

Chapter 13—Recreation and Wildlife Recreational Enterprises

Description of the Product and Its Uses

The management of forests for recreation and wildlife-based enterprises has the potential to benefit both private forest owners and rural residents in general. Such recreational activities such as camping, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, spelunking, touring historic or archeological sites, rafting, and mountain biking offer possible supplemental income opportunities. Both consumptive and nonconsumptive wildlife-based enterprises can be developed for commercial hunting, fishing, and appreciative use activities such as wildlife observation, bird watching, photography, the informal or formal field education of schoolchildren and adults, and even basic and applied scientific research (table 13–1).

Developing recreation-based enterprises or charging for recreational access will not be a solution for all forest landowners. Entrepreneurs must have a thorough and objective understanding of the characteristics, merits, and potential pitfalls of these enterprises before making an investment decision.

Market and Competition Considerations

The overall demand for recreation continues to grow, although not as rapidly as it did in the 1960's and 1970's. Societal trends have a strong impact on recreation, and in the United States entrepreneurs should be advised that there are strong indications that past patterns are shifting. The “baby boom” generation that first flooded schools and colleges, then the labor force, and then the housing

market is now in its forties. These are typically the most productive (and demanding) years of life. At the same time, the median workweek length has been increasing, a higher percentage of women are in the work force, and Americans are approaching a period of economic restraint to make up for the massive debts incurred at the Federal level. All of these trends imply some important changes in demand for recreation services in our society (Godbey, 1986).

In the future, recreational activities are likely to become more planned and deliberate because an older, more highly educated public will become more selective in their purchases. For the same reason, the quality of the recreational experience, including level of maintenance, aesthetics, and safety, will rise in importance. Shorter but more frequent trips nearer to home are likely to be the rule. Demand for vigorous physical activities is high and is expected to remain strong in the near future. A continued increase in interest in exercise will also lead to increased demand for close-to-home opportunities for bicycling, jogging, walking, and observing nature.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting is still a popular sport in the United States, but participation rates for hunting have been declining over time. The total number of hunters is also beginning to decline. The major problem is limited access to land on which to hunt, particularly in the eastern United States.

Wildlife normally belongs to the State and cannot be sold, but landowners can sell access, assuming they abide by all State game regulations. Many landowners,

Table 13–1. Recreation enterprises and facilities with potential for generating supplemental income

Archery ranges	Campgrounds	Hunting preserves	Raising fish and game
Bait and equipment shops	Conference facilities	Nature areas and trails	Rock climbing
Bed and breakfasts	Duck blind rentals	Organizational camps	Ski resorts
Bird watching and sightseeing	Farms and ranch vacations	Orienteering	Stables
Boat and dock rentals	Fish and game processing	Outfitters	Swimming lakes
Boating	Fishing lakes	Photographic tours	Target, trap, and skeet ranges
Cabins	Guide services	Picnic areas	Training, boarding, and leasing dogs

particularly in the Eastern and Southeastern United States, have found they can charge access and/or service fees for recreational use if, through habitat maintenance and enhancement, their property can produce sustainable densities of game species, if a good recreational experience can be provided to the hunter, and if access can be controlled. The resource base need not all be on private land, either. A relatively small property that provides access to national or State forest lands could support a hunting club.

Hunting lease operations are becoming widely accepted. The simplest type of arrangement is a basic access fee agreement, formalized with a written lease. It can provide a supplementary source of income to a landowner without large investments of time or money. Most hunting lease operations lease on an annual payment basis. However, a few enterprising landowners are leasing their properties for 5 years but are receiving payment when the lease is signed. Examples of lease prices in several States are shown in Table 13–2. These data represent 1987 to 1989 data (Bromley, 1990).

In 1985, the average hunter in the Southern States spent \$604 per year, but only 9 percent of this—about \$54 per year—was spent on land leasing and ownership, far less than the \$296 per year spent on equipment or the \$211 spent on food, lodging, and transportation. It seems likely that, if necessary, hunters would pay more to acquire something as important as a good place to hunt (Tjaden, 1990).

