



Bison *Trails*



From the Oklahoma State Coordinator

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

Chickasaw National Recreation Area

901 W. 1st Street
Sulphur, Oklahoma 73086

Superintendent

Kevin Young (acting)

Phone

580-622-7234

E-mail

chic_web_coordinator@nps.gov

Website

<http://www.nps.gov/chic>

Social Media

Facebook:

@ChickasawNPS

Twitter:

@ChickasawNPS

Instagram:

@chickasawnps

Oklahoma City National Memorial

301 NW 6th St, Suite 305
Oklahoma City, OK 73101

Superintendent

Kevin Young (acting)

Phone

405-609-8855

E-mail

okci_superintendent@nps.gov

Website

<http://www.nps.gov/okci>

Social Media

Facebook:

@NPSOklahoma

Twitter:

@NPSOklahoma

Instagram:

@npsoklahoma

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

18555 Hwy 47 A, Suite A
Cheyenne, OK 73628

Superintendent

Kenny Points (acting)

Phone

580-497-2742

E-mail

waba_superintendent@nps.gov

Website

<http://www.nps.gov/waba>

Social Media

Facebook:

@WashitaBattlefieldNHS

Twitter:

@WashitaNPS

Instagram:

@washitanps

Traditionally, this space is reserved for the Oklahoma State Coordinator to address the current state of the National Park Service in Oklahoma, as well as tackle issues as we are working together with various entities - both public and private - to enhance and protect the resources entrusted to us.

With the retirement of Bill Wright in December 2022, the position is currently being recruited. Once regional leadership makes a selection, a new State Coordinator will inherit this space and bring to you their thoughts and vision.

Until then, please know that the dedicated rangers will keep working for you and your parks - to protect the resources and the stories that shape who we are as a state and as a nation.

I wish you all a very happy summer!

Matt Whitney
Bison Trails Editor

Celebrating the Strength of Shared Visions

Jared Wahkinney, Park Guide

What does it mean to be a part of a community? Our Parks are filled with communities within the ecosystems that thrive there, and it is our job to preserve these areas. From an Indigenous perspective of conservation, we listen to the needs of our environments. We understand what plants need, how they change, and how adaptation changes them. Within our parks, the natural ecology and communities can be dynamic and ever-growing, and we understand that. The same can be said for our human communities. Nowhere is this more evident than in Oklahoma City. This place is the homelands of the Kiowa, Osage, Wichita, Comanche, and Kickapoo and embraces its growing populations. As the city continues to evolve, it becomes increasingly vital to recognize and adapt to the expanding needs of our diverse communities, particularly those of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

In November 2022, the National Park Service in Oklahoma City was invited to develop a partnership with the First Americans Museum (FAM), also located in Oklahoma City. The collaboration between the NPS and FAM was based on a shared vision to empower youth, guided by respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. Both organizations brought unique strengths to the partnership. Still, the critical component of making the partnership work was being community guided and created based on the community's needs and visions.

The program we set out to develop was a three-day camp focused on visual storytelling. Currently, the rise of Indigenous presence in media made the creation of this camp timely to meet the needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities. This was a chance to talk to youth about telling their story. This topic is very familiar to our organization as the #YourParkStory campaign for 2023 aims to highlight our relationships with our parks.

"Tell Me About It" was structured around giving students examples of how the National Park Service tells stories visually. Rangers Jared Wahkinney and DJ Labay taught the 6-8 year-old campers how to take compelling photos and create artwork that tells a story. Participants learned about composition, capturing portraits, and even using objects to convey emotions. Hands-on experience was offered as FAM lent 4 iPads to the camp. iPads were used for photography and graphic design each day. Then, through journaling and prompts, the campers discovered the power of their own narratives.

During the camp, the participants met Veronica Verdin, a talented visual storyteller from Arches and Canyonlands National Parks. Veronica shared her journey and demonstrated how visual storytelling connects people from different backgrounds. Her experiences inspired the campers to embrace their own stories and appreciate the perspectives of others.

