

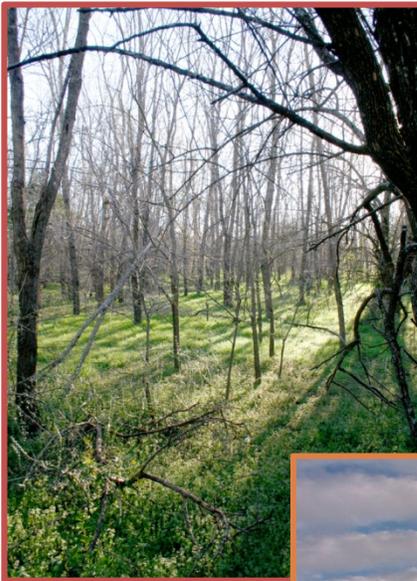
# Management Plan: Sutton Urban Wilderness Park

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee

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**Woodland**



**Wetland**



**Prairie**

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Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

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*"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." Aldo Leopold*

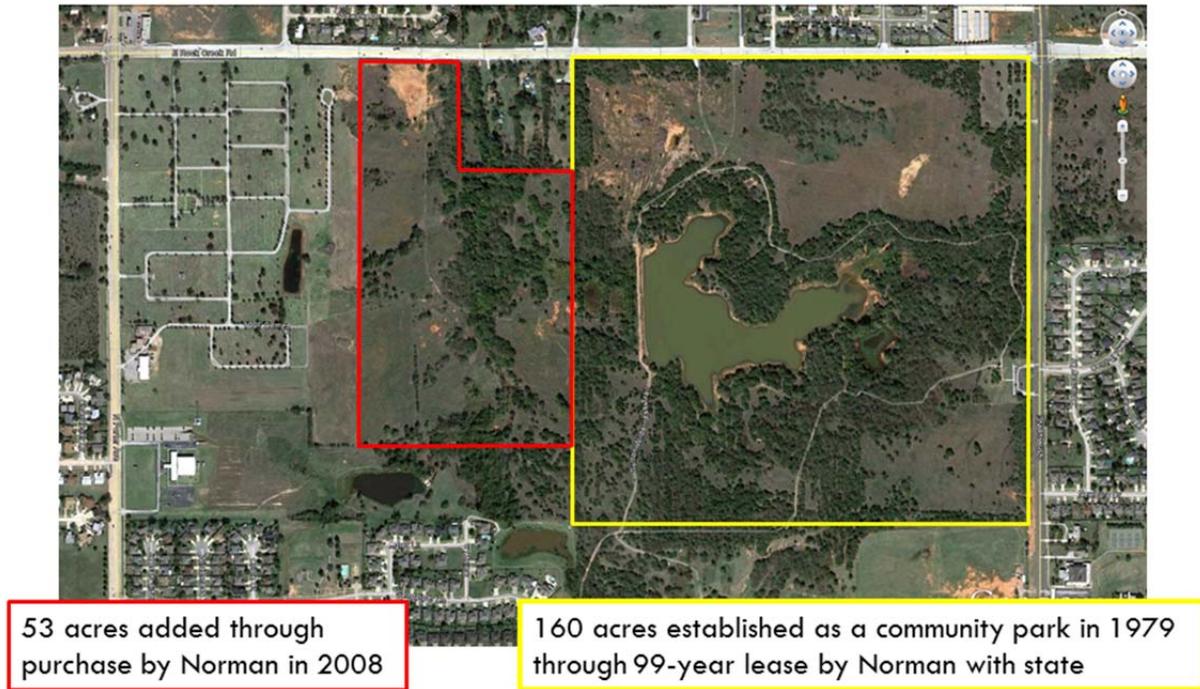
### Section I. Background Information

**Overall Objective** To maintain Sutton Urban Wilderness Park as a healthy ecosystem, representative of the natural ecology of Oklahoma, so that the people of Norman may have a restorative outdoor experience in an urban setting. A healthy ecosystem provides the necessary elements for native species to live and reproduce.

**Goal** To manage Sutton Urban Wilderness Park so that it sustains healthy populations of native plants and animals, and supports a high degree of biological diversity.

**Introduction** Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is a component of the community park system of the City of Norman, Oklahoma. It occupies a unique position within the system in that 160 acres of it is leased from the State of Oklahoma by the City for a period of 99 years (Figure 1). In addition, an area of 53.3 acres bordering the original park on the west is owned by the City and zoned as parkland. The city-owned portion sometimes has been referred to as the Sutton Annex and Sutton West. For simplicity, if not modified as "original" or as "annex," the term "Sutton Urban Wilderness Park" will be understood to apply to both areas as a unit.

Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is part of the Norman Park System and is unique among Norman parks in having its own citizen advisory board. The Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee reports to and advises the Department of Parks and Recreation and, ultimately, the City Council. The Department of Parks and Recreation is responsible for the park and carries out management and maintenance of the park in cooperation of other city divisions. The Committee suggests management directions, evaluates issues that could affect the Park, acquires and provides scientific advice concerning management of the Park, implements some management responsibilities, and organizes special events, such as Park clean-ups.



*Figure 1. Aerial photograph showing initial land included in Sutton Urban Wilderness Park in 1979, as well as subsequent addition to Park in 2008.*

One of the Park’s greatest attractions is that it includes a variety of habitats. These include prairie patches, wooded areas surrounding a lake, creeks, ponds, and marshes. Remnants of the human history on the land now encompassed by Sutton Urban Wilderness Park remain in the orchard shelter-belt area along the southern and western borders of the park. The diversity found in the Park is an important reason why the area attracts and holds so many species of birds and other kinds of animals. The mixture of habitats supports a considerable variety of plants and animals in a relatively small area. Birds like greater roadrunners and American robins, reptiles from water snakes to snapping turtles, amphibians from salamanders to spring peepers, and mammals like cottontails and coyotes all call this area their home.

**History** In the 1920s, the land now comprising Sutton Urban Wilderness Park looked much like other areas in rural Norman—a pasture with a small intermittent creek running through it and a prairie-dog town on its southern edge. At that time, it was part of a farm being run by and for the patients of Central State Hospital. At some point, parts of it were under cultivation (you can still see the contours built up at that time to prevent erosion) but it was primarily used as pastureland for the dairy operated by the Hospital.

During the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program of the 1930s, the various stone bridges and dams were constructed, and trees and bushes were planted. The buildings

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

erected at the same time have now been removed but the plantings still contribute to the diverse wildlife that exists in the area today.

Dr. George Miksch Sutton was an internationally recognized bird artist, teacher, ornithologist, and writer who joined the faculty of the University of Oklahoma in 1953. He was very popular with students, as well as amateur ornithologists and naturalists. With Dr. Sutton as a guide, the area gained popularity among local bird and wildlife enthusiasts. Dr. Sutton used the park as a living classroom for his students and as a place to simply go and observe multiple forms of wildlife—most especially birds. Eventually, he compiled a list of 204 species of birds in the Park. His intense interest in this area continued until the time of his death in December 1982.

