

CHOCTAW NATION

BIG GAME HARVEST REPORT

2025-2026



Choctaw Nation
**Wildlife
Conservation**

The 2025-2026 Fall hunting season has passed, and it was a fantastic season. The following report highlights the harvest of this past year. For the Choctaw Nation, these numbers show sovereignty and strength. Relations with the State of Oklahoma presented challenges in the Oklahoma tribal hunting and fishing world. During this time, Chief Batton, Assistant Chief Austin, and Choctaw Tribal Council held strong in their commitment to the Choctaw people. Tribal leaders from all members of the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement stood strong and defended the sovereign rights of tribal members.

Despite all the confusing statements from the state and misinformation from state leadership, Choctaw tribal members registered harvest numbers that exceeded the 2024-2025 seasons. This is a true testament to the culture and resolve of the Choctaw people. Hunting is a woven part of the culture and identity of our Nation. Take a moment to review this report compiled by Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation associates. Learn about the seasons and populations that so many people pursue each fall. It won't be long before we are grabbing those bows and guns and heading out again. Many are already making preparations by target practicing, scouting, and improving habitat conditions. However you spend your off season, CNDWC associates hope that you will find this report informative and an enticement to get out there for the 2026-2027 big game season.

Fall 2025-2026 hunting seasons marked the fourth year that Choctaw Tribal Members were regulated by the Choctaw Tribal Code 110: Fish, Game, and Animals Code. 2025-2026 marked the second year that Choctaw Tribal members could hunt and fish in the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muscogee, and Seminole Nations by carrying their proof of tribal membership. The 5 Tribes Reciprocity Agreement further strengthens tribal sovereignty and creates new and exciting opportunities for collaboration among tribes.

This marks the fourth installment of the Choctaw Nation Big Game Report. The Big Game Report 2025/2026 is a summary compiled from harvest reports, hunter observations, and what our wildlife associates encountered in the field while collecting data. Choctaw tribal members reporting harvest through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal are a critical piece of the CNDWC. Choctaw tribal members are required by law to check game harvested in the 5 Tribes Wildlife Reciprocity Agreement area through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal. The data you provide gives biologists insights into population trends, hunter participation, and public land use patterns.

CNDWC wants to hear from you! Please contact us with any observations, questions, concerns, or success stories. You can contact us by email at wildlife@choctawnation.com or by phone at 800-522-6170.

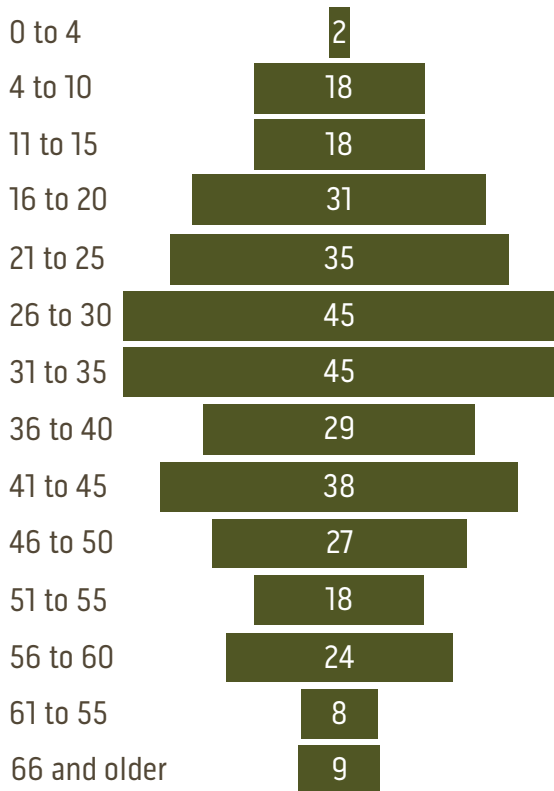


BLACK BEAR SEASON

October is a highly anticipated month here in the Choctaw Nation. Hunters have been honing their aim with archery equipment for months, monitoring trail cameras, and trying to get their stands hung with care. October 1 marks the day that they can put all that preparation into practice. Up until 2009, whitetail deer were the focus of big game animals for hunters in Southeast Oklahoma. In 2009, Oklahoma saw its first archery black bear season since the animals were essentially extirpated from much of their home range in Oklahoma. Thanks to the dedication of wildlife professionals, hunters, landowners, and conservationists, black bears are now present throughout much of Choctaw Nation.

