



## *Happy Holidays from Blue Thumb!*

December 2014

Dear Volunteers and Friends of Blue Thumb:

The sun is setting on another year, and it is time again to say "thank you." Thank you for monitoring, for talking to neighbors, for helping with an education event, for writing a book, for wearing a Blue Thumb t-shirt and responding to the question: "What is Blue Thumb?"

Do you consider yourself one of the environmental good guys—someone who rides in on the white horse to save the day? If you are a Blue Thumb volunteer you are, in a way, doing just that by working to protect our streams and rivers. Can we do more? The answer for most of us is yes. We can get a little braver, set a stronger example, take more action and speak more words. We can all be the steward that helps protect our one and only planet Earth. Because if not us, then who?

When the subject of global climate change came up a few years ago, with it came suggestions for how we can slow global warming. Now the message is "how can we live with the effects of global climate change?" Now is the time to work towards improving our environment. Because if not now, then when, and the when could be too late.

As you read this newsletter, you will find that extra emphasis on education will take place in three watersheds in 2015. The volunteers in these watersheds are asked to carry a heavier load and volunteers from outside these watersheds can add to the success of these efforts by jumping in and working with us.

You may want to take some of the ideas from these watershed activities and put them to work in your own watershed. Additional watersheds will be added to this mix after this first year. Are you willing to be the point person in your neighborhood, in your watershed, in your community, or even in your region of the state to say "let's come together for the good of the Earth?" Can you be the voice that brings people together, and spreads the message of caring for our Earth to your neighbors?

When contemplating what it takes for an individual to care for streams and rivers it seems to take two things, education and inspiration. What actions help, and what actions hurt; that is the education of it. Added to this must be the inspiration, the place inside of us all where knowledge and caring coming together so that we understand the value of protecting our flowing waters and our lakes. Education plus inspiration. Let's work together to help those around us develop a conservation ethic that places real value on our streams and rivers, our forests and our prairies, and our wild animals? Be a Blue Thumb volunteer that leads the way in your community.

Best wishes,

*Cheryl*

*Kim*

*Candice*

*Jeri*

Your Blue Thumb Team

## Watershed Education in 2015

Planning is underway to take education to a new level within the watersheds of three Blue Thumb streams in 2015. The watersheds of **Crow Creek** (Tulsa County), **Medicine Creek** (Comanche County) and **Pennington Creek** (Johnston County) are targeted to receive additional work and funding to 1) teach watershed residents how to reduce nonpoint source pollution and 2) foster a conservation ethic that will help watershed residents understand the value of protecting their local stream.



**Crow Creek**, in metropolitan Tulsa has been monitored for close to twenty years by Blue Thumb volunteers. The stream’s watershed is an urban area: heavily developed, with homes, businesses, streets, highways, schools, museums, and parks all existing within the very populous watershed.

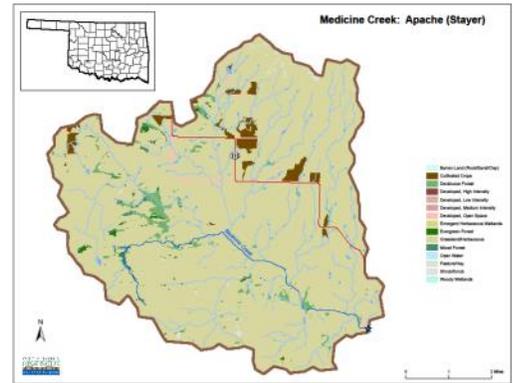
Crow Creek scores well in habitat components throughout the 400 meters of the stream that is considered the monitoring site, but the biological communities are not what they could be. Blue Thumb collections of fish and benthic macroinvertebrates show a stream with low numbers of individuals and lack of diversity in species.

Volunteer Graham Brannin, long-time monitor of the stream, played in Crow Creek as a child and still lives within the watershed, thus is well suited to be in a leadership role for the educational efforts in this watershed.