The NPS and FAM partnership extends beyond the camp. The NPS participated in FAM's TEKfest, a gathering that focuses on Tribal Ecological Knowledge. This presents an excellent opportunity for participants to learn more about this critical field. Additionally, FAM has invited NPS Rangers to host a summer camp, opening doors for more young people to explore their creativity and grow together.

Community-led projects, such as the collaboration between the NPS and FAM, demonstrate the incredible things we can achieve when we work together. By listening to our communities and embracing the richness of diverse stories, we create a world where everyone's voice matters.

Another Place for the Bison to Roam

Megan Wilkins, Park Ranger

The park bison herd at Chickasaw National Recreation Area was first established in February 1920, when three bison were brought to the park from Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge. They were originally housed in a small pasture near Pavilion Springs. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began work on an 84-acre bison pasture, which was completed a year later. This year, another 42-acre bison pasture was completed.

Nine animals from the Chickasaw National Recreation Area bison herd were moved to the new east pasture Thursday, April 6, 2023. Although smaller in size, the east pasture has more grazeland available. One bison cow has proven difficult to herd and remains in the CCC-era pasture, now called the west pasture. Once all the bison are relocated to the new pasture, park staff will be able to start on some much-needed prairie restoration work in the older pasture.



“Having a second pasture will allow us to rotate the bison back and forth. This will benefit both the land and the bison,” said Resource Management Specialist Steve Burrough.

To learn more about how the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior manage 19 bison herds in 12 states, including the herd at Chickasaw National Recreation Area, visit <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/bison/protecting-bison.htm>.



Rangers relocating bison into new pasture / NPS Photo

A New Way to Pay? It's a-boat Time!

Ashe Loper, Recreation Fee Technician



Lake of the Arbuckles / NPS Photo



Boating at CNRA / NPS Photo

The Fees division of Chickasaw National Recreation Area is in the process of implementing a new system that will now allow boaters on Lake of the Arbuckles to purchase their annual boat permits online.

Currently, visitors who have a motorized watercraft can purchase a 1-day pass, 2-day pass, or annual decal via automated fee machines (AFM) located at Buckhorn, The Point, and Guy Sandy boat ramps. Due to ongoing and repeated technical difficulties with the annual decals, Fee staff have been looking for solutions that are more efficient and user-friendly. Breanna Buckley, Recreation Fee Specialist, proposed the idea of online payments for annual boat permits, which will hopefully streamline the process for visitors.

Following in the footsteps of other national parks such as Amistad NRA and Lake Roosevelt NRA, Fee staff will be using the website [pay.gov](https://www.pay.gov) for all annual boat permit transactions starting in January 2024. A separate park email account has been created for Fees to monitor and fulfill transactions. Visitors can either have their decal mailed to the address they provide when they fill out the online form or they can choose to pick it up in person at the Travertine Nature Center during regular business hours.

The 1-day and 2-day passes will still be available to purchase at the AFMs since they are printed on receipt paper and do not have the same technical issues as the annual decals. Although this new system will come with a slight learning curve for repeat visitors to Lake of the Arbuckles, we hope [pay.gov](https://www.pay.gov) will prove less challenging overall. Water recreation is one of the main summer activities here at Chickasaw National Recreation Area and by applying these improvements to our permit system, we are striving to give visitors an experience that is as hassle-free as possible.

Arbuckle Dam Prescribed Burn

Staff Writers



Prescribed Fire burning on Arbuckle Dam / NPS Photo

On February 28, firefighters from Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CNRA), Sulphur Fire Department, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs conducted the annual prescribed burn on Arbuckle Dam. The burn commenced as planned and resource objectives were met.

The low complexity of the burn operation allowed for firefighters and overhead personnel to show proficiency on required training tasks.