In some situations, a lease of \$2 per acre per year can add 15 to 20 percent to the net present worth value of timber investments (Guynn and Busch, 1987). But there are other advantages to leasing land for hunting besides income. Through leasing, the landowner can control the number, activity, and location of recreationists on his or her property. Hunters who have paid for hunting rights have a proprietary interest in the land and are usually willing to watch for uninvited hunters, timber thieves, and other intruders. The landowner can thus gain control over property that may have been trespassed or vandalized in the past. The landowner both protects his or her property and has the security of knowing exactly who is on the land during the various hunting seasons. The user, of course, benefits from reserved, uncrowded hunting or fishing areas.

With fee hunting, the hunter usually pays on a daily basis to hunt geese, ducks, small game, deer, big game, pheasants, quail, or exotic species on a hunting preserve. A hunting preserve is land acreage either owned or leased upon which pen-reared game birds or other game animals are released over a period of 5 or more months for the purpose of sport hunting. Preserves are licensed by the State wildlife agency. They are most numerous in the East and Upper Midwest. The best sites for hunting preserves are farmland with some timber. (However,

timber acreage is good as a buffer area between hunting courses, but it is not suitable as wildlife cover in a hunting preserve.)

A hunting preserve may be a commercial or a noncommercial enterprise. A noncommercial hunting preserve provides quality hunting for one group of hunters on a nonprofit basis. It may be on land leased to a private co-op preserve that is supported by its co-op members and operated by a group of organized sportsmen, or it may be a do-it-yourself hunting preserve. In either case, the organization needs to be incorporated and carry liability and property damage insurance. Co-op preserves usually contract with a game breeder for biweekly delivery of game (pheasants or bobwhite quail, for example).

A commercial hunting preserve is one designed to provide a profit for the owner/operator who furnishes quality hunting to those willing to pay for it. It can be open to the public on a daily fee basis or on a membership basis. Commercial preserves require both a large personal and financial commitment, although the largest financial outlay is land. The most successful operators are those who obtain a year-round income from a combination of activities, such as boarding and training dogs, breeding game, farming, camping, fishing, picnicking, field dog trials, riflery and archery, and clay target shooting. To be profitable, each commercial operator must decide on the proper mix of activities offered, based on skills, location, and facilities. Perhaps the most important requirement is to have the financial resources to operate at a loss for at least 3 years.

Rates at commercial preserves vary from State to State and for species hunted, but a 2-day hunt on the East Coast with one-half day of pheasant hunting (36 birds), a 1-day quail hunt (100 birds), and a one-half day chukar hunt (50 birds) might cost between \$1,800 and \$2,000. Other ranges of prices and activities (again on the East Coast) are 1-day hunts including 100 quail or 36 pheasants or 50 chukars for \$400 per person; a 1-day duck hunt for \$12 per duck released with a 20-duck minimum; or a dove shoot for \$40 per gunner per day (Tjaden, 1990). Usually, along with this type of shooting preserve, there are supporting goods and services offered such as pickers, taxidermy, licenses, meals, lodging, ammunition and other shooting supplies, and sporting clays. There may also be fishing tackle, bait, boarding and training of dogs, boat rentals, and guide services, to name a few. It is also possible to combine hunting programs with other wildlife-based recreation activities that are nonconsumptive, but it requires careful management and diplomacy because of strong antihunting sentiments held by many recreationists.

Fee fishing operations offer an opportunity to supply the growing demand for sport fishing. Some entrepreneurs recommend that a small admission fee be charged

