



# Bison Trails

# 25 YEARS



# From the Oklahoma State Coordinator

## National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

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Bill Wright  
Oklahoma State Coordinator

As we come out of Spring and head into the busy Summer season, I am reminded of the good work that we are doing. I don't just mean the mission that we all work towards. I am talking about the day-to-day work that takes place to keep parks going and open for visitors to enjoy, while protecting all the valuable resources we are entrusted with. It is an amazing responsibility to care for the places and things that make us who we are.

I continue to be inspired by our employees who, on a daily basis, go above and beyond to make sure these special places are cared for and presented in the best manner possible. We are doing all that with the same reduced staffing that every industry is facing today. It certainly makes me a little nervous knowing we are going into our peak season without all the tools in the toolbox, but I am encouraged by the way that our employees are approaching that task, and fully aware of what is ahead. I am grateful for the perseverance that they demonstrate.

We use the word resilient a lot lately, and we want to make sure our employees are getting what they need to be resilient. In the face of staffing shortages and increased visitation, I am not sure what that looks like, but I do know our staff will manage through it the best that they can. I can expect no more.

I look for a new crop of visitors eager to experience their national parks and discover something new. We can certainly help them with that. We are in a new age of discovery. People from all walks of life are interested in experiencing new things. We are uniquely equipped to help with that.

## The Impact of 25 Years Doug Hendon



45 years ago, as a student in Western Oklahoma, my first experience of history was of a field trip to the Black Kettle Museum. In a small brick building, I walked past displays of artifacts from the Battle of the Washita. None of those artifacts or museum really made much of impact on me or my classmates. As I recall, my class made it back to Reydon in time for lunch that day.

As time went on, my teenage memories are of a place we called “The Monument.” Many of these memories include dragging Main Street Cheyenne on Saturday night, calling out to friends, “Party at the Monument” or even, “They’re going out to drag race each other.” Unfortunately, many of my experiences growing up did not teach me of the history that was all around me. Little did I know that many years later, my life would circle back around, and I would work at that same place as a Park Ranger for the National Park Service (NPS).

25 years ago, the NPS acquired Washita Battlefield. In this time, the NPS used many resources to bring the history of what happened here over 150 years ago back to life. The NPS is working to restore the park as close as possible to the time of Chief Black Kettle and the morning Lt. Col. Custer and the 7th US Cavalry attacked. The NPS created a trail that leads to the Washita River for visitors and locals to explore, for Native Americans to pray, and for everyone to feel what happened.

The NPS also built a visitor center that I have heard many times referred to as a beautiful and peaceful place. Since working here, I have also had the opportunity to learn the history of Washita. No more is this a place with one person staffing a desk in a tiny museum, but rather a destination with a knowledgeable ranger staff that engages visitors and locals in meaningful conversations. I have seen the programs started here for children to learn, too. They are much more than a field trip to the museum that returns before lunch. There are Reading Ranger programs at local libraries, a weeklong summer camp, Junior Ranger programs, and outreach events in the communities. At these events, some of which I have brought my granddaughter to, I see children eager to learn about the people and events that happened here, through games and activities. And they have fun doing it.

I was asked by my superintendent, “What has been the impact of NPS to the people here?” As one of the “people here” I see many impacts. I see visitors and locals walking the trails, hearing the peacefulness of the Washita River. I see locals in the visitor center gallery pointing at art made by local artists saying to each other, “I saw them in the restaurant yesterday.” I watch as visitors from every state and many countries interact with rangers and leave with a better understanding and respect for the people who fought and died here, and for the survivors who tell their stories.

I now know the history of the past and I see history in the making, because 25 years ago the NPS decided to protect and develop Washita Battlefield National Historic Site. There is so much more here now than 45 years ago. As a local and now as a park ranger, I see another 25+ years of the peace and community that Chief Black Kettle wanted for his people.

The impact is much larger than you know, Superintendent.

