

# National Wildlife Refuge Week 2006



## W5NWR

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge  
u.s. Fish and wildlife service  
Indianapolis, Oklahoma

**Objective:** Conduct amateur radio operations from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge located near Indianahoma, Oklahoma.

**Date:** October 14, 15 & 16, 2006.

**Refuge Overview:** Established in 1905, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 545 refuges throughout the United States managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The 59,020 acre Refuge hosts a rare piece of the past – remnant mixed grass prairie, and island where the natural grasslands escaped destruction because the rocks underfoot defeated the plow.

The Refuge provides habitat for large native grazing animals such as American bison, Rocky Mountain elk, whitetailed deer, and Texas longhorn cattle. More than 50 mammal, 240 bird, 64 reptile and amphibian, 36 fish and 806 plant species thrive on this important refuge.

This refuge holds the distinction of being the oldest wildlife preserve in the United States.

**Planning:** Planning began as soon as John Forslin, KC8ULE proposed the idea in QST magazine. First and foremost, permission to conduct the operation was sought in the form of a Special Use Permit (SUP) request. Initial contact was made with Ralph Bryant, Acting Refuge Manager. A preliminary framework for an operation was described and discussed. Initial indications were that this would be acceptable and should be followed-up with a SUP request. In subsequent communication I learned that Jeff Rupert had been appointed Refuge Manager; remaining communication was with him. Mr. Rupert conducted a Compatibility Determination for the operation in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional office in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The SUP was granted on October 11<sup>th</sup> and would be issued upon arrival.

Equipment planning was based on the experience gained by operating at the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in March 2006. The equipment list would be the same with the exception of a tent. The pervious operation was spent in the back of my Ford Expedition after a strong cold front blew away the canopy I initially erected. I had hoped to have one or two other hams join me; but I could not interest any of the locals. So this was to be a 'one-man-band' operation.

Equipment List:

- Icom-718
- Buddipole antenna
- Laptop
- Writelog logging software

- Coleman 1850W generator

**Operation Summary:** The process began with the packing of the equipment and supplies and loading them on Thursday evening. This took about four hours to complete. The Jeep Wrangler Unlimited with the rear seat removed and external cargo rack just barely accommodated all the stuff.

I departed Dallas/Ft. Worth at 8:00 AM Friday morning. The trip was going to take approximately three and one-half hours. It was a beautiful day and uneventful trip. I arrived at the Refuge Headquarters shortly after noon. I met Jeff Rupert, Refuge Manager. Mr. Rupert finalized the SUP and we discussed the proposed location for the operation. I had initially requested to operate from the top of Mt. Scott but this was not possible because it is closed at night; therefore, I was offered a location at the base of the mountain near Lake Elmer Thomas. Because of concerns about propagation at the base of the mountain and the lack of facilities, I requested and was granted permission to set up in the Camp Doris campground.

The campground is a very nice facility. It was heavily wooded but I was able to find a campsite with an opening to setup the antenna. Setup began at 1:30 PM and was completed around 4:30 PM. At this point, I began putting gasoline in the generator. It was about half full when I noticed gasoline pouring out of the carburetor. The generator was placed on top of a table to diagnose the problem. The bottom-line was, I didn't have the necessary tools (lesson-learned) and the gasoline finally quit running after about an hour; so I don't know what was wrong. The generator made the trip with no gasoline in its tank; so I 'm not sure if this had something to do with it, maybe another lesson-learned. In any event the generator finally started and I was off to the races.

The bands seemed in reasonable condition and I opened on 20M SSB. It was slow. The signal reports I received were very good; so I can only surmise that Friday evenings during football season may not be a good time to rack up Qs. I ultimately went to 40M and PSK31 with better success. By this time the long day was setting in and I was hungry, etc. so I packed it in for the day. It was nearing 'quite-time' so I was going to have to shut down soon anyway.

Saturday morning began at around 6:00 AM when I awoke to the sound of elks bugling in the valley. This went on until 7:00 AM when they shut off like a light switch. I couldn't start the generator until 8:00 AM so I didn't get up until then. I waited until 9:00 AM to actually start the generator because some of the near by campsites were not stirring yet.

