



Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission

River Currents

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Scenic Rivers are Four Season Opportunities

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This morning as I sat to jot down a few thoughts about the events of the summer for this edition of the "River Currents," it dawned on me that within the next few days most schools will resume their classes for another academic year.

I just can't believe that summer is already drawing to a close. It seems like it was just yesterday that the OSRC was ramping up for another summer season.

For nearly three decades, I have had the privilege to work for our state's citizens in the capacity as Administrator of the OSRC. During that time, I have observed many things in our state's efforts to preserve scenic rivers. One observation I'm fascinated by is that in mid-August it seems like someone throws a master switch and overnight those thousands of recreationalists who visit our scenic rivers disappear until next summer.

While the summer season is great for recreation, I can't help but mention the breathtaking loveliness these special natural resources offer in the fall, winter and spring.

These off-recreational seasons provide an excellent opportunity for individuals to enjoy these rivers when floaters are not as plentiful. Visitors can observe the beauty of fall and spring colors, or the first winter snow. It is also an excellent chance to view wildlife. On the Illinois River and its tributaries, it's not uncommon to see bald eagles, hawks, otters, elk, deer, turkey and many varieties of songbirds, along with turtles, frogs and other aquatic life. In fact, nearly seventy species have been identified on the river.

Fishing is another activity that can be enjoyed year round. The Illinois and its tributaries are just a few of the rivers in Oklahoma that have the water quality and quantity necessary for smallmouth bass, one of the scrappiest fish you can get on your line.

With the summer of 2010 waning, I encourage you to plan a weekend to see our state's scenic rivers at their best, sometime during this fall, winter or next spring. There are several upcoming times you may want to visit, such as October 16th, the date of the River Fest. The last two weeks of October is also a great time to visit, as the adjoining oak-hickory forest puts on a wonderful display of fall colors. I'm hopeful our paths will cross this off-recreational season on one of our state's glorious scenic rivers.

Ed Fite, Administrator

A busy July weekend on the Illinois River. Visitors enjoy rafting, kayaking, canoing and swimming.



OSRC Board and Agency News



New Governor-Appointed Commissioner

Mike Fuhr started his career in conservation in graduate school at the University of Illinois where he received his Master's degree in Biology with a focus on aquatic ecology. This focus stemmed from his interest in rivers and lakes as a boy where he spent countless hours fishing with his grandmother in northern Illinois.

Since college, Mike worked as a fisheries biologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation, and has worked for The Nature Conservancy for the last 13 years, 7 of which as Director of Aquatic Conservation in Arkansas, and the rest as the State Director for the Oklahoma Chapter. As the State Director, he manages the various aspects of the Conservancy's work in Oklahoma, including conservation, fundraising, and operations.

He lives in Tulsa with his family – he and his wife, Heather, have 4 children, 3 girls and a boy.

Mike has been interested in serving on the OSRC for some time because of his love of river conservation, particularly those in the Ozarks and Ouachitas. He hopes that his background in aquatic ecology and work in both Arkansas and Oklahoma can help to advance the work of the Commission. "The OSRC is a unique agency that is tasked with protecting some of Oklahoma's most beautiful river systems. Inherent in the mission of the agency is the recognition of the importance of these rivers to both people and nature. That critical link is something that is often overlooked."

Jim Shirrel Retires

Jim Shirrel, long time employee of the OSRC, is retiring after nearly two decades of excellent service.

In 1987, Jim joined the maintenance crew. He worked



off and on since joining, spending a total of 17 seasons on the Illinois River. He was dedicated and thorough no matter what task he was given.

He has had several maintenance duties over the years. For the past few seasons, he has been in charge of the upkeep of the park restrooms. Both the staff and the public have greatly appreciated the effort he put in to the task.

Jim has put in many years on the river and his hard work has been an asset to the agency. His outgoing, unique personality has made him a valued friend and team member of the OSRC staff.

OSRC Fee Updates

Recently, there have been some changes to Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission fee policies. The following is a brief summary of the current fees.

Day Use Fee: Currently, no day use fee for public access areas is in place.

User Fee: For 2010, visitors may float the river free of charge. Due to recent legislation, however, visitors will be required to purchase a decal for their vessels starting January 2011. Decals will be \$1 and must be purchased on per day basis for each private vessel, including canoes, kayaks, rafts, and inner tubes. For visitor's convenience, an annual "flat-fee" decal may be purchased for \$10. These decals will be available at OSRC headquarters and several other locations.

