

Recreational Opportunities on CRP Lands

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Introduction

Although quality timber production may be the main objective for most of our CRP pine lands, many landowners have other objectives in mind. These other objectives often include enhanced wildlife, clean water, intensified forest aesthetics, quality forest recreational activities, and a variety of other purposes.

As these CRP stands are beginning to reach pulpwood size, the big question for many innovative forest landowners then becomes: Which of the above activities can I conduct in my planted pine forests as they reach ten plus years old?

First, it seems like a good idea that we get some sense of the characteristics of the trees and the environment they are in. On a site with average productivity (site index = 70) these ten year old pine trees will be about 6 inches DBH and forty-one feet tall. Originally planted at 700 trees per acre, they are now down to about 580 trees per acre due to losses of various types. The understory is mostly open and clear of underbrush. There is a layer of pine straw on the ground and there is some room between the trees allowing you to walk upright in most places without fear of hitting your head on a limb.

There are many recreational activities for a landowner in a CRP forest. Think back to the

fondest memories of your youth. Perhaps you can conjure up carefree adventures involving a forest setting.

Much of the enjoyment we receive from recreational activities comes from what we see and how it makes us feel. A well-managed forest provides many pleasing aesthetic qualities. Even today, many of us enjoy spending time walking, hiking, camping, four-wheeling, horseback riding, mountain biking, and picnicking in the forest.

These activities fall into two categories; consumptive wildlife-based enterprises such as hunting and fishing and nonconsumptive enterprises such as bird watching and photography that take place in the forest.

Let's take a closer look at these recreational enterprises that are suitable for CRP forestland.

Consumptive Uses of Recreation Lands

Hunting Leases - Leasing access rights to hunters is one of the most common types of recreation enterprises in the South. Leasing operations are highly variable, ranging from no landowner participation to a broad array of services and facilities offered by the landowner. Payments for hunting leases are generally made on a per-acre basis for the privilege of gaining access to a landowner's property for a specified period.

¹1998. Recreational Opportunities on CRP Lands. Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, The University of Georgia, Athens, Ga 30602 U. S. A.

Based upon recent conversations with a university wildlife specialist in Georgia, the average price of hunting leases (for “average hunting”) fall between \$5 and \$10 per acre. “Good hunting,” however, may bring even higher prices.

Hunting leases can be thought of as time-share leases for a vacation condominium. In this sense, leases can be sold to separate groups or individuals, for specific time periods, to hunt specific game. This time sharing leasing concept affords more flexibility for the landowner and can maximize leasing. This way, one tract of land may be leased to an individual or a hunt club several times during the same year for turkey, squirrels, deer, etc. A plan of this type requires the landowner to be more involved in making decisions about his/her land.

However, it maybe to the landowner’s advantage to negotiate a lower price per acre if the hunt club will agree to invest time and effort in habitat management to increase wildlife numbers and guard against poachers. Hunt clubs often do a better job of posting and policing the property than the landowner can. They have a vested interest in discouraging poachers and are willing to spend the money it takes to keep others out of their leased land.

Another way to increase the income from leased land is to add such amenities as a cabin for the hunters or provide for their meals during their use of the property. An innovative way to increase the income from forestland is to strike up a deal with the local bed and breakfast inn to house and feed the hunters while you provide a guide service of your land.

Advantages of leasing include:

1. improved control of land access,
2. expected income is known in advance,

3. few managements cost, and
4. the landowner usually becomes familiar with the individuals using the property.

Disadvantages include:

1. guests may be present at inopportune times, especially with annual leases,
2. often difficult to monitor the game harvest,
3. inadequate harvest of deer can be a problem in highly populated areas, and
4. hunters may feel “ownership ties” (especially with long-term leases) and interfere or disagree with your land management practices.

Shooting Preserves - Other enterprises include shooting preserves that offer hunters an opportunity for shooting pen-raised game such as quail that are released before the hunt. In some other parts of the country these birds include pheasant, chukar, and a variety of ducks.

Most preserves offer guides, bird dogs, meals, lodging, game cleaning and packaging. Hunts are generally sold on a full-day, half-day, or weekend package hunts. Fees for hunting guests can range from \$100 to \$700 per day, depending upon services offered. Hunting only, with no lodging or food will bring about \$100 to \$175 per day. If a guide and dog are provided for a half-day, then it may cost \$150 to \$300. If the landowner provides lodging, food, guide, and a hunting dog, then the cost may run from \$300 to \$700.