The National Park Service's prescribed fire program helps protect local communities and reduces the threat of high-severity, uncontrolled wildland fires. Prescribed fire also serves to enhance natural ecosystem processes and resiliency.

Panther Falls Amenity Enhancements

Staff Writers

In June, park maintenance staff completed a much-needed project on the Panther Falls vault toilets. The small poorly ventilated structures, that had been in place for many years, were replaced by larger, better engineered buildings.

The park completed this project with funding from the National Park Service Cyclic Maintenance Program.

The new vaults are open for use. In the next few weeks, accessible walkways will be added to the structures. We hope these improvements add utility and value to your visits for years to come!



New vault toilets at Panther Falls / NPS Photo

Washita Battlefield

National Historic Site

Where the Bison Roam

Kenny Points, Chief of Interpretation

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site unveiled a new Bison exhibit earlier this year. The Bison was central to the Plain Indians way of life and a symbol of the American West. Getting this project accomplished was no easy task. Superintendent Kevin Young shares his thoughts on realizing a goal several years in the making:

“Whenever I first came to the Washita National Historic Site as the acting Superintendent in 2019, I was able to set down and talk one on one to Chief Wilbur Bullcoming.

As Chief Bullcoming was explaining the history of the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes and how they lived back before the European Settlers came to the plains, I envisioned having a life size Buffalo at the visitors center to help engage the public with the story.

Through my years of serving the Park Service here I have worked diligently to make this vision a reality. It is with great honor and pride that I can now say that a life size bison is here at the Visitors Center to help tell the story of the tribes.

For three years I have looked for a bison that we could purchase. In Fall of 2022 Richard Zahm was able to find a taxidermist with a life size bison cape that was willing to create a feature for the visitor’s center that we would be able to purchase. We excitedly waited for the Bison’s arrival not knowing for sure what it was going to look like. On Saturday January 7th the anticipation was at an all-time high as the bison made its arrival.

We are ecstatic with the new addition to the museum and are looking forward to sharing it with everyone.”

Chief Wilbur Bullcoming and Chief Thurman Star performed a blessing ceremony for the Bison. The Bison presents a strong welcome to visitors as they enter the visitor center gallery. They often share their experiences with Bison, many of which are memories from other National Park Service sites.



Bison Exhibit at Washita Battlefield NHS / NPS Photo



Blessing the bison / NPS Photo

Summer Camp Season

Kate Roesch, Park Ranger

Every summer for the last 8 years, Washita Battlefield NHS has hosted a week-long summer camp for local kids to learn about the park. Last year, after increasing the number of campers there was still a waitlist of over a dozen children that wanted to come to camp. To remedy this, Washita Battlefield NHS decided to host two camps this summer: our traditional camp, “Camp Owa Chita” for 1st through 4th grade children and a new camp, “Camp Hotoae” for 5th through 8th grade children.

Camp Owa Chita has been a summer staple for many local children. This camp encourages children to explore, learn, and get excited about being in national park. Topics and activities change every year and cover a wide range from nature crafts, to a low-ropes teambuilding course about wildland firefighting, to the most highly anticipated activity of camp, the “Roadrunner Derby” a salt-box derby featuring the Greater Roadrunner.

Our new camp, Camp Hotoae is an opportunity for middle school children to learn about possible career choices with the National Park Service or in other outdoor fields. Camp Hotoae while meaning “bison” in Cheyenne, is also an acronym for “Helping Others To Observe And Explore,” since that is what many outdoor careers try to do.



Campers at Owa Chita / NPS Photo

This year, Camp Hotoae is focused on outdoor careers involving wildlife and botany. Campers will have the opportunity to talk with a certified forester, a US Forest Service biologist, C&A tribal members, and NPS park rangers while learning about birdwatching, ethnobotany, and biology. They will also have the hands-on opportunity to “be a ranger” by participating in removing netting that causes dangers for park wildlife.

