

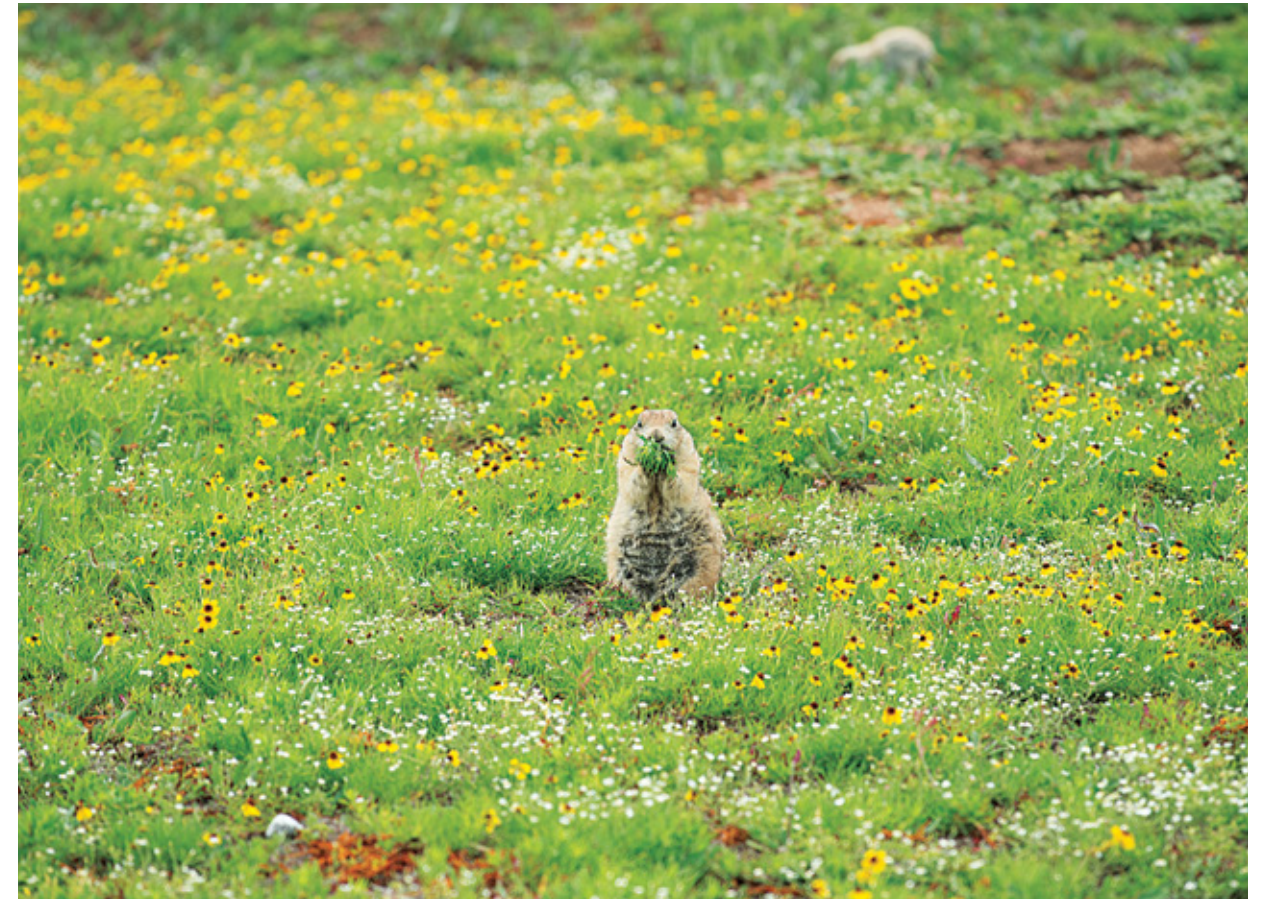
Land Before Time

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KLAHOMA'S LARGEST CONSERVATION AREA, THE WICHITA MOUNTAINS WILDLIFE REFUGE IS A TIMELESS DESTINATION FOR MODERN EXPLORERS AND A SAFE HAVEN FOR AWE-INSPIRING FAUNA.

Photography By KIM BAKER

Established north of Lawton in 1901, the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge encompasses more than 59,000 acres of pristine southwestern Oklahoma terrain. Here, Lake Jed Johnson reflects the early morning sky.



▲ Prairie dogs are some of the refuge's most visible and vocal residents.

◀ In autumn, post oak and blackjack oak create a vivid color palette within the Wichitas' forest.



Expansive views like this one from Mount Scott's peak makes it one of the most popular vantage points at the wildlife refuge.



^ With the diversity of plant and animal life at the Wichita Mountains, every season brings new sights and experiences for visitors.

It's estimated fewer than 500 bison > remained on Earth when they were reintroduced to the refuge in 1907 as part of a national effort to boost their population and prevent extinction. Today, the refuge's population alone stands at approximately 600.





▲ Wildflowers like this standing cypress are abundant throughout the Wichitas in spring and summer.

◀ The 20,000 red cedars planted in the 16-acre area now known as the Parallel Forest were originally intended to be lumber for fence posts, but the project was abandoned after the land was incorporated into the refuge.



French Lake was built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps and was named for Harry H. French, the first supervisor of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.