Shooting preserves in most states are required to be licensed. However, preserve operators enjoy a longer hunting season than that allowed for wild game.

Advantages of a shooting preserve include:

1. the potential of being relatively profitable,
2. a long hunting season, and
3. they provide “instant” quality hunting for those
4. who can afford it.

Disadvantages include:

1. the large capital investment,
2. high business risk for the operator,
3. high management costs, and
4. a relatively small clientele market.

Fee Fishing - Fee-fishing operations are increasing in popularity among landowners who have farm ponds or lakes adjacent to their CRP lands. Public waters are receiving heavy fishing pressure to the point that it is difficult for beginning or even average anglers to enjoy a quality recreational experience. Fee-fishing operations may offer full or half-day permits, and charge per pound of fish caught.

Landowners who want continued business will help to assure a quality experience for their guest by keeping their waters stocked with fish. The most popular fish involved in these operations are largemouth and smallmouth bass, panfish, catfish, and trout.

Sporting Clays - Sporting clays are fast becoming a popular form of recreation for many sportsmen. Since it is a sport that is especially enjoyed by hunters who are involved in bird hunting of some type, it is included in the consumptive discussion. In shooting clays, sportsmen walk a trail or course with stops randomly laid out along the course. Each stop

represents a particular hunting scenario, and the targets are skeet clays rather than game animals.

At each stop the clay targets are released by positioned throwers in a variety of ways to simulate flushing quail, flying doves or ducks, a running rabbit, or some other hunting scenario.

Advantages of sporting clay enterprises are:

1. they can be easily developed on most farm or forest land,
2. they are not dependent on game populations,
3. they can be operated year-round, and
4. they can provide a reasonable rate of return.

Disadvantages include:

1. a high initial investment, and
2. they can be labor intensive.

Nonconsumptive Uses of Recreational Lands

The development of recreational enterprises based upon nonconsumptive uses of forestlands is just as promising as the consumptive uses if they are marketed correctly. Much of the public enjoys spending time in a forest setting. We find it a nice place to be. Forest can be different from one place to another. This changes the way we feel while we are there to hike, camp out, or just to look at wildflowers.

The appearance of the forests affects the way we see the countryside while we are driving down the road. The next time you are in the forest for recreation, think about the conditions that make the activity enjoyable. Our marketing plan should

seek to enhance those conditions.

Activities such as camping, hiking, picnicking, and mountain biking are still enjoyed by a large number of the public, many of who are willing to pay for the privilege.

Even if the landowner is not interested in a “for profit” operation there are still a lot of activities that can be carried out on the property by his/her family and friends. The construction of a family campsite or hiking trail will allow family members and their guest to enjoy nature and the outdoors on familiar property. There is something satisfying about the experience when the land where you are participating in quality recreation is yours or belongs to your family.

Wildlife Associated Recreation

Not surprising, many recreational activities in the nonconsumptive category center on wildlife. This includes such opportunities as bird watching, watching wildlife, nature study, and photography where wildlife resources are the subject of attraction. It is often best to choose a particular wildlife creature to focus on. The amount of land you have or want to devote, and that of your neighbors affects what you can do with wildlife and which creatures you are most likely to attract.

The habitat requirements of animals with small home ranges may be met on small acreages while animals with large home ranges may require vast areas. For example, the habitat requirements for chipmunks are usually met on a small woodlot while a white-tail deer requires from one-half to three square miles depending on the quality of the habitat. Other wildlife have their own unique habitat requirements that may be met on your property if you enhance your forestland to meet their needs.

Nonwildlife Associated Opportunities

There are almost an unlimited number of opportunities to produce nontraditional products and services through improved management and use of renewable natural resources. A few of these possibilities include: campgrounds, lodges or cabins, horseback riding, pine straw (after 10 years), firewood, stage-coach or buggy rides, Christmas trees, and risk-associated activities such as caving, rock climbing, and rafting on nearby lands.

Participation in many of these activities requires the landowner to:

1. clearly define objectives for his/her forestland,
2. develop the idea for recreational enterprises,
3. study the market for such an enterprise, and
4. determine if the enterprise is compatible with existing land management practices.

This brief overview covers the basics of what is involved with recreational opportunities on CRP forestland. The market potential and the resource requirements vary considerably among enterprises, so start with a “good idea” then follow through with a written management plan to better assure you are able to develop it into a successful enterprise.