# Washita Battlefield

National Historic Site

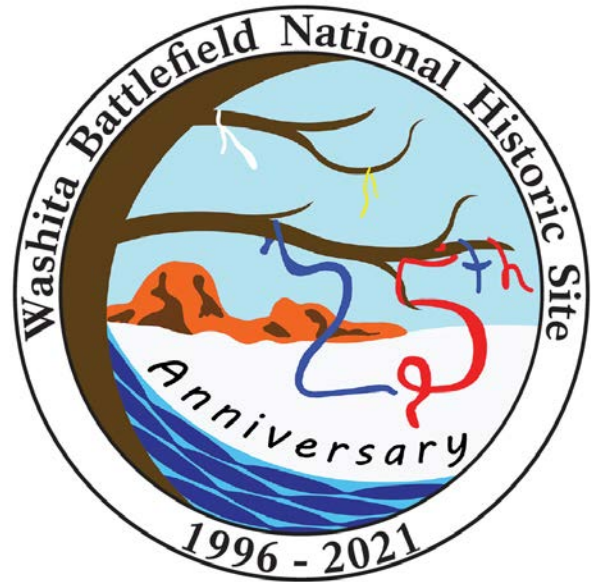
## The 25th Anniversary of Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

Joel Shockley, Park Guide

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site is celebrating 25 years as a National Park Site. Several events, activities, and exhibits were planned around the theme “Remembering the Past, Working Towards the Future.” The land’s past as a National Park Service site began on November 12, 1996 when President William Jefferson Clinton signed the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996, that included core area of the Washita Battlefield National Historic Site. 16 USC 461 note Sec. 607 the “104th Congress in order to provide for the preservation and interpretation of the Battle of the Washita, there is hereby established the Washita Battlefield National Historic Site.”

The public had many ideas for how the land which is now Washita Battlefield should be managed. Some wanted to convert the area into public hunting land, others wanted to create a city park. However, many people recognized the importance of preserving the history the land holds. So, 25 years ago, this land was protected with the intentions of honoring the lives that were lost here and for future generations to reflect and learn from this moment in our nation’s history.

Throughout this year we are celebrating the park’s birthday with several events. In honor of the 25th anniversary as a unit of the National Park Service, Washita Battlefield held a commemoration ceremony on November 13, 2021, at the Washita Battlefield Visitor Center. The site has a 25th Anniversary Junior Ranger Booklet that anyone can complete to earn a 25th



Washita Battlefield 25th Anniversary Logo / NPS Photo

Anniversary Logo Patch during the year. There is even a 25th Anniversary Challenge Coin booklet that anyone can do to earn the coin. In March the Visitor Center opened the “Remembering the Past, Working Towards the Future” Student Art Exhibition. This exhibit displays art from kindergarten to high school from all across America. Throughout Spring the park will be showcasing a parade float built to represent the park’s 25th anniversary theme.

On July 30th the park will work with the 7th Cavalry living history group Troop J to show what it was like to live as a member of the 7th Cavalry. Washita Battlefield continues to reach out to stakeholders and community members to hear ways in which the park’s 25th anniversary can be celebrated.

Event schedules are still subject to review and changes based on Government regulations due to the pandemic. Please call Washita Battlefield at 580-497-2742 or check the park’s website and social media for more up to date information on events being held this year.



1966 Washita Battlefield Overlook / NPS Photo

# Washita Battlefield Participates in the Old Settlers Reunion

## Kenny Points, Acting Chief of Interpretation

The week of April 18th, Washita Battlefield National Historic Site staff participated in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Old Settlers Reunion. This event occurs every five years and celebrates the 1892 Land Run. Over the course of a week the small community of Cheyenne, Oklahoma was transformed into a hive of activity.

