

**Meeting of the Oklahoma Audubon Council**  
**January 26, 2008 10:30 a.m.**  
**Windrock Condos, Stillwater, OK**

Several members arrived early at Couch Park in Stillwater for an unsuccessful search for the Red Crossbills being seen there. (It was later reported the Crossbills were seen that same afternoon!)

The meeting convened at 10:45 a.m. In attendance were: Eric Beck , Cleveland County; Dale Birchett, Friends of Lake Hefner; Martin Brown, Tulsa; Chris Butler, Central OK; John Couch, Payne County; Jane Cunningham , Central OK; John Fisher , Tulsa; Adrienne Holmes, Central OK; Mary Jackson, Tulsa; Pat Jaynes, Payne County; Helen Jordan, Payne County; John Kennington, Tulsa; Candyce Kline, Landowner, Harper County; Tim O'Connell , Payne County, IBA Tech Comm; Jim Orebaugh, Central OK; Sue Selman, Landowner, Harper County; Mark Sherwin, Central OK; Gail Storey , Tulsa; Carole Straughn, Central OK; Jerry Wilhm, Payne County; Donald Winslow, IBA Tech Comm.

**Personal Introductions/Chapter Updates**

Each person introduced themselves, and talked about their chapter's activities. Here are a few highlights (My apologies for what I may have left out!)

Jane Cunningham of the Audubon Society of Central Oklahoma, ASCO, discussed their Lake Hefner project which began last year to install native habitat and landscaping in a barren 8.5 acre area of the lake shore. The project has been fully approved by the city and they have obtained two grants, one from Chesapeake for \$10,000 and another from the OKC Community foundation for \$10,000, to help fund phase 1.

ASCO also has just begun a Junior Audubon Society, after they received a call from a family interested in starting one.

Pat Jaynes of the Payne County Audubon Society discussed the farm bill lobby training she went to in Washington, DC, sponsored by National Audubon. President Jerry Wilham described their chapter's Nature Day and Nature Camp. The Camp will expand to two sessions due to demand. New member Les Imboden has started weekly field trips for the community.

Eric Beck, from Norman, reported there is some interest in forming a Southwest Oklahoma chapter, but he currently does not have time to pursue it.

Jim Orebaugh, ASCO, has a company involved with non-lethal pest control. He is interested in helping the Council with the public relations.

Sue Selman, owner of the Selman Ranch, and Candance Cline, a landowner next to the Selman ranch, have been working on wind energy and Lesser Prairie Chicken issues. They have started a local grassroots organization, Save The Prairie, to educate the public on wind farms.

Gail Storey and Mary Jackson, TAS, talked about the Backyard Habitat Garden Tour. Last year attendance was over 800 people, and netted over \$1,000 for the chapter.

Martin Brown, TAS, discussed his trip to the National Audubon Chapter Leadership Workshop in Maine, and encouraged other chapters to help send a leader. Once a leader attends this, they are "hooked" for Audubon.

**Update from State IBA (Important Bird Area) Coordinator Eric Beck and Steering Committee Chair Martin Brown**

Eric distributed copies of the latest IBA update. Each chapter is encouraged to reproduce it for their members, or include it in their newsletter.

Eric's Coordinators report from that update sums up what he reported to the Council, and is included here:

This is an exciting time for the Oklahoma IBA program. The volunteer work and dedication of the Technical Committee, members of the Audubon council, and the patient staff at the national office has and is paying off. I am overwhelmingly happy to announce that Oklahoma can finally say that we officially have a state recognized IBA! Yes, it's been a year and over that year many good things have happened. We have an outstanding, dedicated, and enthusiastic team of top notch ornithologists working as our Technical Committee. Our Chairman ( John Kennington), and our Steering Committee Chairman (Martin Brown) have kept their sights on the goal and have seen the program move from a dream that they themselves imagined, to a working program that is sure to pave the way for many great things. The Audubon Council has seen fit to keep supporting the program with the only amount of funding we have procured, making sure that this machine that is in motion continues on its path. Most importantly we continue to raise awareness and solicit interest from a concerned and caring public, thank you!

These are really just our baby steps, but they should be celebrated. However, there is still much to be done. In fact so much so, that there really is no end in sight. This is not a bad thing; it only means that great things are to come for the Oklahoma IBA program. Opportunities to raise public awareness, chances to identify and help to preserve Oklahoma's native heritage, and a lot of good natured fun are ahead! Please, as you read this think of what you can do to help this program continue on its path to success, be it through an in-kind contribution, help in one of our volunteer opportunities, or simply sharing in our successes, every little bit counts. Pass the word. The Oklahoma Important Bird Area Program is on the move, and it doesn't appear to be slowing!