Table 13–2. Private hunting lease prices, 1987–89

State	Game hunted	Typical fee
Alabama	All game Deer, turkey, dove	\$2/acre/year lease fee \$2.20-\$3.17/acre/year (\$30-million total)
Arkansas	All game	\$1.45/acre/year lease fee
Connecticut	No information	
Delaware	Deer Waterfowl, dove Quail, pheasant	\$3-\$5/acre/year \$500-\$2,500/blind/year \$20-\$100/half day
Florida	Deer, wild hogs Quail All game	\$3-\$5/acre/year for large tract (500-2,000 acres) \$20-\$35/day \$2.75/acre/year lease fee
Georgia	Deer Quail General hunting: deer, ducks, etc. All	\$2-\$15/acre/year (\$120-million/year a conservative estimate) \$200-\$300/day, including meals, hospitality, and lodging \$200-\$600/day; may include dogs, guide, meals, lodging, and hospitality \$1,000/member/year \$2/acre/year
Kentucky	All	\$1.81/acre/year
Louisiana	Deer Ducks Turkey All	\$5/acre/year \$4/acre/year; \$250-\$1,800/640-acre section/year \$5/acre/year \$3.62/acre/year
Maine	Deer, moose, ruffed grouse, woodcock	Private hunting lodges provide guides, a tradition in Maine. Leasing of hunting rights is rare. Major landowners have formed Great North Woods, which sells access passes for roads and camping facilities; Great Northern Paper Company sells season or daily permits to use roads.
Maryland	Deer, wild turkey Deer, quail Waterfowl	\$3-\$5/acre/year \$3-\$5/acre/year \$80-\$100/acre/year (marsh) Up to \$8,000/blind/hunter/season
Mississippi	Deer and turkey Quail Waterfowl Dove	\$2.50/acre/year \$150/half day \$30/hunter/day \$10/hunter/day
New Hampshire	No leasing reported, but private clubs operate shooting preserves.	
North Carolina	Quail, rabbit Deer Dove, waterfowl	Variable \$1.38/acre/year \$10/hunter/day
South Carolina	Deer, turkey Quail Waterfowl Dove	\$1.69/acre/year \$150/hunter/half day \$30/hunter/day \$10/hunter/day
Tennessee	Deer and other game Quail Deer, turkey Dove Waterfowl	\$1.50/acre/year \$2-\$3/acre/year \$3/acre/year; \$200-\$500/hunter/year \$5-\$10/hunter/day; \$20-\$40/acre/year \$30-\$80/hunter/day; \$30-\$300/acre/year
Virginia	Deer, turkey	\$2/acre/year; hunting lodges may charge \$900/hunter for a 6-day package that includes lodging, meals, transportation, and guide
West Virginia	Waterfowl, pheasant, quail Deer, pheasant, chukar Deer, turkey	\$10/acre/year; \$80/hunter/day \$10/hunter/day, plus a charge/animal bagged; or corporation private club membership of \$1-\$5,000 or \$500-\$1,000/person \$10-\$30/hunter/year
11 southern States (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA)	Deer Quail Rabbit Waterfowl Turkey Dove	\$2.30/acre/year \$1.39/acre/year \$0.83/acre/year \$12.77/acre/year \$1.73/acre/year \$11/acre/year

"Typical" fees to private landowners



*Horseback riding on a forest trail.
Photo courtesy of Jill Bauermeister,
Forest Service. (00–CS–3578)*

(for example, \$1 to \$2 for adults and half price for children under 12) with a charge per fish or per pound of fish caught (for example, \$2 per pound) (Kiely, 1990). If a particular location has an area large enough to be sectioned off, a “fly fishing only, catch and release” area can be added and a fee charged for time. (However, catch and release areas require constant surveillance and supervision and are not as profitable as “catch ‘em and keep ‘em” ponds.)

Other services available at fee fishing enterprises might include bait sales, picnic and camping sites, fish cleaning, rod and reel rentals, swimming, lodging, and in some cases, boat and motor rentals. Operations near large urban centers would have the greatest potential for success.

In summary, a few fishing and hunting business opportunities are as follows:

- Leasing land for hunting privileges
- Boat/motor rentals
- Hunting preserves
- Sporting clays

- Leasing water for fishing privileges
- Duck blinds
- Leasing land for trapping privileges
- Game and fish processing
- Organized hunts
- Habitat improvement
- Guide services
- Raising fish and game for stocking purposes
- Taxidermy
- Room and board for hunters and anglers
- Ammunition and fish bait
- Boarding and training of dogs

Nonconsumptive Uses of Wildlife

Most city-dwelling Americans who yearn for more contact with nature and look forward with great anticipation to vacation opportunities to “head for the hills” are willing to pay for access to back-to-nature experiences. However, most of them are not seeking game or fish. The fact that the majority of people enjoy wildlife without hunting has led many States to try to find ways for landowners to capture more of the economic value of wildlife viewing and similar nonconsumptive activities as important components of tourism and recreation development programs. The landowner or recreation host who can show his or her guests a variety of animals in attractive natural settings will have the advantage over those who cannot.

As defined in the 1985 *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation*, “non-consumptive” wildlife-related recreation means the observing, photographing, and feeding of fish and wildlife, and three out of four persons in the United States are involved in these appreciative uses. Expenditures (including bird seed for backyard feeders, binoculars, cameras, and film) by nonconsumptive participants 16 years of age and older totaled over \$14 billion in the United States in 1984.