We look forward to helping our local children learn about, explore, and protect outdoor places and hopefully spark the next generation of park rangers, protectors, and enthusiasts.

Osage Orange in the Park

Joel Shockley, Park Guide

Many visitors to Washita Battlefield NHS walk the Dust and Fire Trail that goes around the visitor center. One of the most common questions rangers are asked is, “What type of fruit is this green brain-looking ball and where does it come from?” It has been called many names - horseapples, hedge-apples, bois-d’arc and bodark - but the *Maclura pomifera* tree is commonly known as the Osage Orange.

The Osage Orange near the Visitor Center and Black Kettle National Grassland offices were planted by the Reclamation Administration during the Dust Bowl to mitigate the effects of wind erosion.

Long before barbed wire was invented, these spiny trees were used by farmers and ranchers to fence in the prairie and plains and to keep their livestock in and intruders out. The Plains Indians used the tree to make archery bows.



An Osage Orange fruit / NPS Photo

When the wood is first cut it is flexible, but after exposure to air, it becomes very hard and durable. Settlers used the tree as fenceposts, hedges, machinery parts, and as insulator pins. The distinctive 3 ½ to 5-inch, inedible green, heavy brain-looking fruit gives this tree its peculiar name. These balls are about the size of a grapefruit and contain many light brown nutlets.

“Wreck in the Morning Light”

Ty Labeth, Park Guide



Tornado damage at Washita Battlefield / NPS Photo

February 26th ended like any other Sunday at Washita Battlefield NHS: rangers walking out, telling each other to drive safe, keep an eye on the weather. . . the typical evening fare thee wells not knowing that the next week would be anything but typical. That night, every few minutes an emergency vehicle passed by my window. Standing on the back porch, you could see them sitting just down the road near the bridge over Sargent Major Creek. It was obvious something bad had happened toward the park, and a lot of features that were normal when I left work that night were a wreck in the morning light.

An EF2 tornado touched down just west of the town of Cheyenne and moved to the northeast. A few houses were destroyed, and nothing west of town escaped without serious damage. Trees were pulled up by the roots and fences were in a jumble. Several homes in town received significant damage from the high winds, and the Black Kettle National Grasslands and Washita Battlefield NHS maintenance shop were directly in the path.

A carport and several sheds were destroyed, and a lean-to hung on by a support beam. The shop fared the best, but still sustained significant damage and part of its roof was gone. Every vehicle parked outside the shop was totaled, including an employee’s personal car. A three-quarter ton truck with a gooseneck trailer still attached was perched on top of a large debris pile. Washita Camp Owa Chita supplies covered the ground. The Dust and Fire trail was littered with debris.

While the trail’s windmill was torn out of the ground and laid on its side, the water tank underneath was undamaged. Luckily, the visitor center and offices escaped with only minor damages.

The day after the tornado, Washita Battlefield and Black Kettle Grassland staff began the process of clean-up. It was a daunting task in the bright morning light. Day one was primarily picking through the rubble finding items that were serviceable. Day two was much the same, but most of the collecting of items had been completed and the harder dirtier tasks could begin. The rest of the week was filled with the Forest Service fire crew sectioning downed trees, throwing away unserviceable items, and relocating those that could be used.

Tragedy is nothing new to Oklahoma. The outpouring of support from the local community and state agencies was staggering. Community members came by asking if they could help or dropped off water and snacks for the workers. The Cheyenne rodeo grounds filled with trucks and equipment for the electrical workers who came from all over to restore power to those living West of town. Every day, a local business was offering free food to people working in the cleanup efforts. A Forest Service Incident Crew came in to assist, and they did an outstanding job getting all the wind-swept items disposed.

We still have recovery to complete, but with the help from our partners, friends, and even strangers, we are set up for success.

Song title, “Wreck In The Morning Light”, used with permission from Adara Kay Music

Getting Hooked

Matt Whitney, Community Outreach Park Ranger

“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”

While opinions on the origin of this proverb vary, the sentiment behind it remains true: learning to fish can not only feed the stomach, but also the mind and soul.