I decided to eat something and it was around 10:00 AM (1500Z) when I got started. I reconfigured the antenna to 20M and began. I felt the afternoon should be good and provide lots of Qs. The March operation netted over 400 Qs in a day and one-half of operation. To my dismay, at 1600Z all heck broke loose,

i.e. the Pennsylvania QSO Party started. My QSO rate plummeted and it was almost impossible to find a place to call. This is another lesson learned. I had actually checked for any major contests. The only one I noted was a RTTY contest. I didn't think about a QSO party generating so much activity. It is interesting to note that in monitoring the RTTY contest I was copying good signals from EU and later JA so propagation was good. I again went to PSK31 and had a little more luck but it was slow because of the inherent nature of PSK.

Around 4:00 PM I decided to check in with my wife to let her know I was still alive. To do this, I had to drive to high point. Storms and heavy rain were forecast for the Dallas/Ft. Worth area; so I asked the person at the checkpoint for the campground if they knew what the weather forecast was. They did not but would check and let me know when I returned. When I returned, I learned that severe storms were forecast to come in later that evening and heavy rain was predicted for the balance of the weekend.

When I arrived back at camp, I began to operate on 20M SSB. I began calling on a frequency that seemed clear. I managed three more QSOs in an hour and each reported that I was very hard to pick out of the splatter, this was discouraging to say the least. Flies became very bad which is precursor to a storm. Also, around this same time a 'Big Wind' began to blow. This was not a fast wind, just a 'Big Wind' if you know what I mean. It was at this point, I decided to pack it in. I did not want to spend 2-3 hours tearing down and packing in a storm and heavy rain. I finished loading around 7:00 PM and headed out. When I arrived home, I checked the radar and a severe storm was going directly across the area I was at; so I think I made the right decision.

**Final Observations:** I only managed 53 Qs which was very discouraging when contrasted to the Tishomingo operation in March. I guess the highlight of the Qs was being called by 8R1Z from Guyana, This clearly shows the Buddipole and 100W is enough if you get half a chance. I did enjoy the operation very much. I think you can see why by looking at the following photos. I think this is a worthwhile effort and would like to see us and others do it again next year. I would like to see a 'Worked All Refuges' award started. So I'm ready for next year. I plan to activate another Refuge this spring as well. Let's keep it rolling.

I have also received the first request for a QSL card; so this is gratifying.



Warning sign entering the Refuge



Arrived - Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge



Refuge headquarter – Picking up Special Use Permit



Arrival at camp Doris Campground



W5NWR campsite



Almost ready to go



NA5U operating W5NWR



First visitor to the camp



How many deer do you see?



Lake Quanah Parker near campground



Native prairie grass



Prairie and mountains



Prairie Dog Town



Lunchtime in Prairie Dog Town



Longhorn cattle



Longhorn cattle and buffalo graze on the prairie



Two bull buffalo



Scenery



Sunset in the mountains



This fellow did not realize the deer were crossing



Morning scene at mountain top lake



Lake Dam



Buffalo near the lake



Bull buffalo



Up close and personal



Two of the six deer that walked through camp



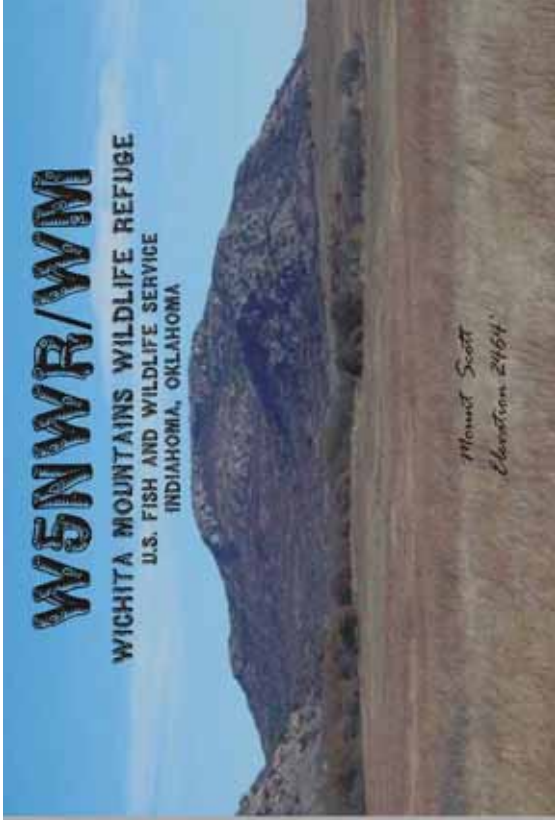
Buffalo herd on prairie, notice another herd at top right