In 1978, when the Department of Mental Health decided that it wanted to sell this land to developers, a number of environmentally oriented citizens of Norman decided that they would do all they could to keep this lovely place from becoming just another subdivision. The eventual outcome of their efforts was a Joint Resolution by the State Legislature (Appendix 1) that resulted in the area being leased to the City of Norman for use as a nature park (Appendix 2). The Joint Resolution contained specific language spelling out what could and could not be done in this area and dedicated the area for nature study and for the passive enjoyment of a wild and beautiful setting.

Dr. Sutton was the first to admit that the area was not a real wilderness but, as he said in a short speech at the dedication of the Park in November of 1979, “It is a place of a kind of wildness.” It has become a small refuge from the surrounding city and a place that serves to let people enjoy nature even when the surrounding area has been turned into tracts of suburban sameness.

In 2006, developers bought land along the western border of Sutton Urban Wilderness Park and approached the Planning Commission and City Council with plans to rezone the area as residential and build a subdivision. This land had been part of the IOOF Cemetery, and no one had foreseen that the land would ever be sold. The Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee met and determined that a subdivision would present a substantial threat to the continuance of Sutton Urban Wilderness Park as a natural area and wildlife habitat. A protest was lodged with the City Council and, after much deliberation, public input, study, and exchange of legal opinions, the 53.3 acres was purchased in 2008 by the City of Norman to be incorporated into Sutton Urban Wilderness Park.

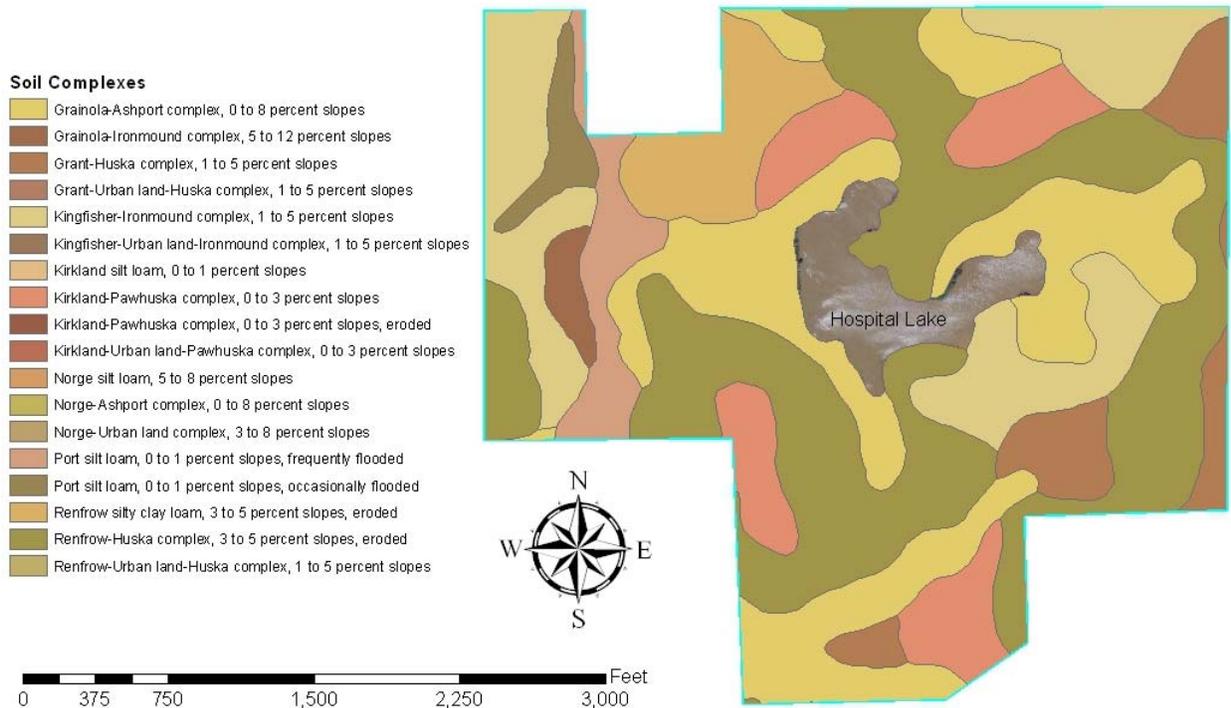
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**Legal Description** Sutton Urban Wilderness [original]. Location: the northwest quarter of Section 20, Township 9 North, Range 2 west, Indian Meridian. Containing 160 acres, more or less, and located within the municipal limits of the City of Norman.

Sutton West Annex. Location: Northwest quarter, Section 20, Township 9 North, Range 2 west of the Indian Meridian. Containing 53 acres, more or less, and located within the municipal limits of the City of Norman.

**Geology** Norman is a part of the Central Redbed Plains. This area is characterized by red Permian shales and sandstones forming gently rolling hills and broad, flat plains.