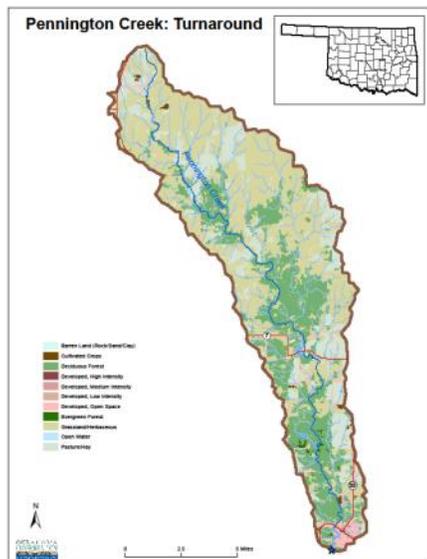
**Medicine Creek** flows partly through the beautiful Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge but mainly through private land in Comanche County in southwest Oklahoma. The stream has yielded reasonably good fish collections and, like many Oklahoma streams, during times of low rainfall it tends to be either nearly dry or have very low flow.

Medicine Creek sometimes has issues with carrying too much sediment, and high bacteria levels. Medicine Creek is dammed to make Lake Lawtonka, which sometimes suffers from excess algae.

Carol Stayer, a longtime resident of Comanche County, monitors Medicine Creek as it flows across her back yard. Carol’s long term interest in the stream



and a dozen years of Blue Thumb data make this watershed a natural to receive an extra heavy dose of education.



**Pennington Creek** in Johnston County has recently been featured as a “success” story due to a reduction in the levels of Enterococcus bacteria. Landowners, with the support of the Johnston County Conservation District, United States Department of Agriculture, and nonpoint source funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency, took action to install practices and management programs that minimized cattle actually in the stream.

With Pennington Creek being in a good place already, watershed education efforts will focus on protection and helping the stream become an important “high quality water” for the state of Oklahoma. Area residents Justin Roach and Lewis Parkhill monitor different sites on Pennington Creek and will take the lead in the education efforts and will involve the City of Tishomingo and the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge.

## You too can live more SUSTAINABLY!

Be a part of something big, take responsibility for your health, and use the bit of land upon which you sit to GROW your food!

Our partner, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, has a program in which NRCS offers assistance and even some funding to establish a greenhouse, which they are, in their official federal-speak, calling a "seasonal high tunnel."

Learn more about this chance to grow your own food by contacting your local conservation district. All district phone numbers are in the back of your 2015 Blue Thumb calendar.

### From Wetlands to Watersheds: Oklahoma Clean Lakes and Watersheds Conference 2015

Blue Thumb is joining with the Oklahoma Clean Lakes and Watersheds Association to make the 2015 OCLWA annual conference the most valuable conference offered yet to volunteers! The conference will be held on April 8 & 9, 2015, in Stillwater.

There will be special pricing for volunteers and a track of sessions that will be of particular interest to volunteers.

Blue Thumb will be able to offer several scholarships that will help pay the way for volunteers to attend. You can learn more about this opportunity by going to the OCLWA website at <http://www.oclwa.org/>. Contact Cheryl if you already know you want to attend.

### Environmental Education Expo

The annual Environmental Education Expo will be held at the National Weather Center in Norman on Friday, February 6, 2015. This year's theme is "Weather and Climate—Making the Connection to Environmental Education."

Blue Thumb volunteers can apply to receive a \$20 scholarship, which will pay half the registration fee. If you are a student or a senior citizen, Blue Thumb will pay \$15 of the \$25 reduced fee. Please contact Cheryl at Blue Thumb if you want to attend a really good education event at a really good price.

### What's new on the website? Lots!

We have added a volunteer voices page with a few videos of our volunteers talking about why they love Blue Thumb. The link to that page is <http://www.bluethumbok.com/volunteer-voices.html>.