In a study done by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it was found that 47 percent of the people who took the kind of trips to natural areas for nonconsumptive activities indicated that woodlands were visited most often. For the landowner in the urban outskirts, the demand for nonconsumptive uses of wildlife could be met by providing areas for bird watching and general observations of other animals in their normal habitat. Along with this, supplies for photography, guides, and seed, etc., can be sold. A small store in the back of a barn would do just fine (Tjaden, 1990).

In rural areas, private farm and forest lands shelter a great variety of interesting natural resources that, if managed properly and in conjunction with other goods

and services, can attract an affluent clientele interested in enjoying the beauty of forest lands. Just as bed-and-breakfast establishments advertise their existence near antique shops and historic sites and hotels provide their guests with jogging trail maps, so landowners interested in developing an appreciative clientele could offer naturalist guide services and develop trail maps of nearby habitats and lists of species that may be seen (while cautioning guests to avoid disturbing wildlife, particularly in their breeding season). School districts and other institutions may also pay for the privilege of bringing classes to private habitats if the quality of information services is high.

General Recreation

Other recreational enterprises that are possible in rural forest regions include campgrounds and summer camps, horse stables, swimming and fishing lakes, ski resorts, and snowmobile courses. Unfortunately, current data on the market potential and financial feasibility of these types of enterprises are largely unavailable. In fact, as an example, a 1992 bibliography (McLellan and Adams, 1992) on literature concerning private nonindustrial land and its use for recreation listed 62 entries under the section on “campgrounds,” and the most recent was a 1981 publication.

Table 13–3 lists several recreational facilities and the perceived financial potential of each, developed in the early 1980s by Douglas Knudson (1984). The table refers to the general situation as perceived by the author at that time.

Since campgrounds are probably the best known of these enterprises, they are discussed in some detail below.

Campgrounds

Many parents today are eager to share the outdoors with their children and to have time together as a family on camping vacations. Particularly in rural forested regions, campgrounds can offer an inexpensive alternative getaway experience for young families. Weekend camping is also popular, reflecting the national travel trend toward shorter, closer-to-home vacations.

The camping industry has responded by providing a number of amenities that make camping more accessible and comfortable. Today most private campgrounds offer modern plumbing, hot showers, electricity, utility hookups, and access to swimming pools and laundry facilities. Some commercial campgrounds offer miniature golf, tennis, croquet, horseshoes, fishing, boating, and even restaurants, hot tubs, and saunas.

One route for entrepreneurs interested in the campground market is to enter a campground franchise. For example,

Table 13–3. Financial potential for private recreational facilities

Very high potential	Campgrounds for travelers Destination campgrounds Urban recreation facilities Organization camps Amusement parks
High potential	Resorts Horse stables Swimming lakes and pools Boating facilities Vacation center complexes (camping, swimming, boating) Downhill skiing
Medium potential	Nature study Picnicking Fishing Some hunting (preserves, leases) Off-road vehicle trails and courses Interpretive activities
Low potential	Back-country recreation use Large area activities—hunting, remote camping, boating
Almost no potential	Driving for pleasure Wilderness Wild and scenic rivers preservation Trails Special scenic/natural features preservation

Source: Knudson, 1984.

Kampground of America (KOA) currently has about 600 franchised campgrounds, including 50 in Canada and a few in Mexico. These may vary in size from 50 sites to 800 sites. KOA facilities always include a convenience store, clean rest rooms, and hot individual showers. They usually include swimming facilities, a laundry, a game room, and recreation facilities on the campground. Many operate as a base camp and tie in with natural attractions in the area, perhaps even providing transportation to those attractions (for example, a national park). In addition to campsites, more than 350 KOA campgrounds now also offer simple log cabins that sleep four to six individuals and rent for \$20 to \$30 a night. Other KOA campgrounds offer kitchen facilities with stoves, sinks, and tables.

KOA sells the rights to use the KOA logo, and belonging to the franchise gives the campground owner access to the marketing, advertising, and management expertise KOA has gained in 30 years as a camping company. The franchise provides national advertising and an annual directory. Individuals may purchase an existing KOA,

build a new campground, or convert from an independent to a KOA campground. Each campground has a protected territory to prevent competition among KOA owners.

While there is no evidence that well-managed franchised campgrounds are more or less profitable than well-managed campgrounds without a franchise name, the promotional efforts and quality guarantee of a parent company can definitely help if the basic package of facilities and services represented by the company is what the customer is seeking. This characteristic of reliability and predictability is viewed as a key to success.