Each October biologists and game wardens from the Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation (CNDWC) and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) hit the field to check in

Total Applications by Member Age Range



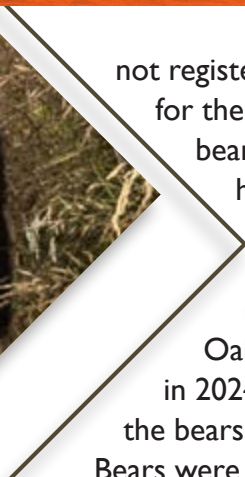
each bear harvested by tribal and state hunters. Valuable data is collected from each animal that gives biologists insight into the bear populations. Several morphometric (size and shape) measurements are taken, as well as tooth samples for aging. This data gives trend data over time that can help inform biologists on management decisions that may be necessary for the population. Each agency shares this vital information to keep track of harvest. Harvest information, research, and field surveys all play a crucial role in setting sustainable season structures and bag limits.

Forests benefit from healthy black bear populations. Bears help break down stumps, dead trees, and deadfall by tearing them apart looking for food such as termites, insect larvae, or other insects. This contributes to healthy soil in the forest.

Black bear meat is a highly coveted delicacy among many hunters. Rendered fat from black bear carcasses is considered by many to be some of the highest quality cooking oil that can be obtained. Hunters should be prepared to handle the carcass for the best result by cooling the carcass as quickly as possible. Bear meat can spoil quickly in early October temperatures. Make sure to get your bear processed as quickly as possible to prevent that from happening. Also, the thickest part of the bear meat must be cooked and held to a temperature of 165 degrees for three minutes to ensure it is safe to eat. Bears can carry the parasite *Trichinella spiralis* which causes trichinosis in humans.

Choctaw Nation hunters were able to harvest 4 bears during the 2025 bear season. 2 male and 2 female bears were harvested. Choctaw tribal members did





not register a bear during the muzzleloader season for the 4th year in a row. State hunters tagged 50 bears during the 2025 season for a total of 54 harvested bears, 28 male and 26 female.

Early falling, abundant mast crops were reported throughout the Choctaw Nation.

Oaks produced well but not quite as well as in 2024. There were plenty of acorns to distract the bears from hunters' bait locations, however.

Bears were in good condition due to favorable summer foraging conditions.

Choctaw Nation issued 350 bear permits to Choctaw tribal members and members of the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement. Choctaw members accounted for 329 bear permits and non-Choctaw tribal members accounted for 21 bear permits.

WHITETAIL DEER SEASON

Fall in Choctaw Nation is a favorite of many Oklahomans. Hard fought high school football games, fall festivals, breath taking foliage, and campfires are found all throughout the Reservation. Then there is whitetail deer season. The excitement of this season gives men, women, and children sleepless nights in anticipation. It would probably be pretty safe to say more leave from work is taken during October through December in Oklahoma. The Choctaw Nation has been a prime destination for Oklahoma deer hunters for decades. Market hunting and over exploitation wiped out much of the herd in Western Oklahoma. The rugged hills and terrain in the Choctaw

Nation provided refuge for deer during this time. As conservation efforts expanded, the Choctaw Nation herd become a prime source for trap and transplant efforts in other parts of the state.