In addition, Eric mentioned he has talked with Dr. Dwayne Elmore, Wildlife Specialist with the OSU Extension Service, on organizing a birding festival or other event. It was mentioned Dwayne is very interested in getting such an event started, but was having trouble finding Audubon folks interested in helping. There was general agreement the Council and chapters would be willing to help with such an event.

(I can report I have since talked with Dwayne and we are working together on planning such an event – *John Kennington*)

Eric also covered some of the issues involved with Lesser Prairie Chicken conservation, including the impact of habitat fragmentation by wind generators, and the Sutton Center's research on the impact of fences. He also described their research on marking fences.

We discussed organizing an event in early April centered on the Selman Ranch that could include Prairie Chicken viewing, a presentation to Sue Selman with media present, some time fence marking and further birding opportunities.

### **Break for an expensive lunch from Hideaway Pizza.**

### **Presentation to Sue Selman**

Eric Beck, Martin Brown & John Kennington presented a plaque to Sue Selman recognizing her ranch and Oklahoma's first IBA.



Martin Brown, our IBA Steering Committee Chair, next lead a discussion on future steps for the IBA program.

Jim Orebaugh volunteered to work on publicizing the IBA program, to help put together presentations to give to Rotary clubs and other civic organizations.

John Kennington emphasized the need to make the IBA Coordinator position a full time position.

A number of ideas for raising funds for the IBA program and Council were discussed. The Council had previously agreed, via email vote, to use the 2008 collaborative funds from National Audubon, to go towards IBA expenses.

Eric Beck reported there is a good chance we will qualify for a state wildlife grant.

It was also agreed that other grant opportunities be researched and pursued.

A resolution to endorse to concept of the Council issuing a collectible stamp, with artwork from Debbie Kaspari, with the details to be determined later, passed unanimously. John Kennington will follow up.

A resolution to endorse the concept of the Council issuing a pin passed unanimously. John Fisher will follow up.

A resolution to endorse the concept of the Council setting up a membership system passed unanimously. John Kennington will follow up.

Sue Selman mentioned that a professional photographer (Leonard Lee Rue!!) had filmed LPCs on her property, and given her permission to use some video he had filmed. It was suggested we could sell copies of this video as a fund raiser for the IBA program.

### **Wind Energy and Lesser Prairie Chickens**

We first heard an excellent presentation by Sue Selman and Candyce Cline on the impact of Wind Energy on the prairie, and the work they have been doing with the new Save the Prairie organization.

Attached below is the text of a speech Sue gave to the Woodward Rotary Club, which covers man of the points Sue made to the Council.

Sue emphasized to us that wind energy is not truly “green”. It does not impact the base load that power companies must keep on line. As more wind generators are brought on-line to help meet peak demand additional base load (from coal/gas/nuclear) also needs to be developed.

Plans are to erect huge numbers of wind generators up and down the entire central flyway. This could have devastating impacts on birds and bats.

Candyce pointed out there is no regulation on wind energy. A tower near her property has broken access hatch which bangs constantly with the wind, and there is no one to complain to and be sure the owners correct such problems.

Eric Beck next discussed the latest science from Sutton Center on how wind generators fragment the prairie habitat, and that LPCs will avoid any areas with tall structures. Wind generation could well lead to the extinction of LPC in Oklahoma.

We also discussed the proposal before the Wildlife Department to open the Cooper Wildlife Management Area to wind development. Tim O’Connell informed us of a letter from Dwayne Elmore that the OOS signed on to, in opposition to opening this public area to development. Tim will forward this letter to John for distribution to the Council, and will send a letter to the Wildlife Department expressing the Council’s opposition to opening any public lands to such development.

### **Discussion of an Oklahoma State Audubon Office**

This topic was not covered as a separate agenda item, but the general topic of having full-time environmental professionals in Oklahoma was brought up at various times during the meetings. There was general agreement this is desirable, but funding is not there yet for a state office, but our first goal will be making the IBA Coordinator a full-time paid position.

We also discussed influence of legislation. John Kennington mentioned that in the late 1980's the Council had hired a part-time lobbyist in Oklahoma City. The position was not continued as the Chapters did not support funding the position, one reason being there was not sufficient communication to the chapters.

It was mentioned that Billie Brown is the lobbyist for the Sierra Club, and we may be able to either hire her for lobby on some specific issues, or perhaps work with Sierra on certain issues. Candyce Cline and John Kennington will pursue this.

The Council thanked Pat Jaynes and the Payne County Audubon Society for hosting our meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:15 p.m.

John Kennington  
Chairman

## Northwest Oklahoma — Last Great Place To Ruin

- Author: Selman, Sue

*Rotary Club Speech, November, 2007, by Sue Selman, President, Save the Prairie, Woodward, Oklahoma, savetheprairie@hotmail.com*

Will Rogers once said, “Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” That is what I feel will happen to all of us if we don’t pay attention to what is going to happen here with the wind industry.