Close up of herd



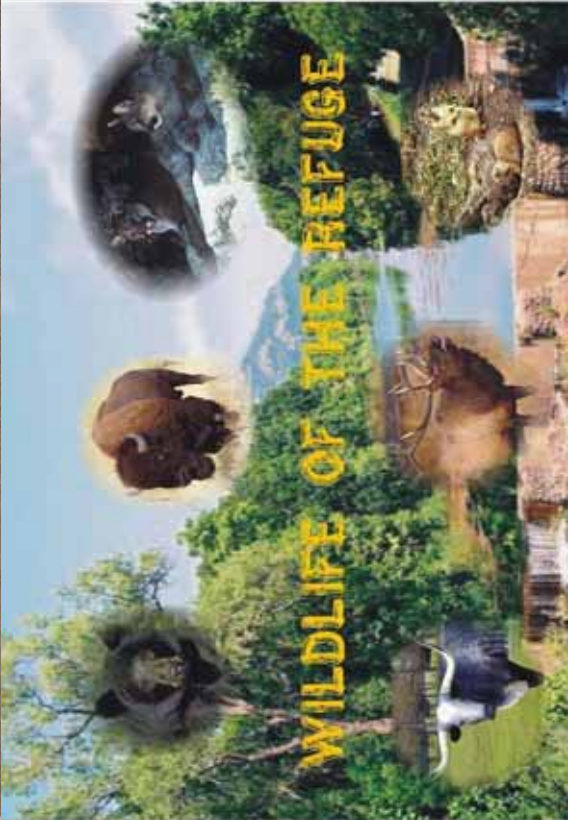
Mt. Scott, elevation 2464'. This was the proposed location for the operation.



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QSL Card



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge

SPECIAL USE PERMIT

Station No	Fee Credited	Permit Number
21670		77751
Date		
10-13-2006		
Period of Use (inclusive)		
From	10-13	, 2006
To	10-15	, 2006

Permittee Name  Mike Thomas	Permittee Address 5717 Puerto Vallarta North Richland Hills, TX 76180 Phone: 817-514-6066
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Purpose (specify in detail privilege requested, or units of products involved)  
Operate amateur radio equipment at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.

Description (specify unit numbers; metes and bounds, or other recognizable designations)  
Activity will take place in the Public Use Area of the Refuge.

Amount of fee \$ 0.00 if not a fixed payment, specify rate and unit of charge:

- Payment Exempt - Justification: Final Compatibility Determination Amateur Radio Operation
- Full Payment
- Partial Payment - Balance of payments to be made as follows:

Record of Payments

- Special Conditions
1. Activity will occur in the open Public Use Area of the Refuge.
  2. Permittee may only occupy an area of space similar to other refuge recreational users (i.e., one parking space, etc.).
  3. Permittee agrees to discontinue activity if conditions become unsafe due to inclement weather.
  4. Permittee agrees to coordinate with the Refuge to identify NWRS and Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge specific information.

This permit is issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and accepted by the undersigned, subject to the terms, covenants, obligations, and reservations, expressed or implied herein, and to the conditions and requirements appearing on the reverse side.

Permittee Signature  Mike Thomas	Issuing Officer Signature and Title  Jeff Rupert, Refuge Manager
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