Camping Fee: Camping fees are \$12 per night for up to 4 people. Larger parties will be charged an additional \$12 fee per 4 person group. Campers may park one vehicle free of charge. There will be a \$4 parking fee per additional vehicle. The OSRC encourages visitors to carpool.

One question visitors often have is, "Why do visitors pay fees?" The OSRC mirrors the rules of the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, including their fees, and is also subject to any legislation passed which mandates the charging of fees. The money collected allows the OSRC to provide services for visitors, such as increased River Ranger patrols, clean bathrooms, upkept parks, free trash bags, and the Visitor's Center.

OSRC Agency News

Summer Seasonals

Activity along the Illinois River flourishes in the summer months. To accommodate visitors' growing needs, the OSRC hires a crew of summer employees to assist with administration, maintenance, and law enforcement. These seasonals are an asset during the incredibly busy summer season.

Maintenance

Each year, four to eight summer maintenance employees are hired. These seasonals assist permanent employees James Hickman and Josh Baird with the task of maintaining the OSRC headquarters, public access areas, and other locals around the river.

The maintenance crew works hard, and efficiently completes their many tasks, such as cleaning the public access areas in order to make them safe and sanitary for public use. Maintenance mow and weed eat, in addition to picking an average of 90,000 pounds of trash by hand. The crew responds to calls from the public and float operators about navigational hazards in or along the river, removing fallen trees and other debris.

A pair of seasonal floaters are also brought on during the summer. The crew take canoes and float a 6-mile stretch of river a day, picking up several 30 pound bags of trash. The float crew picks up an average of 8,850 bags every summer.



Maintenance Supervisor James Hickman, seasonals Charlie Thurber, Colt Ketcher, Kyle Leatherwood, Danny Kester, Maintenance Dude Josh Baird, and seasonal Barry Emmons, in the OSRC Visitor's Center. Not pictured are Kyle Cortez and float crew members Matt Robinson and Ben Whitiker.

Park Host

In previous seasons, there have been some difficulties collecting camping fees from visitors. This summer, the OSRC created a new position to avoid such issues.

Currently serving as Park Host is Stormy Cartwright. She works Friday through Sunday, checking each public access area for campers. She makes several rounds to each park, collecting fees from campers at parks and offering onsite assistance to visitors.

Stormy works closely with the River Rangers and the tourists in order to ensure that fees are properly collected.



Stormy Cartwright

River Rangers

The need for law enforcement on the river increases dramatically over the summer. The Ranger Department, supervised year round by Stephanie Stephens, employs an additional six employees during the season. Most seasonals work full or part time for other law enforcement agencies and come from police backgrounds.

River Ranger's primary duty is to protect visitors, property and natural resources in operating areas of the OSRC. Rangers patrol the parks, respond to distress calls, write citations and tickets, and make arrests.

One proactive effort rangers have made this season is the practice of checking floaters for contraband before they get on the river. Rangers board shuttles before they depart from float operations to survey passengers. This practice has led to reduced incidents on the river.

Rangers perform many other functions in addition to law enforcement. Assisting visitors, collecting camping fees, and educating the public about the importance of river preservation are also among their duties.



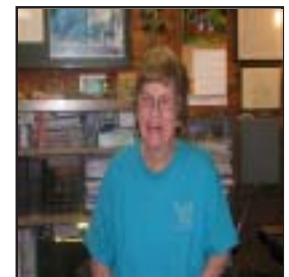
From Left: Seasonals Steve Wallace, Tommy Moore, Wes Han, Supervisor Stephanie Stephens, and Seasonal Matt Vogle. Not Pictured: Seasonals Dustin Davis and Cody Warren.

Administration

During the summer season, the administrative branch of the OSRC is supported by assistant Phyllis Colter.

Phyllis has worked at the agency for 18 seasons. She assists in the office and the Visitor's Center, organizing the area and keeping it stocked with informational brochures. Helping tourists is one of her other duties, and she visits with those who call or drop by, answering questions and offering other assistance.

In addition to being an experienced employee, Phyllis has a colorful, friendly personality and is an esteemed member of the OSRC team.



Phyllis Colter

Spotlights in the River Basin

2010 Illinois River Cleanup



Volunteers enjoying the cookout after their float.

The Illinois River is an important and cherished resource to many. Each year, those who appreciate the natural beauty of the river participate in the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission annual River Cleanup.

The 2010 Cleanup was held Friday, August 6th. This event followed a schedule similar to previous years. Volunteers arrived at the OSRC to sign in, then departed to one of the several commercial floatation device outfitters along the river. Participants took canoes along a 6 mile float, picking up trash along the way.