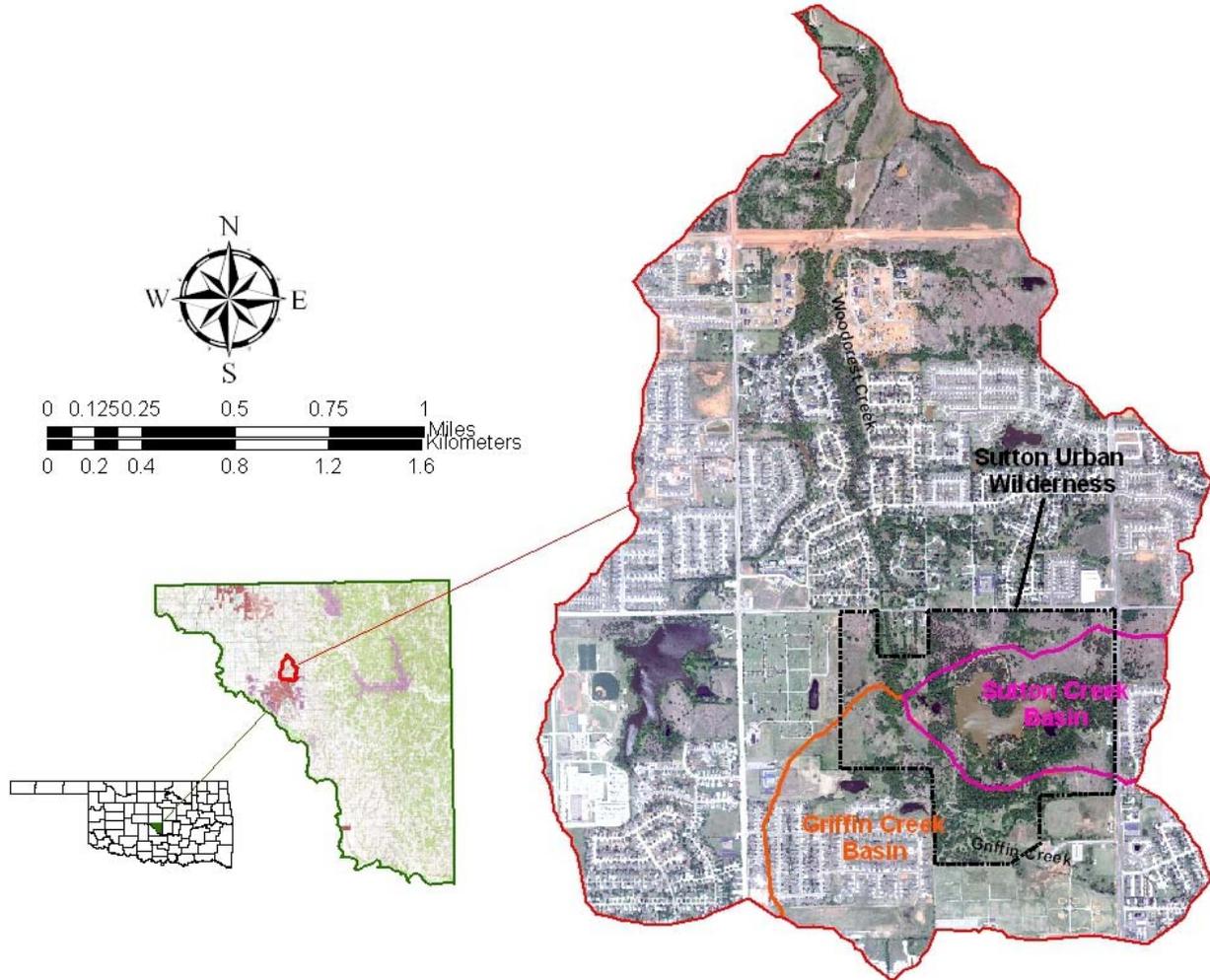
Sutton Urban Wilderness lies within the Renfrow Grainola-Grant general soils group (Figure 2). This is described by the 1987 Cleveland County Soil Survey as deep and moderately deep, very gently sloping to moderately steep, well drained, loamy soils that formed in materials weathered from shale, siltstone, or sandstone.



*Figure 2. Soils of Sutton Urban Wilderness Park (Elzein 2003).*

The survey goes on to say that soils in this group naturally have a low diversity in vegetative patterns. Ponds found will almost always be man-made. In terms of agriculture, sites in this group are most suited to native range, hay or Bermuda grass pasture. They tend to be of poor quality for cropland due to the rolling and sometimes steep nature of the landscape. One needs to be wary of erosion due to water and the possibility of soil compaction during wet periods.

**Hydrology and Channel Morphology** Sutton Urban Wilderness Park, like most of Norman, overlies the Garber-Wellington aquifer from which the City of Norman obtains a portion of its drinking water. The Garber-Wellington is capable of yielding 150–300 gallons per minute.



*Figure 3. Extent of Woodcrest Creek watershed, a sub-watershed of Little River watershed, that collects run-off from Sutton Urban Wilderness Park (Elzein 2003).*

The Park lies within the Woodcrest Creek watershed (Figure 3), which is a sub-watershed of the Little River watershed. This means that all of the precipitation that runs off of the Sutton Urban Wilderness Park flows to Woodcrest Creek and then on to the Little River. The direction of the flow is generally to the north.

Two small ephemeral unnamed streams flow through the Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. The larger of the two channels (designated East Creek) enters the Park from the east and is impounded by a dam that forms Hospital Lake. Overflow from Hospital Lake goes through a pipe to lower ponds located west of the lake. These ponds held water year-round as

recently as the late 1980s and early 1990s, but have since begun to fill and, during drought years, dried up completely. Below the lower ponds the channel confluences with a smaller channel (designated Griffin Creek in Figure 3).

Approximately 44% of Sutton Urban Wilderness Park lies within the East Creek Basin and 32% in the Griffin Creek Basin. Thus, 44% of the flow from the Sutton Urban Wilderness Park goes to East Creek and 32% to Griffin Creek. The remaining 24% flows to Woodcrest Creek to the north. About 78% of the 136-acre East Creek Basin is located within Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. Thus, most of the water in East Creek is from the Park, whereas only 22% of the 349-acre Griffin Creek is within Sutton Urban Wilderness Park.

Stream channels develop their morphology—including their size and shape—in response to the processes of moving water, sediment, and detritus down the watershed. Dams and urbanization can significantly alter flow and sediment-transport regimes in streams and, thus, result increased stream-bed and bank erosion.

The dam impounding Hospital Lake and some ornamental stonework over East Creek were constructed in the 1930s. The channel upstream of the impoundment is now experiencing significant bed and bank erosion. This erosion has caused some of the old stonework trail guards to collapse into the creek. Increasing development to the east of Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is likely to increase erosion in the future. Commercial development and parking lots on the southeastern corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and Rock Creek Road also are likely to impact both erosion and water quality.

**Water Quality** Urbanization in a watershed can have profound impact on stream-water quality. Impacts can include: increased sedimentation as a result of stream-bed and bank erosion; degraded aquatic habitat; contamination from pesticides, fertilizers, and other pollutants; increased temperature; and reduced oxygen levels. All are serious threats in urbanized streams, including the three streams flowing through Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. Healthy, stable streams with adequate, properly functioning riparian corridors can buffer the impacts of urbanization.

**Riparian Corridors** Riparian areas are the areas adjacent to and on the banks of natural channels or lakes. They serve many important functions, including removal of sediments and other contaminants, reduction of flood risk, and reduction of stream-channel and stream-bank erosion. Such corridors support a diversity of plant and wildlife species, maintain good habitat for healthy fish populations, and create opportunities for recreation including fishing, camping, picnicking, and other activities. *“Riparian zones are lands immediately adjacent to streams, sometimes called stream corridors, usually within floodplains. The riparian area provides a transition between aquatic habitat and upland habitat and may contain wetlands. The relative health of the riparian zone, or stream*

corridor, directly affects fish and wildlife survival” (Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 2012).

The riparian corridors within Sutton Urban Wilderness Park are threatened by increased stream-bed and bank erosion and by invasive plant species. Minimizing such effects is of importance in terms of the long-term health of the Park.

**Vegetation** Norman lies in an area of mixed-grass prairie with intermittent fingers of Crosstimbers vegetation (post oak, blackjack). Riparian areas are characterized by willows, elms, cottonwoods, walnuts, and pecans. Within the park, bois d’arc (Osage orange), hickories, elms, mulberries, cottonwoods, and honey locusts are common, with honey locusts encroaching on the grasslands. Red cedar is prevalent to the point of being a nuisance species; a major effort over the past year has greatly reduced the area affected by this species. Callery pears are present in invasive numbers primarily in the grasslands. Japanese honeysuckle and Chinese privet are invasive in the wooded area.