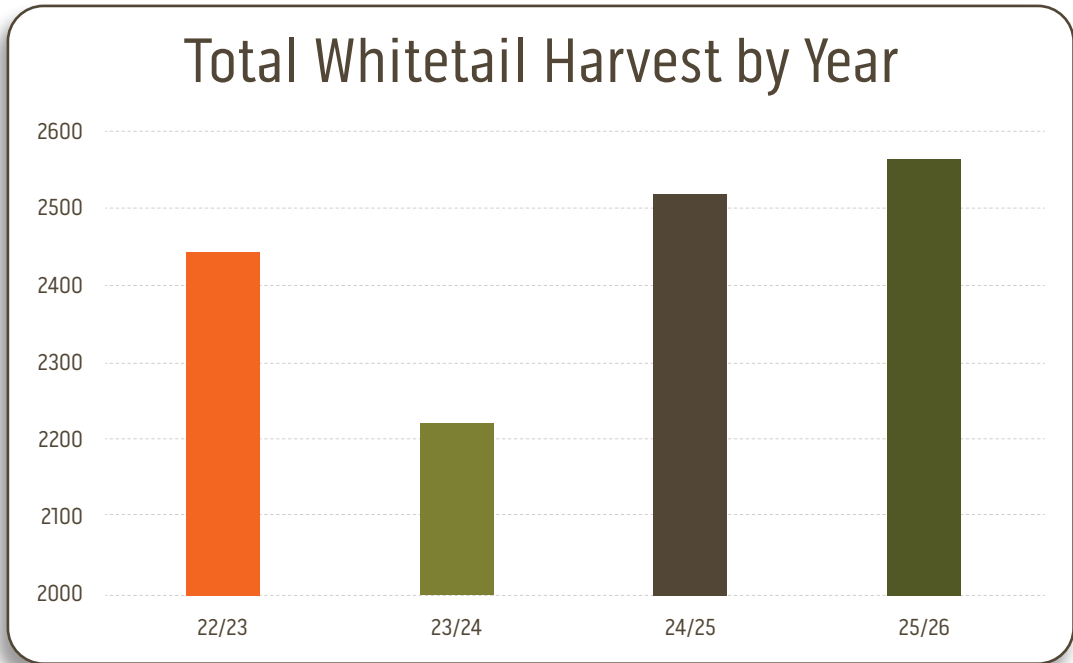
Today, the deer herd is thriving and offers more opportunity than ever for hunters of all pursuits. Choctaw Nation shares a combined season bag limit of 6 deer, with no more than 2 antlered deer with the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement members and the State of Oklahoma. The combined season limit cannot be exceeded in any of these areas.

ARCHERY

Archery deer season within the Choctaw Nation runs concurrently with the state season from October 1-January 15. The bag limit for archery season is 6 deer with no more than 2 being antlered.

301 antlerless and 395 antlered deer were harvested within the Choctaw Nation by members of the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement as reported through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal and shared data from other tribal wildlife professionals. The total harvest was a 4% increase over the previous years harvest. Antlerless harvest

Total Whitetail Harvest by Year



accounted for 43.2% of the harvest down from the 2024/25 rate of 47.8%.

Choctaw tribal members harvested 39 deer with archery equipment in the Chickasaw Nation, 11 in the Muscogee Nation, and 5 in the Cherokee Nation for a total of 55 deer harvested outside of the Choctaw Nation by Choctaw tribal members. Non-Choctaw tribal members harvested 54 deer within the Choctaw Nation.

The challenge of harvesting a deer with a primitive method continues to attract hunters looking for longer seasons and higher bag limits. Whether it's with a traditional bow, modern compound bow, or crossbow, archery season offers something for everyone looking to extend their hunting pursuits. Archery is also an important tool for wildlife managers to provide extended opportunities while balancing the management of a healthy deer herd.

YOUTH DEER GUN

Youth deer gun season remains a great way to introduce youth to hunting and the outdoors. This season usually falls during Fall Break for most schools. The Fall 2025 Youth Gun season ran October 17-19. The bag limit was 2 deer with no more than 1 being antlered.

CNO youth harvested 235 deer during the season. This broke out to 94 antlerless and 141 antlered deer. The total harvest was down 21.7%.

The weather during youth season was unseasonably warm which led to a lot of nocturnal deer movement. A very productive season for oaks led



to an abundance of acorns. This had deer spread out and not visiting feeders reliably.

Another factor could be the state's statement on not recognizing tribal hunting and fishing rights. This led to a lot of confusion for tribal members which undoubtedly led to some tribal members purchasing state licenses due to fear of the false statements put forth by state leadership. Those statements by the state happened less than two weeks prior to the opening of the youth season. Fortunately, tribal leadership worked quickly to reassure tribal members of their sovereign rights to hunt and fish.

