful—searches for gold and silver. All that remain today are prospect holes and colorful legends about lost mines and caches of treasure.

When this portion of what is now Oklahoma was being opened to homesteading, a group of farsighted citizens urged that the heart of the unique Wichita Range be retained in public ownership. By proclamation on July 4, 1901, President McKinley withheld from settlement and designated the acres that now are Wichita Refuge as a forest reserve.

The Wichita area, under various administrations, has been a national wildlife refuge since 1905 and as such is the oldest managed unit of the Refuge System, although it did not enter the System officially until 1935.



United States Department of Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources".

The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States, now and in the future.

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