National Park Service assisted at the event registration to encourage park visitation and participated in several events. The first event staff took part in was the “Styles of our Past Style Show”. This event highlighted fashion styles ranging from late eighteen hundred to current times. Rangers Celeste Dixon from Fort Larned National Historic Site, Kenny Points, and Kate Roesch dressed the part for this event. Celeste showed off her 1870’s officers wife living history costume. Kate wore a female 70’s era National Park Service Uniform. Kenny sported a 90’s uniform, like what was wore when Washita Battlefield was established, and a modern uniform to highlight the differences between the two. Mike Mapel, Jeff Hensley, and Loren Smith, volunteer members of the Troop J 7th Cavalry group, showcased a wide variety of uniforms used by the 7th Cavalry during the late 1800’s. JR Lonelodge, DJ Yarholar, Domingo Whiteman, Nivy Yarholar, and Naumi Yarholar provided a highlight for the event. Dressed in Native American Regalia, the group demonstrated a variety of traditional tribal dances.

On Friday and Saturday park staff setup a Junior Ranger tent in downtown Cheyenne. Visitors were able to complete a variety of junior ranger activities including the 25 for 25 Challenge. This program was created as part of the Washita Battlefield NHS 25th Anniversary and encourages visitors to learn about the history of the area by visiting the Washita Battlefield Visitor Center as well as several locations in Cheyenne. Upon completion of 10 challenges each participant earned a 25th Anniversary Commemorative Coin. Children were also able to create a ball and cup game to take home as a souvenir. A touch table with a variety of bison related objects was also a hit with the young and young at heart enjoying the Old Settlers Reunion.

Living History Rangers took part in the Historic Tent City on Friday and Saturday. The Tent City was headed by Troop J, a group that uses living history to



Washita Battlefield staff with a demonstrator/ NPS Photo

portray the lives of soldiers in the 7th Cavalry. Joel Shockley, participated as Acting Assistant Surgeon. Celeste Dixon provided interpretation dressed as an officer’s wife and Pete Bethke, from Fort Larned, was able to compliment the troop as a Blacksmith.

One of the highlights of the Old Settlers Reunion is the Saturday parade. Washita Battlefield entered a float for the parade constructed by Washita Battlefield employee Doug Handke with help from all the park staff, especially Ty Labeth. The float’s theme was the Park’s 25th Anniversary Slogan “Remembering the Past, Working Towards the Future”. It consisted of a teepee and three bison transitioning into the park’s visitor center by way of the Washita River. Washita Battlefield Superintendent Kevin Young and Larry Bell from Chickasaw NRA navigated the float while several NPS Employees passed out candy and wooden nickels to onlookers. Over 700 people were able to view the park’s float which finished 2nd in the historic category.

The Washita Battlefield Visitor Center saw visitation increase 38% from the previous week over the course of the Old Settlers Reunion. Ed Standefer and Amanda Maxwell from Chickasaw NRA helped by staffing the Visitor Center on Saturday. Overall, the Old Settlers Reunion was a great success. Washita Battlefield NHS was well represented in an event that is very important to the community of Cheyenne.

