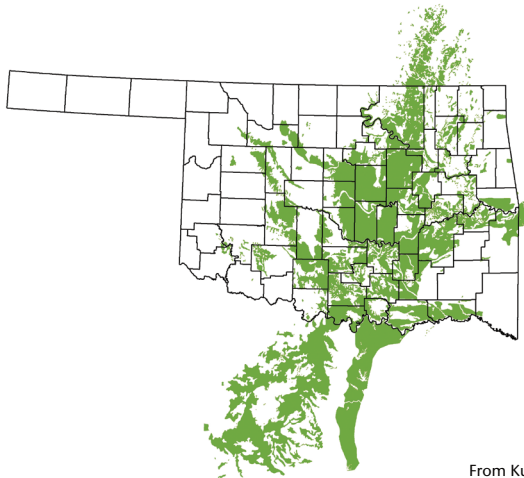




## How Did the Cross Timbers Get Its Name?

When Oklahoma Territory was opened for settlement, newcomers found much of the Cross Timbers to be impassable, thick forests. The strong scrubby oak trees with low branches blocked the easy passage through this forest. In 1832, the American writer Washington Irving traveled through the region, describing the Cross Timbers as “vexations of flesh and spirit” and as they moved across the area, it was as if “struggling through forests of cast iron.”

## Historic Range of the Cross Timbers



From Kuchler 1964

## What Is Happening to the Cross Timbers?

The Cross Timbers woodlands have changed since Irving visited Oklahoma Territory. Cross Timbers forests developed over many centuries and are sensitive to change, especially such large-scale modifications as road construction and urban development. Fragmentation of the Cross Timbers occurs when we convert forest to agriculture lands, build new housing, and develop oil and gas resources, all of which impact wildlife habitat as well as watershed health.

Also, the Cross Timbers is being taken over by invasive species. Exotic species from Asia and Europe are displacing our native plants and changing the nature of our forests. Chinese privet and Japanese honeysuckle are some of the most abundant invaders in the Cross Timbers. Although a native tree, the eastern redcedar has overtaken many acres of Cross Timbers because of fire suppression and passive land management.



## Why Should the Cross Timbers Matter to You?

The Cross Timbers may not be commercial forests that provide high-quality wood products, but they still offer many benefits and values to our state that citizens might not realize.



Changes in the forest disrupt established natural processes within forest systems and affect the services they provide, including flood prevention,

soil protection, wildlife habitat, and water filtration. When services provided naturally by forests are lost, they must be provided artificially, often at great public expense. Well-managed Cross Timbers can support healthy watersheds capable of filtering water and maintaining sustainable water supplies. Healthy Cross Timbers can decrease soil erosion problems and slow storm water runoff.

Recreation is popular in this forest type because large portions of the state’s population live within the Cross Timbers. Some recreational activities include bird watching, swimming, canoeing, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, cycling, horseback riding, and spiritual renewal.

Cross Timbers is home to a wide variety of wildlife. Because of the habitat diversity – thick forests, prairie gaps, and even wetlands – the Cross Timbers harbors many different types of animals, from white-tailed deer to spotted skunks, from western chicken turtles to five-lined skinks, and scissor-tailed flycatchers to painted buntings.



## What Is Being Done to Help the Cross Timbers?

Oklahoma Forestry Services, Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, and Oklahoma Natural Areas Registry are working with many partners to help educate landowners about the benefits of the Cross Timbers and how to manage this forest type to meet their objectives while conserving and enhancing nature’s benefits.

In central Oklahoma, OFS has worked with Oklahoma State University to study management options of Cross Timbers near Stillwater. OFS also has worked with Oklahoma City and City of Sand Springs to conduct prescribed burns to improve the health of the Cross Timbers surrounding Lake Stanley Draper and the Keystone Ancient Forest. These will be demonstration areas for anyone wanting to learn more about managing Cross Timbers forests. OFS foresters are available to provide technical assistance to any landowners interested in managing their Cross Timbers.

The ONAR encourages citizen-based conservation of Oklahoma’s natural diversity through a voluntary land preservation program. Several Registry sites protect ancient Cross Timbers. If you own land that you believe may have old-growth Cross Timbers, you may contact the Registry Program about becoming a member.