MUZZLELOADER

Muzzleloader season dates for 2025 ran from October 25-November 2. The bag limit was 2 deer with no more than 1 being antlered.

119 antlerless and 311 antlered deer were taken by tribal members within the Choctaw Nation as reported through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal and from data shared by wildlife professionals of the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement. The total of 430 was up 64.8% over the 2024/25 season but only 10% over the 2023/24 season.

Choctaw tribal members harvested 20 muzzleloader deer within the Chickasaw Nation, 1 in Muscogee nation, and 1 in the Cherokee Nation. Non-Choctaw tribal members harvested 33 deer within the Choctaw Nation.

Weather patterns were mostly favorable for muzzleloader season and many hunters reported seeing strong pre-rut activity. Pre-rut activity led to increased daytime movement, which may have been a factor in the increase in harvest.

GUN

Gun season dates for 2025 ran from November 22-December 7. The bag limit was 2 deer with no more than 1 being antlered.

452 antlerless and 651 antlered deer were harvested by tribal members within the Choctaw Nation as reported through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal and from data shared by members of the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement wildlife professionals. The total harvest of 1,103 was down slightly by 4%.

Choctaw tribal members harvested an additional 109 deer outside of the CNO boundaries. Non-Choctaw tribal members harvested 119 deer within the Choctaw Nation.

HOLIDAY ANTLERLESS DEER GUN

Holiday Antlerless Deer Gun is a great way to spend additional time outdoors with family and friends. With the hustle and bustle of the busy holiday season, it is nice to get in the woods and slow down with visiting friends and family. This season also provides an opportunity to take additional deer for the freezer and help balance sex ratios in the population. The bag limit for this season is 2 deer. Deer taken in this season are considered “bonus” deer and do not count toward the season limit of 6.

The Holiday Antlerless Deer season ran from December 18-31. Choctaw tribal members took 100 antlerless deer within the Choctaw Nation during this season. Choctaws also took 13 deer outside of the CNO during this season. Harvest for the season was down 18.7%.

CWD TESTING

Once again CNDWC received funding through the United State Department of Agriculture-Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) to sample harvested deer within the CNO for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Chronic wasting disease is a prion disease that is always fatal to whitetail deer that contract the disease. It is a concern for deer managers and hunters alike. It has not been detected within the Choctaw Nation but has been detected in other areas of Oklahoma and nearby Arkansas.

CNDWC partnered with taxidermists and meat processing facilities to collect the CWD samples. CNDWC staff collects retropharyngeal lymph nodes from harvested animals and sends them to the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory for testing. 252 samples were tested with no detections within the Choctaw Nation. CNDWC has collected 484 samples over the past two seasons and all have been non-detect.

CNDWC is committed to working with state and federal agencies to address any challenges related to CWD.

DEER PROGRAMS

For the second year in row CNDWC partnered with meat processors to offer the Hunters for Food Sovereignty Program. Willing hunters can drop off deer at a participating processor and donate the deer to those unable to obtain their own meat. CNDWC distributes this meat at community centers as it is available. Approximately 600 pounds of ground venison was donated in the 2024/25 season and increased over 4x for the 2025/26 season to approximately 2,500 pounds. CNDWC is excited about the growth of this program and look forward to even more growth in the coming fall.

CNDWC is offering a program for landowners and lessees wanting to improve deer herds on their property. The Choctaw Nation Deer Herd Enhancement Program (DHEP) is available for those



managing 640 acres or more. Biologists will work with landowners to create management goals, provide habitat advice, and provide harvest recommendations. You can enroll by visiting our website at www.choctawnation.com/services/wildlife-conservation/ or by emailing our department at wildlife@choctawnation.com. Applications will be accepted until June 1.