**Wildlife** Wildlife in Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is typical for the area and includes both prairie and woodland species. Reptiles include garter snakes, skinks, diamond-backed watersnakes and Texas horned lizards. Mammals are represented by white-tailed deer, skunks, raccoons, rabbits, foxes, bobcats, and a variety of rodents. Birds are the most varied of the vertebrate wildlife within the Park and include both year-round residents and migratory species. Typical birds include great egrets, great blue herons, belted kingfishers, painted buntings, numerous native sparrows, Nashville warblers, red-winged blackbirds, and a variety of hawks and owls.

No endangered species have been reported within Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. There are several species recorded in the Park that have been identified as declining or of special concern by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation due to low populations in Oklahoma. These include the Texas horned lizard, Swainson’s hawk, loggerhead shrike, Bell’s vireo, burrowing owl, and barn owl.

## Section II. Management Plan

**Mission** Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is unique in that some management aims are spelled out in the legislation that created the Park in 1979 (Appendix 1). These dedicated goals include: (1) The land shall not be put to any use that is incompatible with the present ecology of the area. This shall include restorative management techniques such as the planting of native plants and reintroduction of native animal species. (2) All vehicular traffic shall be prohibited. (3) Access points shall be limited. (4) Construction of facilities shall be prohibited. (5) A trail system shall be developed. (6) A parking lot shall be provided. (7) All firearms shall be prohibited. (8) Fishing shall be allowed on a limited basis.

In addition, the City Ordinance, Section 15-607 (Appendix 3), prohibits the following activities: (1) littering; (2) operating any motorized vehicles or bicycles; (3) starting or maintaining a fire; (4) camping; (5) swimming; (6) hunting; (7) trapping; (8) collecting biological or geological specimens; (9) cutting or collecting wood; (10) operating a boat or canoe; (11) fishing by means of a trotline or jugline; (12) possession of weapons such as bows, slingshots, air guns, and firearms; (13) defacing or damaging any natural object; and (14) introducing any plant or animal species. The Parks and Recreation Department may issue permits for scientific study, park maintenance, and conservation or other purposes appropriate for use of a wilderness area. Where questions arise concerning administration of the permit system, the Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee acts in an advisory capacity. Organized group events with more than 35 people are required to have written authorization from the Parks and Recreation Department.

**Objective of Management** To maintain Sutton Urban Wilderness Park as a healthy ecosystem, representative of the natural ecology of Oklahoma, so that the people of Norman may have a restorative outdoor experience in an urban setting. A healthy ecosystem provides the necessary elements for native species to live and reproduce.

**Background** In considering a management plan for the George Sutton Urban Wilderness Park, it is important to reiterate that the Park is not “a wilderness.” A wilderness, by definition, is a tract of land that is or was uncultivated and uninhabited by man. The Sutton Urban Wilderness Park has been heavily impacted by man, particularly since the time it was part of a dairy operated by Central State Hospital. Though not a wilderness, as indicated earlier, Dr. Sutton described the area by saying “It isn’t a wilderness so much as it is an area of wildness.”

While wildlife-management plans often target specific species of fish or game, this would not be the appropriate approach for a public park, where viewing a diverse variety of wildlife species is the goal. The goal is essentially to promote healthy populations of native

plants and animals in a way that encourages biodiversity and enhances the natural ecology of the area.

### **Wildlife Management**

**Goal**—To establish and sustain healthy populations of diverse native species for public enjoyment. These organisms would include, but not be limited to, trees, forbs, grasses, birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, and invertebrates. “Enjoyment,” with the exception of fishing, largely is to be confined to passive activities, such as photography, hiking, observation, conservation efforts, and educational programs.

The Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee was unanimous in supporting the goal of promoting native plants and animals in the Park. We hope to improve the communities of native plants, which can then be inhabited by the animals that would normally live in association with such communities. If the plant communities include the appropriate mix of species to provide both food and cover, then animal diversity will be enhanced.

The goal of promoting biodiversity necessarily is tempered by reality and local conditions. The Park will never support bison and bald eagles, but we can have wood ducks and belted kingfishers, raccoons and opossums, and snakes and salamanders. To achieve the goal of maximizing wildlife diversity within Sutton Urban Wilderness Park, the following actions should be pursued.

**Objectives**—(1) To plant diverse native vegetation and encourage propagation of native species, while discouraging invasive species. (2) To maintain this vegetation in a way that provides cover and food for native species of organisms and promotes their reproduction. (3) To maintain connections with larger natural areas. (4) To promote and maintain buffers. (5) To maximize edge (ecotones). (6) To establish wildlife food plots. (7) To increase passive enjoyment of visitors. (8) To evaluate effectiveness of management activities. (9) To promote fishing. (10) To promote scientific evaluation and use of the Park.

Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is a relatively small tract of land set in an urban area. Both the size and urban setting present management challenges in that there is a high probability of a given species being extirpated (disappearing locally) in a small, isolated patch of habitat. Connections between natural areas are of importance to maintain wildlife populations in an urban setting. Considerable research underlies the positive net benefits from making high-quality links between habitat patches. “In the urban landscape connectivity may be linked to the long-term sustainability of communities” (Turner et al. 2001).

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

In practical terms, the difference between connections and no connections between habitat areas means that an animal will be able to locate sites for foraging, nesting, and dispersal, or be unable to do so. The threshold depends on the particular animal species and the extent, quality, and spatial arrangement of habitats in the area. In terms of animals in Sutton Urban Wilderness Park, maintaining connectivity between the Park and the Little River riparian area through parkland dedication or other means is a very important goal.

Basic concepts of connectivity include: (a) Connectivity refers to both the character of the landscape and the ability of the animal to get around. (b) Connections, or corridors, should provide habitat themselves. Preferably, these will be natural corridors, with native vegetation. Corridors that consider habitat needs should be wider (e.g. 200–300 feet) than might be required for corridors planned only for recreational trails and the like (Arendt 1994). (c) Creek, stream, and river systems are corridors of particular significance relative to the goal of preserving wildlife populations. Width is an important factor for effectiveness. (d) A continuous corridor is best but “stepping stone” patches also can be effective.

The most important connection relative to Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is probably access to the Little River area via Woodcrest Creek, which runs north through the northwestern portion of the Park. Since the Little River area includes fairly extensive natural areas, maintaining this connection to Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is of high importance. The entire area between the Park and Little River is developing rapidly. Maintaining connectivity between the two areas through parkland dedication, purchase, or other means is an important goal.

Buffers between active recreation areas, such as the Griffin Sports Complex to the south, and residential areas have been developed and need to be maintained. The existing buffer (about 90-foot wide) between Sutton Urban Wilderness Park and Griffin Sports Complex helps to minimize likelihood of unsupervised children entering the Park, reduces intrusion by pet dogs and cats, and ameliorates detrimental effects of light and noise on wildlife.