In 2022, the National Park Service in Oklahoma City was fortunate to receive a grant from the National Park Foundation to acquire, build, and outfit a cargo trailer to take to various lakes, rivers, and ponds to engage Oklahomans by teaching them how to fish and allow for younger anglers to participate in the Junior Ranger Angler Program.

While identifying places to stage programs and clinics, rangers learned that Scissortail Park in Downtown OKC had been awarded a different grant: *Vamos a Pescar*. Scissortail Park and the NPS agreed to collaborate at programs scheduled at Scissortail. This would allow both parks to reach Central Oklahoma residents and visitors and show



A Park Ranger showing off parts of a fishing pole / NPS Photo



Interior of the Fishing Trailer / NPS Photo

them the variety of places to be able to fish across Oklahoma. Many participants had never fished before and were instantly “hooked” after catching their first fish.

In addition to the Scissortail programs, the NPS fishing trailer has engaged youth anglers in Yukon, Ok part of their annual Trout Fish Out, Fishing Derby, and Festival of the Child.

The NPS fishing clinics and trailer are similar to one that is based out of Chickasaw National Recreation Area. Rangers at both locations have partnered with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to provide the free fishing clinics.

A Visit from the Director

Hailey Franks, Park Guide



On May 15, 2023, park rangers at the Oklahoma City National Memorial had the honor and privilege to meet the Director of the National Park Service, Chuck Sams. Director Sams stopped by the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum as he was returning to Washington, D.C. after being in Oklahoma on personal business. After greeting Director Sams, Supervisory Ranger Mary Collins interpreted the symbolism of the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial. The Director graciously took the time to talk with each ranger and answer any questions they had.

Chuck Sams was sworn in as the 19th Director of the NPS in December 2021. Even though he grew up in Northeast Oregon, Director Sams does have ties to Oklahoma, holding a Master of Legal Studies in Indigenous Peoples Law from the prestigious University of Oklahoma School of Law.



Director Sams walking with rangers / NPS Photo





National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service
 Office of the Oklahoma State Coordinator
 301 NW 6th St Suite 305
 Oklahoma City, OK 73102

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BisonTrails

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BisonTrails is the official newsletter of the units of the national park system located in the State of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma State Coordinator
 Kevin Young (*acting*)

Contributors
 Hailey Franks Kenny Points
 Ashe Loper Joel Shockley
 Megan Wilkins Jared Wahkinney
 Kate Roesch Ty Labeth

Editor
 Matt Whitney

Cover Photo
 Flowing Water at Chickasaw NRA / NPS
 Photo

Comments? Write to:
 Newsletter Editor
 National Park Service
 301 NW 6th St, Suite 305
 Oklahoma City, OK 73102

Support Your Parks

Friends of Chickasaw NRA

The purpose of the Friends of Chickasaw National Recreation Area is to promote public appreciation of and support for Chickasaw National Recreation Area. This support includes conducting interpretive programs, increasing public awareness regarding the park and its mission, fundraising, and other volunteer activities. The IRS has certified this group as a private non-profit organization (501c3) and membership fees for joining are tax deductible. Anyone interested in receiving a membership application can send an email to: chic_superintendent@nps.gov, or call 580-622-7220.

Friends of Chickasaw NRA
 PO Box 976
 Sulphur, OK 73086

Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is a private non-profit organization, and does not receive any annual operating funds from the federal, state or local government. Museum admissions, store sales, the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, earnings from an endowment and private fundraising allow the Memorial and Museum to be self-sustaining.

Valuable gifts of time, talent and treasure to the Memorial help change lives each and every day. Make your donation to the Memorial and volunteer your time. If you would like to help, write to PO Box 323, Oklahoma City, OK, 73101, or call toll-free at 1-888-542-HOPE.