We have moved all of our volunteer-written data reports to the Blue Thumb website. You can find the reports, categorized by county, at <http://www.bluethumbok.com/data-quality-and-interpretation.html>. Explore the page and learn something new about a Blue Thumb stream!

Two PowerPoint presentations are now available on the site at <http://www.bluethumbok.com/presentations.html>. The presentations are for you to use when you give talks about Blue Thumb.

Several of our handouts are also available at <http://www.bluethumbok.com/downloadable-handouts.html>. Print these off and hand out at events or to your neighbors!

You can also find field forms, information about nonpoint source pollution and our catalog of services on the site. If you have ideas of other things we can add, contact Jeri Fleming.

### First Blue Thumb Training of 2015

University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, January 30 and 31, 2015. To register or for more information contact Kim Shaw.

### Upcoming Events

Tulsa Area Blue Thumb Meet & Greet  
Jan. 6, 2015 3:00—7:00 Tulsa County Conservation District Office, Tulsa, OK. Contact Cheryl for questions

Water Quality Seminar—Introduction to Healthy Streams  
Jan. 20, 2015 6:00 p.m. Wes Watkins Technology Center, Shawnee, OK. Contact Andrea Jones—405-379-2570

Conservation Day at the Capitol March 23, 2015

**Winter quality assurance sessions and bug collections!  
Jan. and Feb. 2015**

**Congratulations to Ariel, Ava and Katie on being named the Environmental Best of the Best from Keep Oklahoma Beautiful!**



## Tools of the Trade

If you are a Blue Thumb volunteer who actively monitors a stream, then you are equipped with a Blue Thumb test kit. Your test kit contains the tools you need to perform chemical monitoring on a monthly basis.

Blue Thumb has MORE tools available to you for the purpose of educating the residents who live, work, and play within your watershed. Two come to mind immediately: The EnviroScape and the Groundwater model. Use these tools to help citizens understand their role in pollution, pollution prevention, and the relationship between surface water and groundwater.

Contact a Blue Thumb staff member to learn about upcoming workshops where you will learn how to check out, set up, use, clean up, and return these models. But most of all, learn how you can help people to "get it!" where our water is concerned.



## Blue Thumb Mini-Academies

If you are a teacher and monitor a stream, you and your students are eligible for a Blue Thumb mini-academy. All you have to do is contact a Blue Thumb staff member and one of us will come to your school and provide an abbreviated introduction to monitoring to your students.

Students and teachers who complete a mini-academy tend to get off to a better start in monitoring and submitting data. Is there a mini-academy in your future??



## EnvironMentor

Beth Landon at Oklahoma City University revived the Environmentor in 2012 to provide Oklahoma citizens information on all things environmental. The EnvironMentor has interesting articles, a calendar of environmental events, online library of newsletters at

<http://www.okcu.edu/environmentor/> and a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/TheEnvironMentor>.

## Bringing in the Data

If you have a Blue Thumb test kit and have been assigned a site you should be performing monthly monitoring (even if your creek is dry!).

If you are monitoring but not submitting data, please email it or snail mail it to Kim. If your creek is dry, you should still fill out the first page of the data sheet and send it to Kim. The data is useless if it never becomes an official part of your stream's profile.

**If you have a kit but you are not monitoring, please return your test kit to your local conservation district, with your name taped to the lid. Or, better yet begin monitoring again!**

## Oklahoma Blue Thumb Association

The Oklahoma Blue Thumb Association is a membership organization for people who care about the Blue Thumb program and Oklahoma's water resources. If you haven't joined it is only \$10 per year or \$150 for a lifetime membership. All donations and membership fees are used to help Blue Thumb volunteers and support educational events. Check out their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/OKBTA>.