# Student Art Exhibit

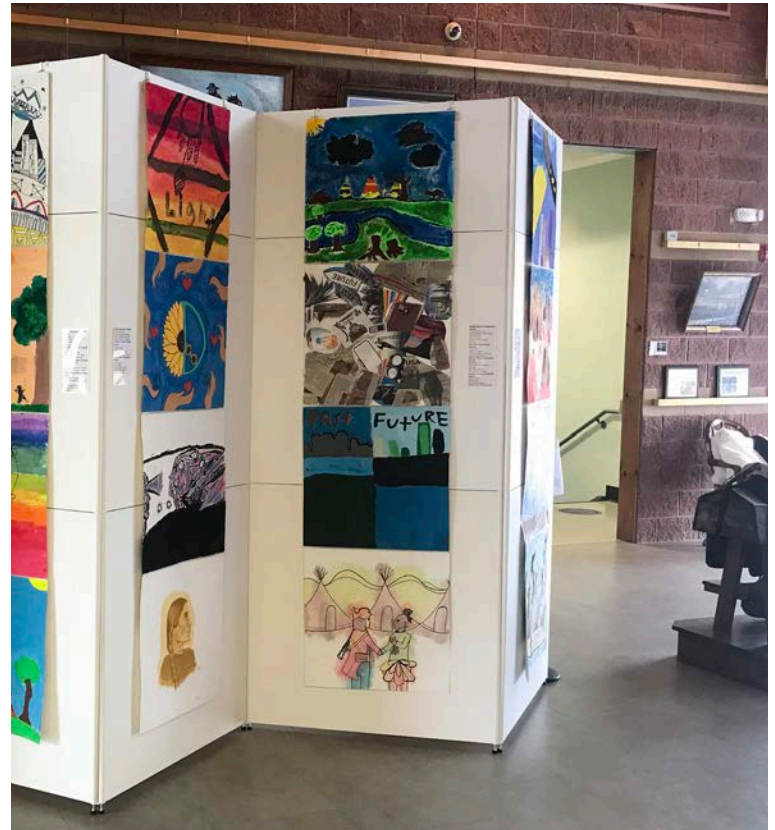
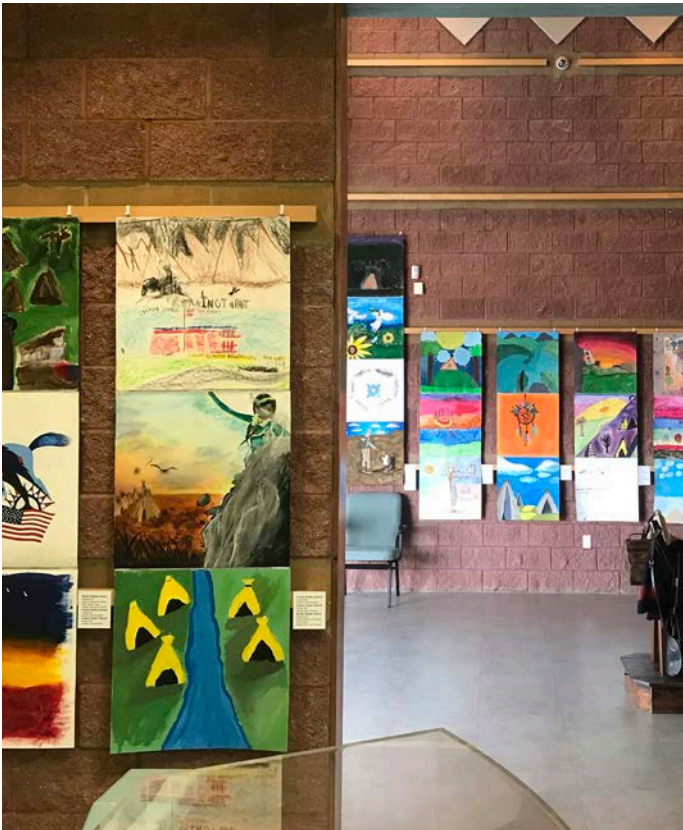
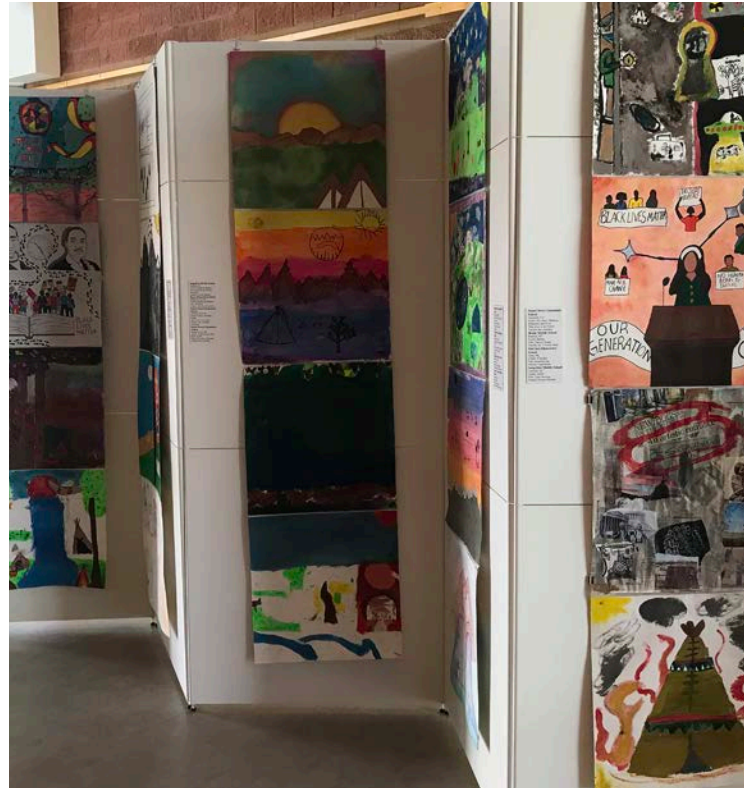
Kate Roesch, Park Ranger