However, the cost to join a franchise may be high. KOA, for example, requires payment of about \$25,000 as a nonrefundable franchise fee. Costs vary depending on whether the operation is a conversion, a resale of an existing campground, or a new campground. During operation, the holder of the franchise pays the KOA company an 8 percent royalty plus a 2 percent advertising assessment based on camper registration fees. In addition, there is an annual renewal fee of several hundred dollars.

Over the years, the average investment required to develop and operate a quality campground has risen (as it has for other commercial recreation facilities). There are relatively few shoestring or part-time operations today that are run with much success. Many enterprises start too small and never build up enough clientele to be successful. Most financially successful campgrounds represent investments of \$250,000 to \$500,000 in land, facilities, and improvements.

Financing has been a persistent problem for the recreation industry, although lending institutions are becoming more supportive. Problems that concern lenders include the seasonal nature of many recreation and tourism businesses, the limited managerial ability of operators, and the limited equity involved in the mortgages. New owners must often put up personal collateral. Loans may be easier to obtain for those who are associated with a nationally known franchise (Knudson, 1984).

Besides starting with a large enough investment, there are other keys to success in the campground business that are just as important. Location is closely identified with profitability. Accessibility to population centers, resort areas, and/or major highways seems to be important. Prior experience in the campground business is also important. The types of special or convenience services offered (for example, grocery or snack services, fishing, and mountain bike trails) can have an effect. Hot showers and flush toilets are generally expected, although primitive camp sites may also be offered.

There are many drawbacks to entering the campground business. Private campgrounds have traditionally had to charge more than public campgrounds. In fact, government competition through subsidized low-cost camping has caused many operators to drop out of the campground business after years of marginal operation. Financing and insurance are often hard to get. Local, State, and Federal requirements regarding public health, sewage, water, safety, taxes, and liability have been difficult for many businesses to meet. The business is extremely demanding of time, especially during the season. The manager must be able to do some of everything, from fixing a septic system to displaying merchandise attractively. Good hosting and management skills, and patience and friendliness with people are absolutely essential. One of the key competitive advantages that private campgrounds can offer over public campgrounds is a greater degree of personal attention from the campground owners and staff, and it is critical to a campground's success to maximize this advantage.

To reduce the impact of low-occupancy days, many campgrounds offer seasonal or year-round rates. Campgrounds often take on the look of a trailer park under this arrangement, but, on the other hand, regular customers often make a special effort to keep their places neat.

Many recreation businesses have organized in order to promote their mutual interests and to have a greater voice in state and local government. There are campground associations in many States. The major national organization is the National Campground Owners Association.

Other Recreation Businesses

Vacation complexes, organization camps, guest ranches, and ski resorts are among the oldest elements of the recreation industry in forest areas. Many such enterprises have their base of operations on private lands but use public lands, especially national forest lands, for some activities. Fishing and swimming lakes and ponds, off-road vehicle trails, riding stables, and picnicking areas are other attractions. As discussed in the wildlife enterprise section, there are shooting preserves and many leased hunting lands that take advantage of forest lands.

Sporting clays are becoming very popular in some areas because they offer the sport and challenge of shooting without the limitation of seasons and without killing any wildlife. Sporting clays offer a variety of simulated game shoots as the shooter stalks through the forest and field, attempting to shoot clay pigeons that simulate a rabbit, duck, quail, or other game species. Usually the course consists of 50 targets released from 10 stations. Targets are released in variations of singles, pairs, and simultaneous pairs. The typical course costs \$15 for the 50 targets and takes about an hour to complete.

At least 50 to 100 acres generally should be set aside for a sporting clay enterprise. The initial cost is in establishing trails through the woods and setting up the spring-loaded throwers. The sport can be as simple or elaborate as desired. The cost of building the trails could even be offset by selling firewood removed. For landowners who are contemplating a shooting preserve, the addition of a sporting clays activity gives diversity and extends their income opportunities.

It should be pointed out that some of these recreational activities might support a club activity on a seasonal basis. For example, acreage that is leased to a hunting club in the fall might be leased to a horseback riding club in the spring and summer.