I want to thank you for inviting me here today. This tells me you are interested in being informed and listening to both sides of the story. My friends have counseled me to not get emotional. “Sue, just give them the facts.” That is good advice, so I am not going to get emotional, but I will be somewhat passionate today. Because I know that with the invasion of the wind industry into western Oklahoma is going to alter this beautiful country completely and not for the best.

The destruction of our beautiful prairie will have many negative and far-reaching effects that we can only begin to imagine. As Jon Boone, a gentleman who has intensively studied the wind industry, has said, “The people who founded this nation believed democracy could survive only if citizens worked hard to stay informed.” That is why I have gone to great lengths and expense to inform the public about the downside of the wind farms. To quote Will Rogers again, “I only know what I read in the newspapers.” And for the general public that is true. There has been plenty of information handed out by the wind industry to promote themselves, and they have done a superb job. We have only heard what they want us to hear. We have not heard the other side of this story. So, I am going out on a limb to get that information to the people about loss of hunting, loss of the public hunting areas, loss of wildlife habitat, loss of tourism, loss of property values, and the technological weaknesses of the wind industry.

I am most passionate about a proposal allowing OG&E to lease a significant portion of the Cooper WMA. I was dismayed that they would make such a proposal, until I read a Forbes magazine article in which Scott Greene with Oklahoma Wind Power Initiative was quoted as saying, “Concerns raised in other states about the aesthetics of the giant wind turbines or the environmental impact on the migratory birds are minimal in western Oklahoma where communities with vast expanses of land are desperate for economic development.” I was offended by this statement but at the same time it became clear to me that this is the mindset of those who don’t appreciate western Oklahoma. They don’t realize the importance of the Cooper to our local economy and to hunters from Oklahoma and across the nation. Alarming enough, I was also informed that there have been inquiries by other wind developers into the use of Packsaddle and Sandy Sander WMAs for wind farms. As a result of these proposals, the ODWC has formed a subcommittee to decide where they stand on wind development. My stance on this topic is:

1. Placing wind turbines on the Cooper will fragment and destroy a large quantity of habitat. This is 16,000 contiguous acres of prime public land paid for by thousands of hunters and taxpayers. There is only 2% public land available in Oklahoma, with precious little in NW Oklahoma, and we can ill afford to lose any.
2. By leasing or selling public land for wind development, we are opening the door for further industrial development of all our public lands.
3. Also, other landowners considering donating or selling their property to the ODWC may reconsider if they think their land might be industrialized.
4. By leasing to wind developers, the ODWC is saying to the nation that it is OK to put turbines on sensitive wildlife habitat areas. In this case it is Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat.

Commissioner David Riggs, the chairman of the subcommittee, stated that there would be several meetings over the next months with wildlife specialists to help determine their position on the matter. Commissioner Riggs reassured the concerned citizens who attended the monthly meeting that we had nothing to be concerned about at this time. After the ODWC open meeting, OG&E representatives met with the subcommittee in a closed session. It has come to light that OG&E wants to speed the process along because of the growing opposition. If OG&E does allow hunting, I think ODWC would soon realize there would be huge liability issues involved with high-powered rifles and two-million-dollar turbines. I would like to encourage you to email, write, or call the Wildlife Department and ask them to not lease the Cooper to OG&E.

A second area of concern is the habitat loss of the Lesser Prairie Chicken [LPC]. As you recall, Don Wolfe from the Sutton Avian Center recently spoke to you about the LPC. The chicken is in serious trouble due to a number of reasons which I am sure Dr. Wolfe discussed with you. There are plans for hundreds of turbines in LPC territory, and this will be the death knell for the LPC in Oklahoma.

Wind developers have been placing and are looking at future placement of wind turbines near LPC booming grounds. The turbines, roads, traffic, and power lines cause fragmentation of the LPC habitat. Fragmentation leads to isolation of population. This loss of connectivity can lead to genetic bottlenecks, and ultimately local extinctions. To prevent the LPC from being added to the endangered species list, landowners including myself have been working with USFW for over ten years to improve LPC habitat. Sadly, all the efforts of the USFW and the Sutton Center have not been sufficient to stem the tide of the LPC's decline. Therefore, the USFW is taking steps to declare the LPC endangered. As a result of this, mitigation will be required of the wind industry. One of the possibilities will be payment to landowners to preserve and maintain lesser prairie chicken habitat. Unfortunately, payment would not be made to landowners with a wind lease.

Another species that brings in tourism and educational experiences is the Mexican Free-Tailed bat. There are 13 Mexican Free-Tailed Bat maternity colonies and three of those in northwest Oklahoma are in close proximity to wind turbines. The female bats migrate

from Mexico to these caves to give birth and raise a single pup. Ed Arnett, a biologist with Bat Conservation International, released a study of two FPL wind plants in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. His research reaffirmed earlier studies showing major bat mortality. Backed with the news that its wind turbines were killing thousands of bats, FPL reacted quickly. They barred scientists from pursuing follow-up work, removed its \$75,000 contribution from the research cooperative studying bat mortality, and ended the doctoral work of a graduate student. This is alarming since three maternity colonies are located near turbines north of Woodward. The loss of the Mexican Free-Tailed Bat will have an adverse effect on further educational studies and tourism revenue.