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site is proud to celebrate the success of working together with tribal and community members for the last 25 years to remember and commemorate what happened here over 150 years ago.

For the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Washita, the park collaborated with the Fiber Arts Collective to reach out to teachers and schools across the country to create artwork around the theme, “Remembering the Past, Working Towards the Future.” In response, the park received 71 pieces of artwork created by 334 students; half of which were created by Oklahomans.

This art installation portrays what the next generation of park goers thinks about Washita. The park invites the public to come see the what the next generation of park stewards thinks the future will be for Washita Battlefield National Historic Site.

The art installation will be on display in the visitor center from March until October 2022.



## Veterans Lake Fire

Megan Wilkins, Park Ranger

The Veterans Lake Fire started as a brush pile burn on private land on Saturday evening, March 19, 2022. The following day, it escaped containment at approximately 6:30 pm and spread quickly into Chickasaw National Recreation Area.

Firefighters quickly responded from a number of agencies, including National Park Service staff, Sulphur Fire Department, Davis Fire Department, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Joy Volunteer Fire Department, Oak Grove Volunteer Fire Department, Rock Prairie Volunteer Fire Department, Sulphur Police Department, Murray County Emergency Management, Davis Emergency Management, and the Murray County Sheriffs Office.

As the fire rapidly spread on Sunday evening, evacuations were conducted for Rock Creek Campground in the park, and for private residences on Claremore Avenue and Limbyard Drive southeast of the park. Luckily the wind drove the fire towards Veterans Lake, which acted as a fire break and greatly aided firefighters in stopping the spread towards developed areas of the park and the town of Sulphur. Most of the area west of Highway 177, south of Sulphur, and east of Rock Creek were closed for the next two days while fire crews worked in the area. Rain on the evening of Monday, March 21st also greatly aided in slowing the spread of the fire.

Incident Commander Josh Williams of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Deputy Incident Commander Jason McDaniel of the National Park Service came to manage the fire and oversee containment operations. Two Bureau of Indian Affairs crews, one from Oregon and one from Michigan, as well as Chickasaw NRA staff, worked south from the original containment lines to extend down into less populated areas to keep the fire from spreading. The interior areas of the fire were allowed to burn out.

Hazard trees and smoldering materials were cleared from the Veterans Lake Trail, which reopened on Friday, March 25th. The Rock Creek Multi-use Trail System reopened the following week.



Firefighters working the Veterans Lake Fire/ NPS Photo

The final size of the fire was 447 acres, with a little over half of the burned area in the park. Several large limb piles at the Sulphur Limbyard caught fire and the limbyard remained closed weeks afterwards. However, no structures were damaged and most importantly, no one was injured.

The park was able to take advantage of the presence of fire crews, and new contacts gained with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to conduct two prescribed fires the following week. The new bison pasture area and Arbuckle Dam were both successfully treated according to plan on April 1st, 2022.