The connection with the IOOF cemetery (located the west of Park), as an adjoining open space, is important in maintaining wildlife populations for Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. If parts of the cemetery land were to be converted to a residential or business area, this would adversely impact both wildlife and the quality of visitor experience in the Sutton Urban Wilderness Park.

Maximizing ecotonal (edge) areas is a commonly used wildlife-management technique. Promoting edge areas enables easy access by many kinds of animals to food near cover, to shelter from weather, to cover where risk of predation is lower, and to suitable nesting sites.

The fish in Hospital Lake include a variety of native species and can be taken and removed within the constraints of regulations of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. No invasive species, such as grass carp, should be introduced or harbored.

**Management Plans by Habitat Type** Sutton Urban Wilderness Park encompasses several prairie areas, wooded areas, one small lake, two creeks, and a number of ponds. Each of these areas has its own management requirements.

***Prairie Management Plan***—The prairie areas of the Park are representative of Great Plains mixed-grass prairie. A challenge is that those prairie areas are degraded as natural areas because of the presence of a number of invasive and nuisance species, most notably eastern red cedar, privet, and honeysuckle. Also, some dense ground thickets are present that tend to inhibit seed regeneration and favor invasive species.

The overall goal for prairie areas is to promote native grasses and forbs that, in turn, will encourage wildlife diversity. In addition, it is a goal to provide public education about these areas so as to enhance enjoyment of them by the public.

Objectives are to: (a) Restore, protect, and enhance prairie areas of the Park by discouraging nuisance and invasive species with controlled burns or similarly effective means. (b) Plant native wildflowers and grasses in the prairie areas for wildlife enhancement and visitor enjoyment. (c) Map and develop mowed trail systems through prairie area with the possible introduction of benches. (d) Develop educational programs as needed to promote public understanding of management techniques, such as controlled burns. (e) Seek funding for a prairie specialist to help restore appropriate forbs and trees after the removal of invasive species.

Native prairies are fire-dependent and prescribed burns may sometimes be an important maintenance tool. Lacking fires, mowing or other management techniques will be needed. Controlled burns bring about the following benefits: (a) Native plants are favored, growing more vigorously and producing more flowers and seeds. (b) Fire controls trees and woody shrubs. (c) Burning in alternate seasons helps promote a wider release of different varieties of seeds at different seasons.

Fires can be destructive of wildlife, especially reptiles, ground-nesting birds, small mammals and invertebrates in general. Care should be taken to avoid burns during the nesting season of ground birds and consideration should be given to wildlife factors when planning a burn. Since Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is surrounded by suburbs, human factors must also be considered, and appropriate safeguards should be taken to ensure that management fires are appropriately contained. Given the suburban setting, seasonal mowing and regular cutting of cedars also can be employed in management of prairie areas

in the Park. Yearly mowing and selective thinning of nuisance species can assist in promoting the goal of a healthy prairie area in Sutton Urban Wilderness Park.

Opening up the prairie floor through burns or selective cutting would allow for introduction of Oklahoma native wildflowers and grasses into the area. This would not only provide an aesthetic experience for visitors but will also enhance prairie areas for a wider variety of birds and wildlife. If mixed-seed blends are employed, care should be taken to ensure that invasive species are not included in the blend.

A trail system should be developed that will guide visitors through prairie areas. The most suitable trail type in a prairie is a mowed trail. Unlike mulched areas, mowed areas help control invasive weeds and can act as a firebreak. In addition, mowed trails offer direction to visitors and help reduce disturbance to nesting birds and wildlife. Benches or other features may be placed in certain areas to provide relaxing views or educational opportunities to visitors.

***Woodland Management Plan***—The primary goal is to manage the woodland area for native trees and understory plants that, in turn, will encourage wildlife diversity. An additional goal is to provide for the public education and enjoyment of these areas.

The woodland area of Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is basically riparian vegetation surrounded by mixed-grass prairie. At present, the woodland area includes a number of invasive species, most notably eastern red cedar, privet, and Japanese honeysuckle. In some parts of the woodland, a dense ground thicket is present that reduces wildlife and plant diversity by suppressing herbaceous plants in the understory and blocking the movement of wildlife.

Objectives for the woodland are: (a) To restore, protect, and enhance woodland areas of the Park by removal of invasive species. Removal of red cedars, privet, and honeysuckle will open large areas for the reintroduction of native trees, forbs, and understory plant life. (b) To plant native trees and forbs for wildlife enhancement and visitor enjoyment. Focus should be on trees that support a diversity of birds and other wildlife. (c) To bring a higher level of management to woodland trails so as to reduce erosion.

Presently, there are well-established trails through the woodland, although a number of the trails suffer from erosion brought on by heavy rains, visitor traffic, and bike use. In addition, numerous smaller visitor-carved trails run through the wooded area of the Park. A trail-management system should be developed that will guide visitors comfortably through the wooded area. This may involve the introduction of new topsoil and mulching on the most heavily used trails, as well as blocking or closing off of inappropriate trails.

***Wetland Management Plan***—The goal is to maintain the lake, ponds, marshes, and streams in healthy and sustainable conditions. If successful, such management will: (a) Provide the base for a healthy biodiversity of aquatic and other life forms. (b) Provide numerous educational settings and give students opportunities to record, observe, compare, and contrast aquatic habitats. (c) Provide variety and interest for the casual visitor. (d) Maintain fishing as an activity in the Park.

Hospital Lake (technically a reservoir) is a small lake fed by East Creek and contained by a dam at the west end. It supports harvestable fish populations, which include crappie, bass, and bluegill. The objectives are to: (a) Work with state agencies to maintain healthy fish populations, including stocking with largemouth bass. (b) Document and monitor water quality, both in terms of chemistry and aquatic life. (c) Monitor aquatic plant populations. (d) Maintain structural integrity of the dam. This includes periodic removal of trees from the west slope of the dam. Tree roots that penetrate a dam eventually can provide conduits for water to leak out through the dam. After tree removal, the slope should be replanted with native plants that will hold the soil and prevent silting of the small ponds and wetlands below the dam.

There are several creeks and channels within Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. Most of the creeks are seasonal in nature, carrying water only after a rain. The largest are Woodcrest Creek, which flows north out of the northwestern portion of the Park toward Little River, and East Creek, which enters the Park from the housing development across 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE. There are several smaller water corridors within the Park. Objectives for creek management are: (a) To identify locations and functionality of all riparian corridors within Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. (b) To describe the existing morphology and erosion potential of the two main channels in Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. (c) To protect creeks and riparian corridors that are in good condition and enhance those in poor condition that are not functioning properly. (d) To ascertain and monitor water quality. (e) To take action to prevent pollution and erosion threats that could materialize from development in areas bordering Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. Increased development to the east, south, and north of the Park could affect the quantity and quality of storm water entering the Park. Increased run-off could increase pollution in creeks and Hospital Lake in the form of hazardous chemicals, as well as sediment and debris. Swales or rain gardens might be of use in preventing damage to the Park's creeks from run-off. (f) Maintain the health of the riparian zone adjacent to creeks.