## Your Blue Thumb Staff

Cheryl Cheadle  
cheryl.cheadle@conservation.ok.gov  
918-398-1804

Kim Shaw  
kim.shaw@conservation.ok.gov  
405-522-4738

Candice Miller  
candice.miller@conservation.ok.gov  
701-659-0008

Jeri Fleming  
jeri.fleming@conservation.ok.gov  
405-334-6343





# BLUE THUMB ACCOMPLISHMENTS VERSION 2014



**1,610**  
Adults reached during exhibits,  
presentations, conferences

**2,089**  
Children reached during festivals and  
natural resource days

**918**  
Data collections  
done by volunteers

**Nearly 1 Million!**  
People who learned about reducing  
water pollution through Blue Thumb  
media (articles, radio, Facebook,  
website, calendars, brochures, "Bob has  
a Blue Thumb," etc.)

**137**  
Macroinvertebrate  
collections

**97**  
Students who completed  
Blue Thumb mini-academies

**79**  
Adults who completed  
Blue Thumb Training

**10,000**  
Number of visits to  
[www.bluethumbok.com](http://www.bluethumbok.com)

**8**  
Number of COUNTRIES  
that have someone that  
likes Blue Thumb!

**419**  
Number of likes on  
[www.facebook.com/BlueThumbOK](http://www.facebook.com/BlueThumbOK)





# BLUE THUMB FISH COLLECTIONS 2014



## GREAT PLAINS ECO-REGION

Each year Blue Thumb conducts fish collections in one Oklahoma eco-region.

Ever wonder why Blue Thumb conducts fish collections? It's to help you and Oklahoma decision makers gain a better understanding of the health of your stream.

A habitat assessment is completed on the same reach of stream that fish are collected from. The assessment provides information about cover, substrate, and underwater habitat.

Fish collections offer the best introduction to your stream—where the big fish hide, where the minnows are found and can even tell you who lives along the banks of your stream and what activities are taking place.

The following streams had fish collections done in 2014.

**Canadian County:**

Fourmile Creek  
Sixmile Creek

**Cleveland County:**

Little River

**Custer County:**

Little Deep Creek

**Comanche County:**

Jimmy Creek  
Medicine Creek

(The above two creeks were unable to have fish collections on them for two years due to drought and thus no flow)

Wolf Creek

**Kay County:**

Spring Creek

**Oklahoma County:**

Bishop Creek  
Bluff Creek

Chisholm Creek  
Crutch Creek (two sites)  
Deer Creek  
Guy James Creek  
Spring Creek (two sites)

**Payne County:**

Boomer Creek  
Feather Creek

Sanborn-Hazen Lake Creek  
Stillwater Creek

The following streams also had fish collections done this summer as they couldn't be done last year for various reasons.

**Creek County:**

Rock Creek

**Osage County:**

Sand Creek

**Ottawa County:**

Tar Creek

**1**  
Number of fish found on the  
Guy James fish collection  
It was a long day!

**2**  
Number of pairs of  
sunglasses lost by Jeri  
during fish collections

**22**  
Number of  
2014 Fish collections

**All of them**  
Number of spiders  
Candice is afraid of

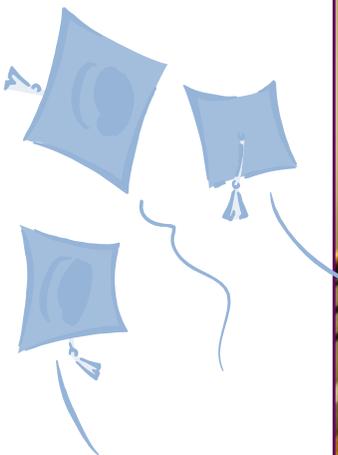
**2**  
Number of times we  
actually saw Kim fall in  
the creek!

**44**  
Number of times intern J.T.  
refused to stick his hand in a  
scary looking place during  
fish collections

**17.5 minutes**  
Average number of  
minutes between Jeri's  
falls on Stillwater Creek  
fish collection



# BLUE THUMB CLASSES OF 2014





# BLUE THUMB FUN IN THE CREEK 2014