Tourism in northwest Oklahoma is growing. I have been a member of two tourism steering committees: the Oklahoma Wildlife Trail Map committee and the agritourism committee initiated by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. Many people have been working for a long time to develop and promote tourism and have made great strides. Tourism can be very profitable and a “green” business. I assure you that tourists are not coming here to see thousands of turbines and miles of transmission lines. They are coming here to experience pristine prairies, unique wildlife, wide open spaces, beautiful sunsets, peace and quiet, and western lifestyles. Tourism can be a very important source of income to northwest Oklahoma if it is allowed to develop.

Another source of income to northwest Oklahoma is hunting. We are in the midst of hunting season, and you have seen all the hunters in town at motels, restaurants, stores, and quick-stops. The hunting business brings in millions of dollars to our economy and will be here for the long run if it is not jeopardized by wind farms. We are in the process of losing thousands of hunting acres to wind farms. To emphasize my point, I would like to convey an experience I had at my breakfast table this morning. I have two very nice quail hunters here from Ohio. They drove a long way, as most of my hunters do, to hunt wild Bobwhite Quail. They expressed their love of northwest Oklahoma. They think it is beautiful here. They love the wide open spaces, wild bird hunting, and the scenery. They are very dismayed at the thought of all that being ruined by the wind industry. Mr. Fee said, “I came here for the ambience, the quiet wide open spaces. I love to hunt wild quail and there are very few places east of the Mississippi to hunt wild birds.” I hear this sentiment echoed often by my hunters. Hunting is a profitable business for our communities which I don’t think gets enough credit.

Not only are we losing hunting acreage and income, but we could be devaluing our property and our neighbors’ property by long-term leases that may not pan out. Most of the leases that I have heard about run from 50 to 150 years. Land that would have sold for a great deal of money to be used for hunting, recreation, and a country experience will not be considered valuable by those prospective buyers. Even though a study on property values and wind farms has not been conducted, I think property, especially the neighbor’s property, loses its value. [One farmer I read about](#) regrets ever leasing to wind developers. He regrets having been the “lure” to draw in other unsuspecting landowners. He regrets that he has allowed fields to be subdivided and road base to be spread on land once picked bare of rocks. He regrets that he’s no longer the person who controls his own land

and is told where to go by security guards. He regrets the divide he has created between friends, between neighbors, and between family members.

The wind developers love to discuss wildlife habitat, bird and bat kills, and property values with you because all of that takes away from the real issue — which is their technological weaknesses. A few of their weaknesses are:

1. They're inefficient and unreliable. When wind is not blowing, the wind farms are not producing. Wind farms average less than 25% of their capacity a third of the time. They produce above that average rate another third of the time and nothing at all (yet draw power from the grid) the other third of the time.
2. Another weakness is wind-generated electricity cannot be stored, so it has to have plants powered by natural gas or coal operating at the same time to fill in the gaps. Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority in Edmond said they had to build a 14-million-dollar plant to fill in the gaps.
3. A third weakness is that wind energy will not significantly reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; therefore they are not the "green" solution that we have been led to believe.

One last point I would like to make is the wind industry is not regulated by anyone. No other multimillion dollar project is allowed without regulations to make such drastic changes to an area's environment and way of life. I would encourage you to write, call, or email northwest Oklahoma's legislators and ask them for some legislation to protect our wildlife, tourism, hunting business, and a rural way of life.

Jon Boone sums it up like this, "I've concluded that industrial wind energy in the United States exemplifies American business at its worst, promising to save the environment while wreaking havoc on it. Spawned, then supported, by government welfare measures at considerable public expense, it produces no meaningful product or service yet provides enormous profit to a few wealthy investors, primarily multinational energy companies in search of increased bottom lines. It's an environmental plunderer, using a few truths, many half-truths, and the politics of wishful thinking to frame a house of lies. It's all a bill of goods."

Right now, according to the Southwest Power Pool's data, there are over 1,300 wind turbines planned for our area of the state. After witnessing the large numbers of wind companies attending the Arnett meeting, that staggering number, in all probability, is just the tip of the iceberg. I am not willing to stand by silently and watch our special area of the world be industrialized by such a weak technology.

Finally, believe me, I realize it's not "politically correct" to question wind energy. But I had to come to you and make a challenge — as leaders and citizens of northwest Oklahoma, you have an obligation to continue investigating and seeking the truth about the wind energy industry, and you must do this before it is too late.