

Farmers Can Earn Money From Natural Resources

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Stable or falling commodity prices are forcing many farmers to look for alternative sources of income. Farmers and other rural landowners could make some extra money by charging people to hunt, fish or pursue other forms of outdoor recreation on their land, said Ed Smith, natural resources specialist at the east district office of Ohio State University Extension.

How much money could be made depends on location, the extra services provided, the quality and type of natural resources on the land, and many other factors. But landowners could earn as little as \$5 per acre up to several thousand dollars total for the whole property by allowing access to their land for a fee, Smith said.

As the demand for outdoor recreation increases, public parks and recreation sites, especially in the Eastern United States, are becoming crowded, he said.

The Eastern United States contains 78 percent of the nation's population, but only 9 percent of the publicly owned land. In Ohio, only 7 percent of the forestland is publicly owned, Smith said. As a result, private land can play an important role in providing recreational opportunities.

"As dual-income families with little available leisure time demand more recreational opportunities close to home, more possibilities open up for landowners to allow access to the natural resources on their property," he said.

Fee access for outdoor recreation has become more common in recent years, but is most prevalent in hunting. Each year, 14

million people hunt, and 83 percent of them hunt solely or partially on private land.

"Hunters are a group highly affected by the availability of private land and have shown a willingness to pay for access," Smith said.

More than 35 million Americans fish annually. Fishermen have better access to public waters but have also shown some willingness to pay for access, he said. Hunters and fishers spend \$71.9 billion each year — 20.5 percent of that is spent on trip-related expenses and 7.7 percent on land leasing, licenses and other fees.

Wildlife watching — observing, photographing or feeding — is enjoyed by nearly 63 million people in the United States. Wildlife watchers spend \$29 billion a year, with 32 percent going to trip related expenses. Other nonconsumptive forms of outdoor recreation that could be done on private lands include picnicking, walking, nature study, day hiking and cross-country skiing.

"Nonconsumptive users, both for wildlife and other types of recreation, are accustomed to free access or access at a nominal rate on public lands," Smith said. "But, as public recreation sites become more congested, nonconsumptive users may become more willing to pay for a closer and possibly higher-quality recreation experience."

Different types of participants require different natural resources, so the people willing to pay for access to private land will vary by location and the attributes of the land, Smith said. For example, nature photographers require access to scenic views or wildlife populations,

while cross-country skiers need extensive land area and may be willing to travel longer distances to participate.

"Joggers, day hikers and picnickers prefer easy, close access and may not require unique natural environments," he said.

The age composition of nearby urban centers makes a difference. Being close to an area where the average age of residents is older indicates a more likely demand for more passive activities. These types of factors are as important in determining the potential for marketing recreational opportunities as the natural re-

source base of the land, Smith said.

Fee-access things to consider include: how much land will be made available; what types of activities will be permitted; how many people will be allowed access at one time, particularly during popular hunting seasons; what days and times will access be allowed; is landowner insurance necessary; what warnings can be offered to reduce liability; what services can be provided, such as hiking trails, hunting stands, stocked ponds and camping sites, to add value to the land; what arrival/departure, parking, alcohol use and other rules need to be set; and

how will fees be charged.

Fees could be per hunter per year, per acre, per season or some combination of these. Participants should sign a written agreement before being allowed access to the land, Smith said.

Landowners also should consider how they will market their land and the potential start-up and annual costs before they begin allowing fee access on their property.

For more information about the possibilities of allowing fee access to private lands, contact Smith at the east district office of Ohio State University Extension at (740) 732-2381.

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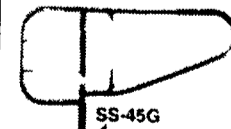
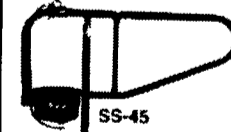
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