DRAW HUNTS

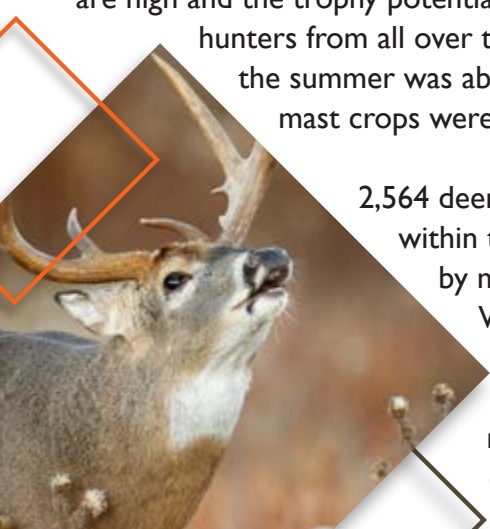
For the first time ever, the CNDWC was able to offer additional hunt opportunities through the draw hunt program. These hunts take place on tribal property outside of normal season dates and bag limits. Tribal council approves the proposed hunts and tribal members may apply to the categories that they are eligible.

This year 3 hunts were held for youth tribal members. A total of 10 whitetail deer were harvested during the hunts. 3 antlerless and 3 antlered deer were taken on the Talawanda property and 2 antlerless and 2 antlered deer were taken on the Wardville property. CNDWC is excited to offer more hunts this fall and encourage everyone to keep a lookout for the application period starting August 1.

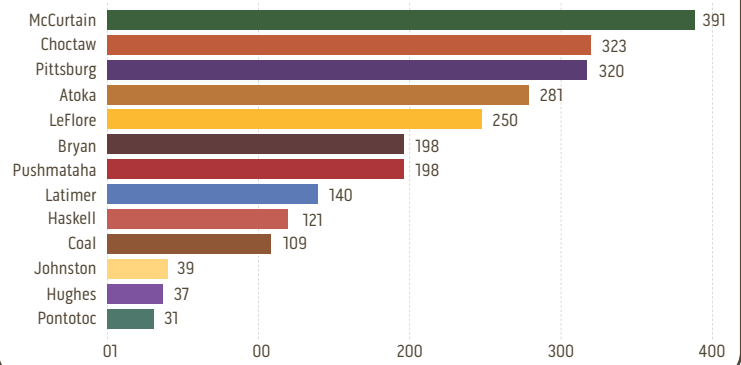
DEER SEASON SUMMARY

It would be difficult to argue that deer hunting is better than it has ever been in the Choctaw Nation. Numbers are high and the trophy potential continues to attract hunters from all over the country. Forage over the summer was abundant and once again mast crops were productive this fall.

2,564 deer were harvested within the Choctaw Nation by members of the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement. That represents an increase of 1.7% over the



Total Harvest by Reported Harvest County



2024/25 deer season. The antlerless harvest of 1,066 was down 11.6% from the 2023/24 season. Antlered harvest was up 14.1%.

The 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement added 206 deer taken by non-Choctaw tribal members. Choctaw tribal members harvested 199 deer outside of the Choctaw Nation as part of the 5 Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement.

Youth harvest continues to be an encouraging statistic that the cultural heritage of hunting is alive and well in the Choctaw Nation. Hunters aged 30 and under account for 55.5% of the harvest for Choctaw Members. The 11-15 year old age cohort once again accounted for the largest proportion of harvest at 14.0%. National statistics show that the hunting population is aging with older hunters not being replaced by younger counterparts. This is not the case within the CNO and is a testament to the Choctaw hunting heritage and expression of sovereignty.

ELK SEASON

For the 2025-26 elk season no elk were reported through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal or reported through the 5 Tribes Wildlife Reciprocity Agreement.

Small numbers of elk exist within the Choctaw Nation. Restocking efforts from the state and non-profit agencies have not taken off like they did in Southwest Oklahoma. Numerous reasons could account for this

including disease, climate, poaching, parasites, habitat fragmentation, and genetic diversity.

TURKEY SEASON

Spring signals a new beginning in the outdoor world. New growth emerges, trees put on their leaves, and flowers show their brilliant colors. For the Choctaw Nation it means the fish are biting and the turkeys are beginning to gobble. Experiencing the thrill of a wild turkey responding to calls keeps hunters coming back every year.

Eastern wild turkeys occupy the eastern portion of the Reservation, while Rio Grande/Eastern hybrids and Rio Grande wild turkeys occupy the western portions.

