

# Wild AT HEART

John Muir, the naturalist and author often known as the father of the National Park system, once wrote, "The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness." Thanks to the work of The Nature Conservancy—which has worked in the Sooner State since 1986 and protects nearly 100,000 acres—Oklahomans have access to eleven areas of pristine natural beauty. Photographer David Joshua Jennings traveled to five of these preserves to document The Nature Conservancy's work to ensure future generations of Okies can see their state in all its wild, natural glory. For more information about Nature Conservancy properties in Oklahoma, visit [nature.org](http://nature.org).

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID JOSHUA JENNINGS

The 17,000-acre J.T. Nickel Family Nature and Wildlife Preserve northeast of Tahlequah is the largest privately protected conservation area in the Ozark Mountains. While some Nature Conservancy properties offer only restricted public access, J.T. Nickel is open for visitation year-round.

## TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE

In 1993, the Ken-Ada Ranch north of Bartlesville helped start the bison herd at the Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Osage County with a donation of 300 animals. Today, the herd numbers nearly 2,600 in the summer.

Since 1991, more than 730 prescribed burns at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve have aided biodiversity efforts on this pristine prairie. In addition, The Nature Conservancy has assisted nearby ranchers in burning more than half a million acres and suppressing 127 wildfires.

**TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE**

## PONTOTOC RIDGE PRESERVE

At the Pontotoc Ridge Preserve north of Tishomingo, The Nature Conservancy is working to mitigate the damage done by invasive species like the eastern redcedar. The 2,900-acre wilderness also provides a sanctuary for butterflies, more than 90 species of which have been documented here. The preserve is open to the public during special events.



OKA'

**YANAHLI PRESERVE**

Though it only stretches along one mile of southern Oklahoma's Blue River, the 3,600-acre Oka' Yanahli Preserve protects a wide variety of ecosystems. The river itself is a source of fresh water to the city of Durant, and The Nature Conservancy works with local landowners to enhance water quality. The preserve is open to the public during Nature Conservancy events.

## FOUR CANYON PRESERVE

On these 4,000 acres along the Canadian River in Ellis County, The Nature Conservancy protects mixed-grass prairie, oak-lined canyons, and floodplain that provide habitats for least terns, painted buntings, red-bellied woodpeckers, and Texas horned lizards, among other species. The public may access this wilderness during Nature Conservancy events.