Risk Recreation

“Risk” or “adventure” recreation differs from traditional outdoor recreation by posing elements of real or perceived physical danger to the participant. Possible income-producing risk recreation ventures related to forest lands might include the following:

- Adventure travel
- Hang gliding
- Canoeing
- Kayaking
- Hiking
- Orienteering
- Mountain biking
- Ropes courses
- Rappelling
- Ski touring
- Skydiving
- Bicycle touring
- Backpacking
- Hot-air ballooning
- Caving
- Mountaineering
- Ice climbing
- Rafting
- Mountain running
- Snowshoeing
- Rock climbing
- Winter camping
- Wilderness trekking

The income opportunities for risk recreation generally are either through fees for access to private land or through commercial operations. A variety of program elements might make up a recreation package. For example, a weekend introductory ski-touring package might include sales and rental, transportation, lodging, a pass to ski on groomed trails, meals, and classes. A package for more experienced participants might include transportation to and from a trailhead, winter camping, and a guided back-country ski tour on ungroomed trails.

In general, the profitability of recreational access ventures can vary greatly among divergent geographic, cultural, land use, and clientele situations. Information on patterns of demand should be used in assessing the feasibility of marketing recreational opportunities. For example, nature photographers require access to scenic views or wildlife populations. Cross-country skiers require a more extensive land area than picnickers and may be willing to travel longer distances to participate.

Commercial recreation ventures generally require sizeable acreage, large capital investments, and well-trained labor. Furthermore, the real costs of increased liability and management must be considered. People paying for recreation have a legal claim to safety in most cases, making a vendor much more liable for death or injury to recreationists than for trespassers. Some stables have been driven out of business by liability insurance costs.

Marketing

Advertising in well-known hunting magazines is very effective for hunting operations. These include *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, *Ducks Unlimited*, *Wildfowl*, *Gun Dog*, *American Hunter*, and *Peterson Hunting*. Ads generally run for a part of the year (for instance, from July through December for waterfowl hunting). Each ad should list services offered, address for a free brochure, and a telephone number. The brochure is very important, as is the treatment which someone inquiring on the phone receives.

Most fair-sized cities have annual shows for sports enthusiasts. Operators should rent space in at least two shows per year and pass out “free admission” coupons where appropriate (for example, for fishing). Trade shows help expand the marketing area and may be done in conjunction with a local chamber of commerce.

Press releases and personal contacts with outdoor writers are inexpensive ways to get the word out to people about a recreation enterprise. Many outdoor writers welcome material for their columns. Most States have an outdoor writers association, and their mailing lists can usually be acquired.

Flyers, brochures, and posters can be distributed locally. Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, retirement villages, churches and synagogues, and sporting goods stores are good starting points. Small ads in local newspapers are good for recreation operations. The ads can also include “free admission” coupons. Local television shows can provide good opportunities for marketing as well.

Equipment Needs, Costs, and Labor Needed

Achieving the appropriate quality of recreational experience requires the basics of clean, comfortable lodgings, good food, and a quality of naturalness. Structures should be designed to complement the landscape wherever possible. Wildlife habitat improvements of an obviously artificial character such as nesting boxes made of plastic pipe, wire, and old tires should be avoided. Trails should be rustic, and signs should be tasteful and low profile.

Equipment needs vary according to the sophistication of the operation. For example, in the case of a fishing operation, the facility needs a small building for checking customers in and out, and, associated with that building, should be space to store and sell bait, lend stringers, clean fish, and store ice. The operation must be as clean, neat, and attractive as possible.

Labor needs will vary according to the type of enterprise being considered. For example, guides must be carefully selected and trained, since they are the individuals who spend the most time with customers. Retirees or college students often make good guides. When possible, entrepreneurs should consider employing family labor. Other ways to hold down labor costs are to swap help in an operation with friends or neighbors in exchange for hunting, fishing, or other recreational opportunities.

A recreation enterprise may require a significant investment in both facilities (often more than \$200,000) and new skills, including specialized management. A certain sensitivity to social processes and the social needs of groups of people is often also necessary. People who pay for recreational access are likely to be seeking high-quality experiences and may expect special considerations. The landowner who shares those expectations will be better able to anticipate particular needs and provide for them. In addition, marketing skills are exceedingly important in the success of recreation enterprises. Many cooperative extension or small business development centers offer courses in management.