YOUTH TURKEY

The Youth Turkey Season ran April 12-13. The bag limit was one tom/jake and counts toward the season bag limit of 1 tom/jake. Choctaw tribal youth hunters harvested 14 turkeys within the Choctaw Nation and an additional 5 turkeys outside of the Choctaw Nation as part of the 5 Tribes Agreement. This was a 17.6% decrease from the spring 2024 season.

SPRING TURKEY

Spring turkey season runs April 16-May 16 and has a bag limit of 1 tom/jake turkey. CNO hunters tagged 69 turkeys during the regular spring season within the CNO Reservation. CNO hunters tagged an additional 6 turkeys outside of the Reservation and Cherokee hunters tagged 3 birds within the CNO thanks to the 5 Tribes Agreement. This represents a 56.5% increase in harvest over the 2024 season.

FALL TURKEY

Archery fall turkey season runs October 1-January 15 with a bag limit of 1 tom/jake turkey. CNO hunters tagged 3 turkeys during the archery fall season within the CNO Reservation. CNO hunters tagged 1

turkey outside of the Reservation under the 5 Tribes Agreement.

TURKEY SEASON SUMMARY

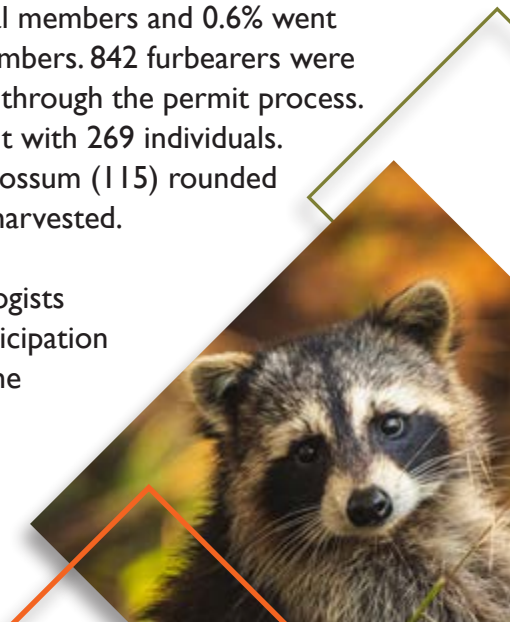
Jake harvest for the 2025 spring season accounted for 24.7% of the total harvest indicating a decent hatch for 2024. Hunters reported seeing many jakes in the field while deer hunting in the fall of 2025. The hatches seemed to improve in 2024 and 2025 after several years of poor recruitment. It is shaping up to be a productive season in 2026. Many research projects are going on all over the state and Southeastern United States that will give insights into turkey management. Biologists are working to make sure that turkey populations will be sustainable for the long term.