# Hunter Education

Ed Standefer, Park Guide



Green wing teal/ NPS Photo

Did you know that you can hunt at Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CNRA)? Though more commonly associated with other federal land management agencies like the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and US Forest Service, many NPS sites across the country allow hunting. Grand Teton National park in Wyoming began its elk hunt program in 1950. Many of the NPS units in Alaska permit hunting in at least some part of their area. In 2020, Olympic National Park utilized a public hunt as management tool to reduce the population of invasive mountain goats. Our next-door neighbor, Texas, has three NPS sites where you can hunt: Lake Amistad National Recreation Area, Big Thicket National Preserve, and Lake Meredith National Recreation Area. These are only a few examples of NPS areas where visitors can hunt.

For its part, CNRA has allowed hunting from its founding in 1976 and providing hunting and fishing opportunities is one of the park's stated purposes in its foundation document. To help further this mission, on Saturday October 23, 2021, CNRA partnered with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) to teach a Hunter Education Course at the park for the first time in over a decade. Nine people attended the eight-hour course and successfully tested to receive their ODWC Hunter Education Certificates.

The ODWC began offering Hunter Education Courses approximately forty years ago with the express intent of lowering the number of hunting related accidents and

injuries. Since the program's introduction, the number of hunting related mishaps decreased dramatically. In Oklahoma, persons thirty-one and older are not required to take a Hunter Education Course but are welcome to voluntarily attend and test for certification. Children ten and up can attend Hunter Education Courses and test for their certification. Some states are moving toward requiring completion of a Hunter Education Course for a person of any age to acquire a hunting license. All 50 states, as well as some other countries recognize Oklahoma's course as meeting their standards.

The Oklahoma Hunter Education course covers ten topics, such as introductory information about wildlife conservation and management, hunter responsibility and ethics, meat care, and wildlife identification. Safety comprises a large component of the class and both firearm safety and the safe use of tree stands is emphasized. In recent years, tree stands are the leading cause of hunter fatalities in Oklahoma.

CNRA plans to make an autumn Hunter Education Course an annual event. In addition, the park is currently working with the ODWC to offer one or more "advanced" Hunter Education courses that might offer more detailed instruction on meat care and cooking, archery hunting, or muzzleloader hunting. These courses are not yet scheduled.



