



range from \$ 5 to \$10 per acre annually. The highest rates are for properties with special habitat (like for waterfowl), very high wildlife population and close to cities.

There are some expenses, such as property improvement or advertising, could result in a higher price and should be carefully evaluated.

This is obviously not a lucrative enterprise but at a minimum landowners can expect to recover the cost of property taxes.

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RI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT & THE RURAL LANDS COALITION SUBCOMMITTEE PARTICIPANTS INCLUDE:

Rhode Island DEM:
Office of Sustainable Watersheds
Division of Forest Environment
Division of Agriculture

Rhode Island Forest Conservators
Organization
Southern New England Forest Consortium
USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

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RI DEM, Division of Forest Environment (401) 637-3367 or visit our website at: www.state.ri.us/dem/programs
USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (401) 828-1300

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Hunting Leases on Private Land

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT SUSTAINABLE LAND-BASED BUSINESSES

Management for wood products, like timber and firewood, is difficult to justify on an economic basis alone due to the small size of most parcels of forestland in Rhode Island and the long term nature of forest management. Managing for alternative forest uses, like hunting and/or fishing leases, could prove to be an avenue for generating income, at least enough to pay property taxes reducing the likelihood the land will have to be sold.

The purpose of this publication is to provide an overview of leasing land for hunting and/or fishing as a forest based business and direct interested individuals to other sources of information.

Overview

Access fees to private land, in the form of leases, are not a new concept; there are well-developed markets for fee-based recreation in the southern and western United States as well as other parts of the world. Loss of traditional hunting and fishing areas to development and crowded public areas makes some people willing to pay for a high quality recreational experience close to their home.

With proper planning and management, owners of large parcels of forest land (or associations of landowners) could generate supplemental income. There is the additional benefit of oversight provided by lessees on property that is frequently trespassed on or vandalized. In addition, they may be willing to perform maintenance activities such as habitat improvement, marking property boundaries, and trail maintenance.

Technically, landowners do not own and cannot sell wild animals (they are publically owned by the state). Landowners do howev-

er control access to their property and can decide who uses it for recreation. A hunting lease is an agreement between a landowner and sportsman(s) that grants access to a property for hunting or fishing. This can involve long-term (seasonal) leases or short term (daily fee).

A hunting preserve is land upon which commercially raised game animals or fish are released. Game preserves are licensed by DEM, with a minimum acreage (120 acres) and special record keeping requirements.

Landowners, and people hunting or fishing, must adhere to rules and regulations established by the state for hunting and fishing, including season restrictions, bag limits, and licensing requirements.

The Leasing Process

A lease is a legal document that spells out the terms and conditions of the agreement. A well written lease clearly identifies



the responsibilities of the parties involved to ensure there are no misunderstandings. Although sample leases are available in publications such as *Tips For Hunting Leases* from University of Georgia or *Hunting Leases and Permits* from Alabama Cooperative Extension, An attorney should be consulted to insure you are adequately protected and all legal requirements are met.

Conclusion

Forestland contains a resource that, if properly managed, can attract clients and generate enough income to offset management expenses. In many cases, the use of property for hunting is granted to family and friends. On some properties charging fees for access for hunting may be a way to pay property expenses.

Charging fees for access to hunt or fish



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has the potential to develop into a viable alternative forest business in Rhode Island. Property owners receive revenue to help pay property expenses and receive the benefit of additional oversight while The lessee benefits from a reserved, uncrowded hunting or fishing spot that is managed in a sustainable manner to promote wildlife populations.

Assessment

Before deciding to lease, evaluate your property and other resource . This assessment will allow you to determine if your property is suitable for leasing and whether you have the time and other resources to manage this type of enterprise.

The most important consideration is the presence and abundance of game animals and/or fish. This is determined by the quality and diversity of habitat on the property. Some types of wildlife, like waterfowl, have special habitat requirements but for the most part a mixture of habitat insures the needs of most species are met and encourages healthy populations of wildlife. This includes, mature and young forest, hardwood and conifer stands, wetlands, as well as open areas and agricultural fields.

Another factor is the size of the property since this determines the species that can be hunted, the number of hunters that can use the property, and the potential for management to improve habitat. Small parcels would be limited to small game while large acreage provides opportunities to hunt larger animals and allows more hunters. Working with adjacent landowners to cooperatively lease property is a possibility.

Aesthetic and natural features on the property play a factor. Don't overlook the importance of amenities, such as parking area, restrooms, or a place to dispose of trash.