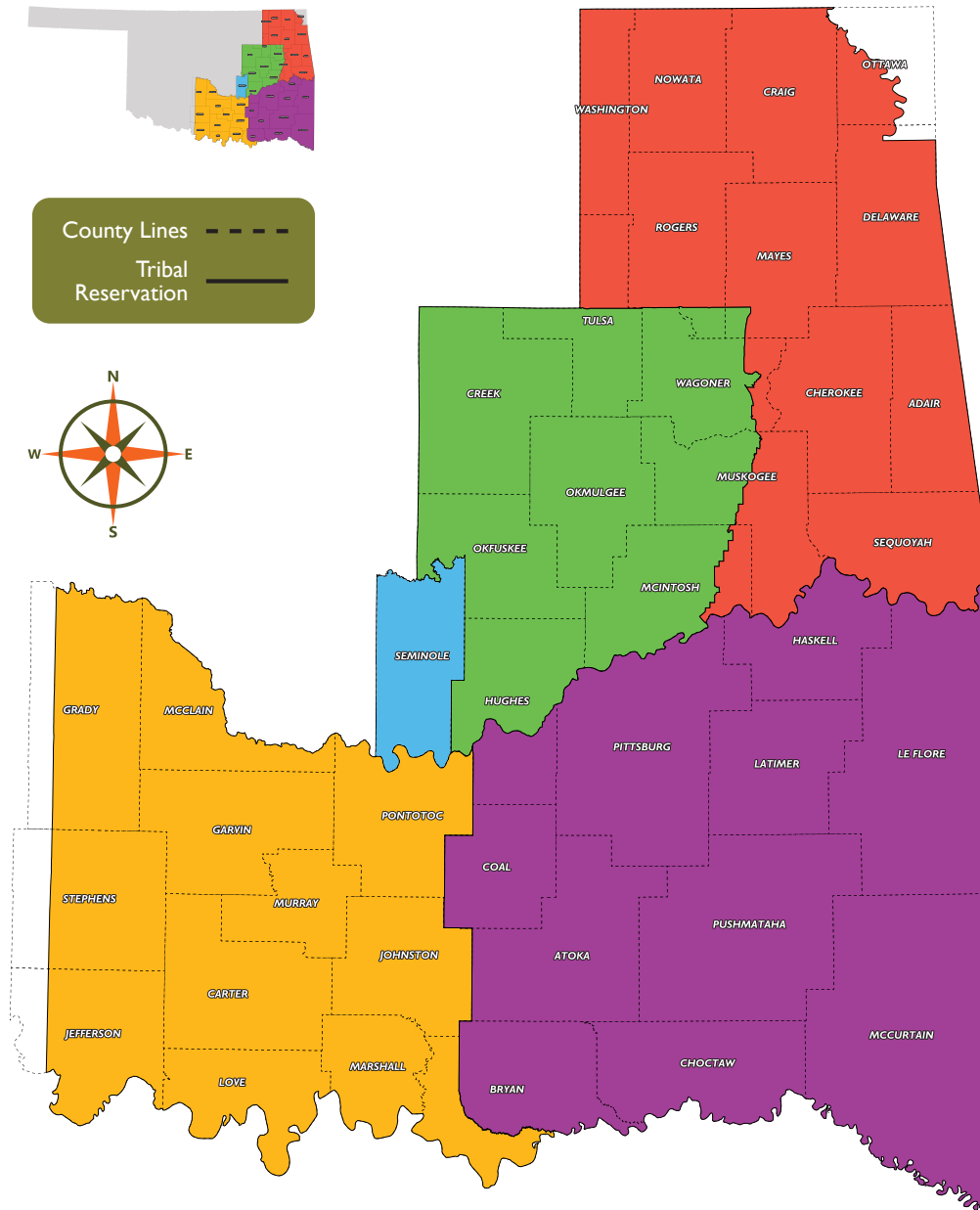
FURBEARERS

Fur prices saw an uptick in prices this fall with some species bringing record prices. Trapping is an excellent way to hone woodsmanship, provide extra income, and manage furbearing species. Tribal members are required to obtain a free furbearer permit through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal before pursuing furbearers. This helps biologists keep track of how many people are pursuing furbearers and their harvest.

328 permits were issued this last season. 99.4% went to Choctaw tribal members and 0.6% went to Cherokee tribal members. 842 furbearers were reported as harvested through the permit process. Raccoons led the count with 269 individuals. Coyotes (255) and Opossum (115) rounded out the top 3 species harvested.

This data can give biologists insights in hunting participation and how trapping or the lack thereof may affect other species such as ground nesting birds.





TRIBAL WILDLIFE DEPARTMENTS



Chickasaw Nation

<https://www.chickasaw.net/Services/Community-Services/Chickasaw-Nation-Fish-Wildlife-Service-Hunting-Program>

CNRangers@Chickasaw.net



Choctaw Nation

<https://www.choctawnation.com/services/wildlife-conservation/>

wildlife@choctawnation.com



Cherokee Nation

<https://wildlife.cherokee.org/>

wildlife@cherokee.org



Muscogee (Creek) Nation

<https://www.muscogeenation.com/department-of-interior-affairs/division-of-agriculture-natural-resources/wildlife-program/>

wildlife@muscogeenation.com



Seminole Nation

https://www.sno-nsn.org/getpage.php?name=Wildlife_Park_and_Recreation_Department

wpr@sno-nsn.gov



Choctaw Nation

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For the Choctaw Nation Hunting & Fishing Regulations
visit ChoctawNation.com/services/wildlife-conservation



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