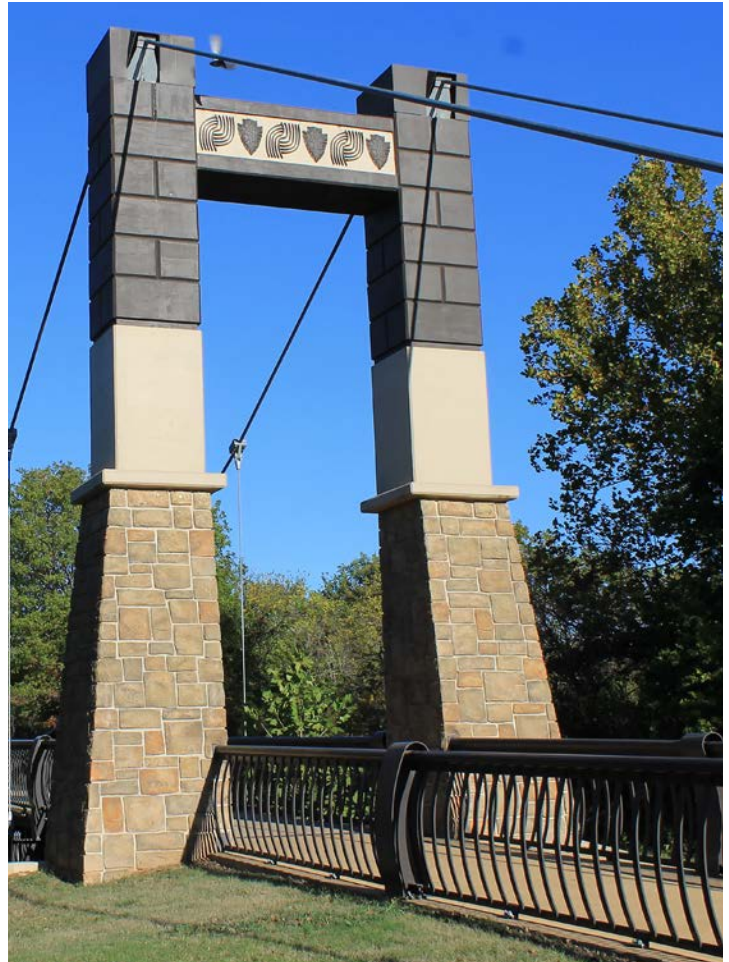
# Continuing the Path

Sarah Puckette, Park Guide

Everyone in Sulphur who appreciates a walk in the park can now hike from the Chickasaw Cultural Center to Chickasaw National Recreation Area's Veterans Lake thanks to the completion of a new paved hiking trail. The new sidewalk segment is around 0.4 miles long and runs from Inkana Bridge to the intersection of Cat's Eye Road at Veterans Lake. From the end of this spur trail, one can either continue onto the sidewalk that encircles Veterans Lake or walk through Rock Creek Campground to connect to the Bromide Hill Trail and Bison Pasture Loop. If hiking the opposite direction, visitors will enter the Chickasaw Cultural Center's campus through the traditional village and gardens.

Inkana Bridge, a 195-foot pedestrian bridge spanning Rock Creek, was dedicated in 2017 and provided the initial connection between the recreation area and the cultural center. Inkana means "friend" in the Chickasaw language and the addition of this connector trail will make it easier for visitors and locals alike to explore the area, and travel back-and-forth between the two popular destinations.

This project was completed thanks to funding generously provided by the Chickasaw Nation and their continued partnership with the National Park Service.



Inkana Bridge / NPS Photo

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# Leeper House Restoration Completed

Dan Winings, Biological Science Tech

Leeper House is the oldest building in the Chickasaw National Recreation Area. Originally built in 1894, Leeper House has served various functions within the park. In 1904, it was converted to the superintendent's office, and in 1914, additions and repairs were made and the administrative office was relocated there.

During the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) era, the CCC built an addition that was added to the west side of the building, repointed the masonry, and shingled the roof. The CCC masons built the addition to match the existing building as much as possible, using gray-blue limestone from the quarry where the original rock was obtained. Landscaping was added around the building including stone steps and plantings. Park administration continued to use the building until 2002 when law enforcement moved into the building.

Leeper House has recently undergone a major multi-phase rehabilitation. In 2019, the roof was repaired with new sheathing and cedar shingles. The heating and cooling system was also upgraded. The most recent project replaced and leveled the floor which had warped. The modern ceiling was removed and replaced with one of the correct historical height.

The old cloth-covered electrical wiring was replaced with armored wires to bring the building up to current electrical code. The exterior and interior were cleaned and repaired to fix the cracks that have developed on them. The foundation and floor joists were repaired to prevent further sagging and cracking of both the floors and walls.

- NPS -

## Learning to Leave No Trace

DJ Labay, Park Guide

Spring Break is a time to celebrate moving past the bitter winds of winter and getting out to enjoy the sun. As an outcome, it is generally a busy time at Martin Park Nature Center in Oklahoma City. Many families come to the park to enjoy the playground, trails, observing wildlife, and learning about various animals inside the visitor center. Martin Park Nature Center has done well in conveying the importance of minimizing impact while outdoors. However, with this increased visitation, the need to remind visitors of the Leave No Trace principles becomes ever more important. Nestled within a developing area, Martin Park Nature Center serves as one of the few natural areas close to Oklahoma City. To many visitors, the idea of camping and spending time in nature is a bit of a snipe hunt. The curiosity is present, but the knowledge of outdoor ethics has yet to be established.

It's a dangerous business stepping out your front door. To many the natural world is a scary place, but with proper planning and education that anxiety can be lessened. To help introduce and remind visitors of the Leave No Trace ethic, the National Park Service teamed up with Martin Park Nature Center to host 4 days of Leave No Trace activities in the park's Story Circle. One of the activities was the trash timeline, where visitors could guess how long it takes for common trash items to decompose. Many are shocked when they learn it can take a million years for a glass bottle to fully break down. Another activity was Camp Oh, No!, a sloppy campsite where people could identify what was wrong, and learn how to correct those mistakes to ensure their future campsites are clean and tidy.