Ponds include vernal or seasonal ponds, for which no active management is required, and larger, permanent ponds. In addition, a wetland is present in the western part of the Park. There are two sets of larger ponds, one above and to the south of Hospital Lake, and two below the dam. These ponds historically have been areas supporting considerable wildlife diversity. They provide important breeding places for amphibians, as well as accessible

fishing for children. Many of the ponds are filling with sediment. It is desirable to maintain some of the ponds as ponds, while allowing others to follow the natural process of succession leading to areas becoming woodland or marsh. Objectives relative to ponds in the Park are: (a) To ascertain and monitor water quality. (b) To maintain the larger upper and lower ponds in their historic form, with water depths consistent with populations of bluegills and minnows. (c) To maintain and control plant communities within and surrounding the ponds so as to provide for a healthy and sustainable aquatic system.

**Public-Use Management and Education** With the publication in 2005 of Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods*, the connection between wellness, wilderness, and education became a topic of public discourse. As noted *USA Today* (November 2006), "A back-to-nature movement to reconnect children with the outdoors is burgeoning nationwide."

While it is gratifying that people are again interested in visiting natural areas, many of new visitors lack both basic knowledge and the wilderness ethics that were once common knowledge. It is necessary now to teach people how to understand, use, and not abuse natural areas around them. This is especially true in an urban wilderness because it is easy for such an area to be "loved to death" through inappropriate use.

The way Sutton Urban Wilderness Park is used by the public will determine whether or not it will be a place that can sustain wildlife populations. A goal in terms of public use is to provide a place where people in an urban setting can encounter "wildness" close to home. It is desirable to make available a place of respite, relaxation, and education for the public while also maintaining healthy natural habitats.

Objectives relative to public education are: (a) To provide information, trails, viewing points, and other accommodations such that Sutton Urban Wilderness Park can be a useful venue for educational experiences that engage people with the natural world. Educational accommodations may include but not be limited to: information in one or more gazebos at entry points; City of Norman web sites with suggested activities, observations, and information; boardwalk entry points for wetlands; accommodations for school groups to pursue education in natural history; and occasional tours and on-site lectures by experts. (b) To provide education for the public in terms of appropriate, non-destructive, and safe behavior in an outdoor setting. Signage is a necessarily an important tool in educating the public about the proper behavior in an urban wilderness. Signs should use positive language to inform the public about proper behavior while also informing about activities that are not lawful. In addition to restrictions established specifically for Sutton Urban Wilderness Park by the City of Norman (Appendix 3), other prohibited activities pertain throughout much of the City, including a restriction on explosives and firecrackers, daylight-only use of the Park, and a requirement that wildlife not be harassed, including that nests and dens should not be disturbed. Fishing has certain restrictions and requires

an appropriate state license. (c) With the exception of fishing, activities generally should be passive and non-consumptive in nature. The Park is a place for hiking, bird watching, photography, and conservation efforts but not for activities that would be disruptive to the biota (such as paintball games or concerts). Activities involving loud noise or bright lighting are prohibited.

Management activities will be accomplished through the joint action of the Parks and Recreation Department and the Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee. Many objectives could be carried out through the action of subcommittees established by the Committee. Members of subcommittees should have specific expertise, time, and willingness to perform the needed actions. Actions could include activities such as monitoring populations, planting native species, and writing of grant proposals.

Regular maintenance will usually be accommodated through the annual budget of the Parks and Recreation Department, as part of routinely scheduled maintenance activities. Major projects probably will need additional funding from outside the normal city budget. Grants and donations are likely to play an important part in accomplishing goals and objectives related to management of Sutton Urban Wilderness Park.

### **Section III. Evaluation**

Periodic evaluation is desirable to determine whether adequate progress is being made in terms of the overall management goals and objectives for Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. Such evaluations appropriately would be joint efforts by the Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee and the Parks and Recreation Department. It is likely that volunteer and scientific assistance will be needed.

Evaluation tools may include: (a) Native/invasive plant censuses. Initial progress can be measured by evaluating the extent to which progress is made in planting and enhancing native plants. (b) Regular censuses of animal species. Censuses will help to determine if the native species are increasing or declining. In the past this was done through the efforts of BIOBLITZ (Oklahoma Biological Survey) and other volunteer activities. (c) Scientific measurements related to water chemistry, erosion, and infill also will help to evaluate the progress toward the goal of a sustainable, diverse, native ecosystem.

### **Section IV. Organization of Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee**

The Committee has been active since the initial establishment of the Sutton Urban Wilderness Park. Basic guidelines relative to the operation of the Committee are: (1) Officers shall consist of a chair and vice chair. (2) Officers will serve for two years. (3) The committee will consist of at least four members from the Norman community, plus a staff member representing the Parks and Recreation Department. (4) A quorum will consist of

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

at least three members. (5) Members shall come from the Norman community but individuals from outside Norman can be consulted as appropriate. (6) Terms of service on the Committee are not limited. (7) The Committee will hold a minimum of four meetings a year. An agenda for the meeting will be posted in accordance with open-meeting provisions that apply relative to the City of Norman. (8) Minutes will be recorded and deposited with the Parks and Recreation Department as a permanent record.

### **Bibliography**

- Arendt, R. 1994. Rural by design: maintaining small town character. American Planning Association, Planners Press, Chicago, Illinois.
- Elzein, B. 2003. Sutton Urban Wilderness. Unpublished Student Project.
- Louv, R. 2005. Last child in the woods: saving our children from nature-deficit disorder. Algonquin Books, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources. 2012. Stream management guides. Division of Water, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Columbus, Ohio. Accessed 11 June 2012. <http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/tabid/4178/Default.aspx>.
- Turner, M., R. H. Gardner, and R. V. O'Neill. 2001. Landscape ecology in theory and practice: pattern and process. Springer-Verlag, New York.
- Zipperer, W. C., J. Wu, R. V. Pouyat, and S. T. A. Pickett. 2000. The application of ecological principles to urban and urbanizing landscapes. *Ecological Applications* 10:685-688.

Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

Appendix 1(1/3). Joint Oklahoma House and Senate resolution relating to development of urban wilderness area.

# Resolution

ENROLLED HOUSE  
JOINT  
RESOLUTION NO. 1008

BY: TOWNSEND, COLE,  
DEATHERAGE, HOBSON and  
BUCKETT of the HOUSE

and

CATE, CLIFTON, VANN and  
KILPATRICK of the SENATE

Correctly Enrolled: *[Signature]* Chairman, COMMITTEE ON ENGROSSED AND ENROLLED BILLS

A JOINT RESOLUTION RELATING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN URBAN WILDERNESS AREA; DIRECTING THE STATE BOARD OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, THE OKLAHOMA TOURISM AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT AND THE CITY OF NORMAN TO CONTRACT FOR THE LEASE OF CERTAIN LAND; IMPOSING CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS; DIRECTING DISTRIBUTION; AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.