Tips for Hunting Leases

- Describe the land to be leased.
- Include a clause to state the dates covered by the lease.
- Prevent the lessee(s) from subleasing the property.
- State clearly which rights are included in the lease, including the kind of animals the lessee may hunt.
- Require that lessee(s) observe State and Federal fish and wildlife laws.
- Include a clause to limit your liability for accidents.
- State that lessee(s) is responsible for posting the land.
- Protect trees from damage and prevent littering.
- Reserve the right to cancel the lease.
- Have all parties sign the lease.
- Have the lease reviewed by a attorney.

Another factor to consider is the time and labor needed to manage the property. A minimum amount of maintenance is needed to insure lessees have a safe and enjoyable recreational experience. Property improvements and specialized management skills may be required.

The cost and benefit of necessary improvements must be evaluated in terms of the feasibility of leasing property. All properties provide habitat for some wildlife species, but in most cases the



quality of the habitat can be improved to favor one or more game species. Active management could improve the value of most properties for leasing but the cost and benefit would vary considerably. The lessee may be willing to do some of the work (this should be written into the lease agreement).

Liability

Concern over liability is an issue discouraging many landowners from allowing hunting on their land. There are several ways to ease this concern, including eliminating safety hazards on the property, having a written lease, and obtaining additional insurance.

A lease may be used to reduce landowner liability since a clause can be added releasing the landowner from liability for the safety and actions of the recreationists. The landowner must still maintain the property and warn against hazardous conditions.

Although property maintenance and a well written lease can reduce landowner liability, additional insurance is a necessity for any business enterprise. It is a common practice in the southern U.S. for the person (or persons) leasing the property are responsible for providing liability insurance. Most hunting clubs carry liability insurance

and can obtain coverage for a small fee. If the lessee is responsible for liability insurance it should be specified in the lease. Additional umbrella liability coverage may be available for landowners through their standard (homeowner) insurance policy.

Management

Although it is impossible to provide habitat for all types of wildlife, forest management can be used as a tool to promote diverse habitat and maintain healthy populations of wildlife. This includes creating a mixture of age classes of forest by harvesting, maintaining open areas, planting food plots, and protecting wetlands and other unique habitat.

Publications providing technical recommendations for forest management are available, many of them via the internet. *Forest Landowners Guide to Internet Resources*, an online publication produced by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service ([/www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ir/index.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ir/index.htm)), provides links to many technical references. Organizations such as the Ruffed Grouse Society (www.ruffedgrousesociety.org), Ducks Unlimited (www.ducks.org), and the National Wild Turkey Federation (www.nwtf.org/) have information about promoting specific game species available in print and on their web sites.

Markets and Advertising

Important steps in marketing a hunting lease include identifying potential customers, determining the price to charge, and promotion to let potential customers know your product is available.

Identifying potential customers allows services be tailored to best meet their needs target promotional activities to attract them. Since the product to be offered is an high quality, uncrowded, hunting experience close to home, the most likely customers are



local sportsman who don't want to travel to enjoy their hobby.

The price of course is determined by supply and demand. Since little property in Rhode Island is leased for hunting it is difficult to gauge the "going rate". A starting point may be to use property expenses, quality of habitat, and services provided to estimate a fair price. A management fee should be added. Use trial and error to test the market. If there is no interest, lower price. It is easier to lower the asking price than raise it.

Techniques to Enhance Wildlife Habitat

- Maintain or plant food bearing trees and/or shrubs
- Establish dense stands of conifers for cover
- Thin the forest to promote the growth and acorn production of oaks
- Maintain small grassy openings scattered through the forest
- Create food plots, planted to corn, alfalfa, winter rye, or sunflowers, to provide a source of high energy food during the winter
- Establish buffers around streams, ponds, and other wetlands.

Promotional activities, like ads in sporting magazines, flyers sent to hunting clubs or ads in the classified sections of internet web sites, such as www.nesportsman.com or huntri.com, should be designed to attract these customers. Contacting local hunting clubs, such as those involved in Federated RI Sportsman's Clubs (www.frisc.net) provides access to a number of organizations whose members are serious about outdoor recreation.

Economics

Good hunting and fishing opportunities are hard to find and most landowners underestimate the value of their property. Many sportsmen are willing to pay for a high quality recreational experience close to home.

The potential revenue difficult to estimate since this is a relatively new concept in the northeast and few properties are available for comparison. The price received can vary dramatically depending on the quality of wildlife habitat on the property and the terms of the lease. It is unlikely the upper amounts will be received unless the property

An informal survey found several thousand acres are leased in Connecticut and Massachusetts with a lease rate of \$5 to \$30 per acre per year. This is in line with rates reported in the southern U. S. (which