A park ranger showing visitors the trash timeline/ NPS Photo

“The ongoing partnership between the National Park Service and OKC Parks has granted Martin Park Nature Center with the opportunity to educate thousands of Spring Break visitors on Leave No Trace principles each spring. Whether it be staying on the trail, respecting wildlife, or packing out your trash, the positive impact made through this partnership can be seen for months to come.” , said Will Hagenbuck, Park Naturalist at Martin Park Nature Center

The spring break Leave No Trace activities arose out of the selection of Martin Park Nature Center as a 2017 LNT Hot Spot. Since this selection, Martin Park Nature Center and the National Park Service in Oklahoma City have collaborated to provide Leave No Trace messaging to visitors at Martin Park Nature Center.

- NPS -

# Building a Garden, Connecting a Community

Mary Collins, Park Ranger

In the Fall of 2020, the National Park Service (NPS) and Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum (OKCNMM) received a grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation to partner with a local school to teach environmental education as it pertains to the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial. Working with Macomb Public Schools' after-school program director, both the NPS and OKCNMM began brainstorming ways that students could learn from and utilize the purpose of the Memorial in their own community. Students from 5th-8th grades that signed up for the club visited the Memorial, toured the grounds, museum, and participated in the Uncover-Discover STEM Lab.

As a representative of the NPS, I had the privilege of visiting the students at their school to teach them about tree and plant identification and the way in which we utilize trees to honor those affected by the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. After much discussion, it was agreed that the students would design a peace garden on the school grounds that would be a place of reflection for the entire community. It took a lot of planning, collaboration, and time to complete the garden, in part due to the affects of the pandemic. The focal point of the garden would be a sapling from the Survivor Tree at the Memorial. Over the course of several months, the garden was planted using native



A park ranger showing visitors the trash timeline/ NPS Photo

plants, annual and perennial flowers, and, at the center, the Survivor Tree sapling.

The day of dedication finally arrived October 28, 2021. The community came together to show their support and to see the garden that was planted for them. The school has been so inspired by this project that they have plans to add a gazebo and picnic tables to the space in the future.

A big thank you goes to Jeff Oakley of Oakley's Landscape Design in Edmond, OK and Mark Bayes with Oklahoma Forestry Services for all of the time, labor, and assistance they donated.

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## NPS in Oklahoma City Receives Grants

Matt Whitney, Community Outreach Park Ranger

The National Park Service in Oklahoma City has been awarded two grants from the National Park Foundation as part of the Park Ventures and the Junior Ranger Angler programs.

The Park Ventures grant will allow the NPS to partner with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Oklahoma County to present a learn-to-camp program called "Backyard to Back Country." The program will introduce camping to families who have never been camping and are unsure where to begin. Over the course of 12 weeks, a park ranger will visit a Boys & Girls club weekly, teaching members the basics of camping, proper equipment, outdoor and nature related activities, outdoor cooking, and the principles of Leave No Trace.

Three overnight camping trips are also part of the program. The first trip will be held at the Boys & Girls

club location to provide a sense of familiarity. The second and third overnight trips will take place at a campground close to the club location.

The Junior Ranger Angler Grant is intended to teach fishing to kids, and encourage participation in the Junior Ranger Angler program. A fishing trailer is being developed for park rangers to bring to local lakes and ponds and host free fishing clinics. Already, the NPS has partnered with Scissortail Park in OKC to conduct a series of clinics that will take place during the summer of 2022.

In addition, the NPS is collaborating with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to become fishing clinic instructors. As part of the grant, the NPS will host free fishing clinics at various Central Oklahoma fishing locations during the fall of 2022 and into the future.



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

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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.

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 NHS / NPS Photo

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## *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](mailto:chic_superintendent@nps.gov), or call 580-622-7220.

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### **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.