At the end of the float, 250 bags of trash, amounting to nearly 2,000 pounds, had been removed from the river. The majority of the debris collected was aluminum cans. Styrofoam items, as well as plastic bottles, articles of clothing, and several tires were also picked up. One group of participants also found a bowling pin, while another collected a tricycle.

After the float, volunteers met at Diamondhead Resort for lunch. Hamburgers and hotdogs, grilled by Roger and Shelley Fields and Garrett Mouse, as well as chips, deserts, and beverages were provided.

Following the cookout was the prize drawing. There were several prizes this year, ranging from t-shirts, coozies, certificates for free floats, and gift cards.

The big ticket items were two kayaks. Armstrong Bank donated an 8 foot yellow Pelican, won by Derrick Tye. Chrissi Nimmo was the winner of a 9.6 foot green Riot, contributed by Cobb-Vantress. A third kayak, donated by Save the Illinois River, will be given away at the upcoming River Fest.

Next years cleanup is tentatively scheduled for the fall. Information will be posted on the OSRC website, www.oklahomascenicrivers.net.



Shown above, volunteers wait as OSRC Administrator Ed Fite draws names for prizes. Show below, kayak winner Derrick Tye with CEO of Armstrong Bank, Sinclair Armstrong.



Illinois River Fest 2010

A festival celebrating the Illinois River will be held October 16th. The main focus will be to educate visitors through fun, interactive programs about the importance of protecting the river. The event will be held at War Eagle Resort.

The River Fest will have several activities for visitors to enjoy. Educational information will be available, as well as hands on learning opportunities.

There are also plans for live music. Visitors can listen to local bands perform while enjoying a tasty treat from food vendors.

on the Wild Side....

Mountain Lions in OK?

Mountain lions, also known as cougars, pumas, and panthers, have long been the subjects of curiosity and mystery in Oklahoma. According to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, sightings of these elusive creatures can be dated back to 1852, and claims have continued today.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, as well as local game wardens, have previously been reluctant to discuss mountain lions in Oklahoma. According to the Wildlife Department's website, mountain lions are in Oklahoma, but game wardens do not know

shoot a mountain lion, if it is deemed a threat to humans or livestock. One stipulation of this law is that if a mountain lion is shot, the responsible party must take the body of the animal to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

There are several ways one can identify an animal as a mountain lion. Their tails are more than half the length of their body. Black marks will be on their ears and tip of their tail while the rest of their body is tan. Adults are between 2 feet to 2.5 feet, and typically, females are smaller than males.

▼ A full grown mountain lion on the hunt. Mountain lions most often hunt alone and at night.



▲ Two mountain lion cubs playing. Cubs are raised by their mother for 15 months, then are sent off on their own.

how many are here and cannot currently make projections in regards to how their populations may grow.

Though there are no estimates about how many mountain lions are in Oklahoma, there are theories about how they got here. One theory, that has been dispelled as purely rumor by Department of Wildlife, is that game wardens have purposefully released mountain lions in the wild.

Another, more concrete theory, is that mountain lions have migrated to Oklahoma from other states. Many states surrounding the area, including Texas, have substantial mountain lion populations. These creatures are also known to travel great distances in order to avoid others. Mountain lions are extremely territorial creatures, especially males, who may claim territories between 10 to 300 square miles. Young males may travel into other states to avoid other mountain lions.

Uncertainty about the presence of lions has previously made enacting hunting and shooting laws difficult. The lack of clear regulations has previously caused some confusion and frustration to the public.

Two and a half years ago, it was made legal to

One should always be careful to avoid mountain lions. People should only shoot a mountain lion if it appears to be a danger to themselves, others, or animals.

Humane Wildlife Control, a group which advocates humane dealings with animals, suggests ways to avoid and react an encounter with a mountain lion on their website, www.totalwildlifecontrol.com.

Some tips they have for preventing a mountain lion from appearing on ones property include learning the signs of cougar presence, such as territorial markings, feces, and tracks. It is also recommended to never feed pets outdoors, double bag all meat scraps that are thrown in the garbage, fence in poultry and other livestock, and to never feed wildlife. If living in mountain lion territory, do not leave children or animals unattended.

If one does encounter a mountain lion, the Humane Wildlife Control recommends throwing rocks, using pepper spray, maintaining eye contact and not turning ones back on the animal. One should also inform their local game warden of the sighting.

For more information about mountain lions, visit www.wildlifedepartment.com.