Special Factors

Liability insurance rates vary widely for recreational enterprises. Some landowners are able to get amendments to comprehensive farm policies at reasonable rates. Landowners with lease hunting operations have found the use of the National Rifle Association Club policy competitive. Some independent insurers are also getting into the market, so it would be wise to “shop around” for insurance quotes. Also, prior to the establishment of any recreational enterprise, it would be essential to consult the local planning and zoning board as well as an insurance company and an attorney for details on these types of ventures.

Many States have cooperative programs that offer landowners some form of economic inducement to allow recreational access. In these programs, the landowner agrees to make property accessible to recreationists in exchange for free technical services, wildlife plantings, signs for delineating property boundaries, and law enforcement patrol. For example, the Department of Wildlife and Parks in the State of Kansas encourages private landowners to enter their land into a public access program that allows recreational hunting. The agency

posts the lands, assumes liability for recreational activities, and provides law enforcement. North Carolina offers landowners direct payment for their access rights on a per-acre basis. In Iowa, “Pheasants Galore” is a private-sector initiative that provides landowners with as much as \$250 per hunter when overnight bed and breakfast services are included in the hunting package. In addition to service fees, participating landowners receive group liability insurance and reduced advertising costs. In New England, snowmobile routes are leased to the State, which collects fees from snowmobilers, accepts the liability, and pays the landowners.

Protection of property from illegal fishing or hunting is essential in providing the proper business environment for wildlife enterprises. Lack of control over property is usually the greatest limiting factor in preventing owners from developing wildlife opportunities on their properties. Strongly enforced, effective trespass laws are essential to the development of wildlife enterprises on wildlands. Most States need to increase the amount of fines and penalties for poaching and trespass.

Resource Conservation Considerations

For fishing and hunting operations, basic decisions must be made concerning the carrying capacity and sustainable yield of an area’s land and water resources and the economic relevance of this yield to the success of the operation. (Partial exceptions to this would be highly intensive put and take operations.) Another factor to consider is the size of the home range of the animals. Species whose populations vary widely because of poor or good annual reproduction are more difficult to manage for wildlife recreational enterprises.

If a forest landowner is fortunate enough to host a population of a threatened or endangered plant or animal species, the survival of the species must take precedence over its value as an attraction. But if a buffer zone between the imperiled species’ principal range and the conflicting human activities can be provided, it may be possible for the landowner to gain a special market niche by providing a chance of seeing a rare creature at a distance.

A side note to consider with fee hunting or leasing operations is planting wildlife food and cover crops under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This program, a part of the 1985 farm bill, was designed to retire highly erodible, marginal cropland. Landowners may retire cropland to either trees, permanent wildlife habitat, permanent native grasses and legumes, or combinations of permanent covers. The CRP program gives landowners an opportunity to establish wildlife habitat and use that habitat to establish a fee-hunting system.

Profile

An interesting example of a regional tourism approach that could build on several recreation enterprises in a rural region is Linda Elkinton's Back Roads Adventures (BRAD). BRAD is a new and innovative travel business in West Virginia that developed as a way to match visitors and tourists with the unique scenic, historic, cultural, and natural resources of a rural area. Linda Elkinton and a friend established a bed and breakfast on the friend's homestead along the Greenbrier River in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. After considering the kinds of resources that could be tapped in the isolated rural area plus their own travel experiences and those of others, they concluded that the experiences sparking the most enthusiasm during visits to new and foreign places are ones that involve personal interaction with people intimately associated with the land and its history. People who can personally share information or demonstrate skills unique to the area, who can effect an exchange of ideas and philosophies, and who can relate to visitors the value of an area's resources were seen as the key to successful tourism.

In early 1986, Ms. Elkinton spent 4 months conducting informal interviews with persons living in three north central West Virginia counties (Monongalia, Marion, and Preston). She had no difficulty identifying some 150 persons who (1) possessed skills that reflected unique aspects of rural life in the area or had special knowledge and experience with interesting features of the natural environment; (2) were entertaining communicators and interpreters of their skills and expertise; and (3) welcomed the opportunity to interact with individuals and/or small groups of visitors for short periods of prearranged time in their shops, homes, or outdoors.

One to two-hour sessions were designed with many of these individuals, including landowners, wood carvers, weavers, muzzle loader rifle makers, glass sculptors, potters, basket weavers, silversmiths, and "home brew" makers. Special arrangements were made to explore various local features with personal guides, mostly active and retired professionals from local communities. They included business people, farmers, teachers, and people in the natural sciences.