WHEREAS, the Northeast Quarter of Section 20, Township 9 North, Range 2 West, Indian Meridian, containing one hundred sixty (160) acres more or less, is located within the municipal limits of the City of Norman; and

WHEREAS, said land is owned by the Department of Mental Health and is currently known as Hospital Lake; and

WHEREAS, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department is required by law to promote the development and use of Oklahoma's parks and recreational areas; and

WHEREAS, the Norman City Council and the Norman Parks Board have endorsed a plan, put forth by a group of interested citizens, to lease the land from the state and incorporate it into the Norman City Park system as the George M. Sutton Urban Wilderness; and

Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

Appendix 1(2/3). Continued.

*Correctly Enrolled: [Signature]*  
*Chairman, COMMITTEE ON ENGROSSED AND ENROLLED BILLS*

WHEREAS, the State Board of Public Affairs is authorized by law to execute a lease contract for the use of state land to any agency, department or municipal subdivision which may require the need of such land; and

WHEREAS, the use of said land as an urban wilderness area will provide an innovative recreational and educational opportunity to people of all ages and interests.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SENATE OF THE 1ST SESSION OF THE 37TH OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE:

SECTION 1. The State Board of Public Affairs and the Department of Mental Health are hereby directed to execute a contract with the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department to lease, to said Department, the land, currently known as Hospital Lake, and described as the Northeast Quarter of Section 20, Township 9 North, Range 2 West, Cleveland County, containing one hundred sixty (160) acres more or less. The Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation shall thereupon join together with the State Board of Public Affairs and the City of Norman for the sublease of said land to said city. The leases shall run for a period of ninety-nine (99) years at an annual rental rate of One Dollar (\$1.00) per year. The leases shall provide for the establishment of said land as an urban wilderness to be known as the George M. Sutton Urban Wilderness. The sublease from the Tourism and Recreation Department to the City of Norman shall contain the following restrictions pertaining to the utilization of said land:

1. The land shall not be put to any use that is incompatible with the present ecology of the area. Every effort shall be made to preserve the wild nature of the area, which shall include, but not be limited to, certain restorative management techniques such as supplemental plantings of native plants and reintroduction of native animal species;
2. All vehicular traffic shall be prohibited;

ENR. H. J. R. NO. 1008 Page 2

Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

Appendix 1(3/3). Continued.

Correctly Enrolled. *Smith* Chairman, COMMITTEE ON ENGROSSED AND ENROLLED BILLS

Passed the House of Representatives the 24th day of January, 1979.

*David D. Brody Jr.*  
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Passed the Senate the 1st day of February, 1979.

ACTING *[Signature]*  
President of the Senate.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
 Received by the Governor this 5<sup>th</sup>  
 day of February, 1979,  
 at 3:00, o'clock P M.  
 By: *Dora Wistrow*

Approved by the Governor of the State of Oklahoma the 8<sup>th</sup> day of  
February, 1979, at 9:50 o'clock a. m.  
*George F. Fisher*  
 Governor of the State of OK

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
 Received by the Secretary of State this 8<sup>th</sup>  
 day of February, 1979,  
 at 11:45, o'clock A. M.  
*Jeanette B. Strubbe*  
 By: \_\_\_\_\_

ENR. H. J. R. NO. 1008 Page 4

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

Appendix 2(1/6). Sublease and lease between state entities and City of Norman leasing the land of the park to the city for 99 years.

CONTRACT NO. K-7980-15

### SUBLEASE

Sublease made July 1, 1979, between the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department and the State Board of Public Affairs agencies of the State of Oklahoma, referred to as lessee, and the City of Norman, Oklahoma, a municipality, referred to as sublessee.

Lessee has leased a tract of land described as:

The Northeast Quarter (NE/4) of Section 20, Township Nine (9) North, Range Two (2) West of the Indian Meridian, Cleveland County, Oklahoma, less and except a cemetery in the Northeast (NE) corner containing 2.3 acres, and containing 157.7 acres, more or less and less and except all mineral and water rights hereinafter referred to as "premises."

Lessee shall lease to the sublessee the tract of land set out above which premises is to be used for the purposes set out and defined in the original Lease, a copy of the original Lease is attached as Exhibit "A" and made a part of this sublease.

The term of this sublease shall be for an initial period of ninety-nine (99) years commencing on July 1, 1979, and terminating on July 1, 2078. The total amount of the lease payments in the amount of Ninety Nine Dollars (\$99.00) shall be due to Lessee at the time this lease is executed at the designated office of the lessee. Sublessee may remain in possession of the premises for the full term of this sublease, subject to the conditions of the original lease, as expressed by House Joint Resolution 1008.

Lessor and lessee shall not be liable for any damage to property or any injury to persons sustained by sublessee or others caused by conditions or activities on the premises. Sublessee shall indemnify lessor and lessee against all claims arising therefrom and shall carry liability insurance insuring lessee, sublessee and lessor against any claims and amounts to be approved by lessor.

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

### Appendix 2(2/6). Continued.

Sublessee shall not cause or allow any undue waste on the premises and shall comply with applicable laws and ordinances respecting the use and occupancy of the premises.

Sublessee shall perform and observe the terms and conditions to be performed on the part of the lessee under the provisions of the original lease between lessee and lessor, and failure of sublessee to comply with the covenants, restrictions and conditions as set out in the lease and House Joint Resolution 1008 will effectuate an immediate cancellation of this lease.

Sublessee shall not make any alterations, additions, or improvements on or to the premises without first obtaining the written consent of lessee, and all alterations, additions or improvements that shall be made shall be at the sole expense of sublessee and shall become the property of lessee and shall remain on and be surrendered with the premises as part thereof at the termination of this sublease.

Sublessee shall keep the subleased premises free and clear of all liens arising out of any work performed, materials furnished or obligations incurred by sublessee.

Sublessee shall allow lessor or lessee or the agents or employees of either the free access to the premises at all reasonable times for the purpose of inspecting or making repairs, additions or alterations to the premises or any property owned by or under the control of either party.

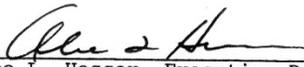
Sublessee shall not assign this sublease or sell or sublet the premises subleased herein or any part thereof or interest therein.

The foregoing sublease is made with the full knowledge and agreement of lessor of the premises and lessor accepts the sublease herein.

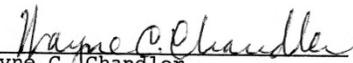
Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

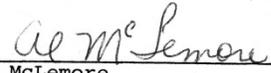
Appendix 2(3/6). Continued.