The service was designed primarily for individuals, families, small groups, and visitors to travel through the area to prearranged locations for personal encounters related to traditional culture, craftsmanship, and rural life of an area. Working in the Morgantown/Fairmont area and in the Canaan Valley/Elkins area of West Virginia, BRAD has developed contracts with 70 adventure providers and guides and makes available over 100 backroad adventures. Examples of the activities are as follows:

Exploring the Outdoors with a Personal Guide

- Edible wild plants and roadside herbs
- Hunting with a camera
- Hiking a gentle mountain trail
- Mountain wetlands adventure
- Collecting wild mushrooms
- Stargazing
- Mountain fly-fishing
- Seining for minnows

Unique Features of Rural Mountain Life

- Folk medicine and herbal remedies
- Making home brew
- Sheep, wool, and the spinning wheel
- Growing shiitake mushrooms
- Mining for coal

Outstanding Local Craftspeople

- Basket weaving—white oak, wild vines
- Hand weaving—traditional and contemporary
- Quilt making and patchwork
- Muzzle loader rifle construction
- Original design pottery
- Botanical designs in clay
- Deep base relief in wood
- Hand braiding of rugs
- Silversmithing

Mountain Music

- Mandolin, guitar, and fiddle
- The hammer dulcimer
- Saturday night country music show
- Bluegrass in the mountains

The outdoor/nature study adventures are conducted on both public and private lands. Included in the private land category are: Winter Botanizing and Nature Study, Identifying Wild Birds of Spring, Seining for Minnows, Butterflies and Insects, Exploring the Unusual Courtship of Woodcock and Snipe, Tree-Tapping and All About Maple Syrup Making, Growing Culinary Herbs, Hunting Wildlife with a Camera, Growing Shiitake Mushrooms, and Identifying Fall Insects by Sound.

In addition, the service makes reservations for overnight stays at local country inns, bed and breakfasts, or other accommodations and recommends dining facilities in the area. Both one- and two-day packages are available. Van, motorcoach, or limousine travel can also be arranged.

All adventure providers and the guides are paid for the time they spend with BRAD clients. The fees for the adventures are based on the type of adventure activity

and the number of people involved. The typical fee for a two-hour self-guided adventure tour for one person is \$30. A couple pays \$40. An adventure involving a personal guide costs \$35 to \$40. About 30 percent of the fee is returned to the adventure providers/guides when they meet with individuals, couples, and small groups, and 70 percent is returned when specially arranged activities are provided for large groups. This means that guides receive an average of about \$10 per hour for their services and informal discussions (arranged with artists, for example) pay about \$5 per hour. The remainder of the fee goes to BRAD.

In its first 2 years of operation, BRAD served some 200 groups in 90 different personal arrangements, and an estimated 800 persons participated in group arrangements. The service responded to about 1,000 direct requests for information and distributed approximately 40,000 informational flyers.

The greatest difficulty BRAD has encountered to date has been securing start-up capital for the business. Neither government, private foundation funding, established lending institutions, nor other more traditional sources of venture capital have been available. The company was formally incorporated in June 1986, and 1,000 shares of common stock were issued and sold to 32 persons who are now the shareholders. This capital, along with an \$8,000 private loan and the fees generated during the first few years, has financed the corporation to date.

Income levels are still not sufficient to support a full-time staff or to purchase the advertising needed to draw East Coast urban visitors who comprise the major target market. However, the initiators are confident that they have hit upon a very important strategy that reaches several objectives, namely:

- To provide activities to enable interested residents and visitors to learn about a rural area and values.
- To provide employment and sources of additional income to people who significantly contribute to protecting and preserving the rich and diverse cultural heritage of a region.
- To increase financial support for important natural, cultural, and historic features that may be threatened by development.
- To open new areas of tourist activity and promote a positive image of life in rural areas.

Considerations for a Rural Development Strategy

The Back Roads Adventures example shows how outdoor/nature study experiences can be effectively woven into a broader rural economic development strategy that can provide extra money to many different residents in a rural region. Those involved with BRAD see many opportunities for fee-generating activities related to nature study and outdoor recreation. Successful recreation and wildlife recreation enterprises are, ultimately, businesses based on both human and natural resources. Any enterprise that can tap grassroots resources has important implications for preserving natural resources, cultural resources, and history as well as for economic development.

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