In witness whereof, the parties have executed this  
sublease at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma the day and year first  
written above.

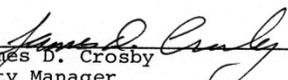
  
Abe L. Hesser, Executive Director  
Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation  
Department, Lessee

  
T. K. McCall  
Vice Chairman  
State Board of Affairs, Lessee

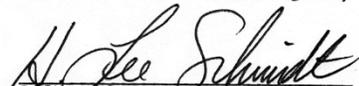
  
Wayne C. Chandler  
Vice Chairman  
State Board of Affairs, Lessee

  
Al McLemore  
Attest: Secretary Member

  
Honorable, William S. Morgan,  
Mayor  
City of Norman, Oklahoma  
Sublessee

  
James D. Crosby  
City Manager  
City of Norman, Oklahoma

Approved as to form and legality this 11<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1979.

  
Office of the City Attorney

Approved by the Council of the City of Norman, Oklahoma, this 18<sup>th</sup> day of  
September, 1979.

  
Mayor

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

Appendix 2(4/6). Continued.

### L E A S E

This lease is made and executed on July 1, 1979, between the State of Oklahoma, ex. rel., the State Department of Mental Health, acting by and through the State Board of Public Affairs, as lessor, and the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department as lessee. All parties to this lease are agencies of the State of Oklahoma.

Lessor leases to lessee and lessee hires from lessor a certain tract of land situated within the city limits of Norman, Cleveland County, Oklahoma, described as:

The Northeast Quarter (NE/4) of Section 20, Township Nine (9) North, Range Two (2) West of the Indian Meridian, less and except a cemetery in the Northeast (NE) corner containing 2.3 acres, containing 157.7 acres, and less and except all mineral and water rights hereinafter referred to as "premises".

The initial term of this lease shall be for a period of ninety-nine (99) years beginning July 1, 1979, to July 1, 2078.

During the term of this lease lessee agrees to pay to Lessor an annual rent in the amount of One Dollar (\$1). The total amount of the lease payments in the amount of Ninety Nine Dollars (\$99.00) shall be due to Lessor at the time this lease is executed, at the designated office of the lessor.

Lessee shall not use, or permit the demised premises, or any part thereof, to be used for any other purpose other than those purposes set out in House Joint Resolution 1008 dated 1-7-79, which Resolution is attached as Exhibit "A" and made a part of this lease. Lessee shall sublet the premises to the City of Norman, Oklahoma, to be used as a wilderness area and for the purposes as shown in House Joint Resolution 1008 set out above and for no other purposes.

Lessor excepts from the operation of this lease a tract of land in the northeast corner of said quarter-section containing 2.3 acres, more or less, which is currently

## Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

### Appendix 2(5/6). Continued.

used as a pauper's cemetery for the Hayden H. Donahue Mental Health Institute. Said property may become a part of the leasehold if and when lessee or his assigns can, with care and dignity, provide for other placement of those individuals therein interred.

Lessee shall, through the term of this lease, at its own cost and without expense to the lessor keep and maintain the premises, including all buildings and improvements of any kind, all fences, boundaries, landmarks and other appurtenances; at the expiration of the term of the lease, said lessee or its assigns shall give peaceable possession of the leased premises to the lessor in as good condition as the same now is, but with reasonable modification allowed in fullfilling the objectives of House Joint Resolution 1008. Lessee and their assigns shall also comply with and abide by all Federal, State, county, municipal and other governmental statutes, ordinances, laws and regulations affecting the premises, the improvements thereon or any activity or condition on or in such premises.

Lessee and/or their assigns shall fully and promptly pay for all costs and expenses of maintenance of the premises and all activites conducted thereon, and lessor shall have no responsibility of any kind for any thereof.

All easements and restrictive covenants previously granted and filed of record shall be honored by the lessee or its assigns.

Lessee or their assigns will permit lessor and its agents to enter into and upon the premises at all reasonable times for the purpose of inspecting the premises for compliance of the requirements set out in House Joint Resolution 1008.

If the needs of the State of Oklahoma shall require the use of said lands prior to the expiration of the term hereof as expressed by legislative enactment which supersedes

Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

Appendix 2(6/6). Continued.

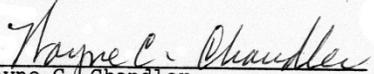
and controls House Joint Resolution 1008, the lessee or its assigns shall give peaceable possession of the premises upon passage of such legislation as manifested through its effective date of passage.

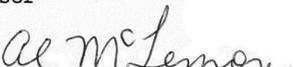
The covenants and conditions herein contained shall, subject to the provisions as to assignment transfer or subletting, apply to and bind the assigns of all of the parties hereto.

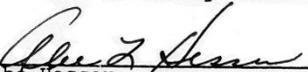
In witness whereof, the parties, have executed this lease at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on the day and year first written above.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Frank James  
Director, Oklahoma State  
Department of Mental Health  
Lessor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
T. K. McCall  
Chairman, State Board of Affairs  
Lessor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Wayne C. Chandler  
Vice Chairman, State Board of Affairs  
Lessor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Al McLemore  
Attest: Secretary Member

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Abe Hesser  
Executive Director, Oklahoma  
Tourism and Recreation Dept.  
Lessee

Sutton Urban Wilderness Management Plan

Appendix 3. Ordinance enacted in 1983 by City Council governing activities at Sutton Urban Wilderness Park.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA, ADDING SECTION 15-607 TO THE CODE OF THE CITY SO AS TO PROHIBIT CERTAIN ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE SUTTON URBAN WILDERNESS; AND SO AS TO PROVIDE FOR THE SEVERABILITY THEREOF.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA:

- § 1. Section 15-607 shall be and the same is hereby added to Chapter 15 of the code of the City of Norman, Oklahoma, to read as follows:

Section 15-607. Activities Prohibited in Sutton Urban Wilderness

- A. No person shall engage in the following activities within the Sutton Urban Wilderness except by written permit for scientific purposes issued by the Parks and Recreation Department:
- 1) littering
  - 2) operating any motorized vehicles or bicycles
  - 3) starting or maintaining a fire
  - 4) camping
  - 5) swimming
  - 6) hunting
  - 7) trapping
  - 8) collecting biological or geological specimens
  - 9) cutting or collecting wood
  - 10) operating a boat or canoe
  - 11) fishing by means of a trotline or jugline
  - 12) possessing a bow, slingshot, air gun, firearm, or any other such device to hurl projectiles
  - 13) defacing or damaging any natural object or park facilities or appurtenances
  - 14) introducing plant or animal species
- B. Organized group events exceeding 35 people shall have written authorization by the Parks and Recreation Department.

The Parks and Recreation Department may issue permits for scientific study, park maintenance, and conservation or other purposes appropriate to use of wilderness area; and where questions arise concerning administration of permit system, the George M. Sutton Urban Wilderness Advisory Committee shall act in an advisory capacity.