



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Miscellaneous Section

1055

Recreational Enterprises Can Complement Beef Production

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Providing opportunities for non-ranch people to enjoy a piece of your way of life generally is not within the objectives of most ranchers. Many, perhaps most, ranchers and their families would rather not even think about recreation as a business form of income. However, leisure time and opportunity still are on the increase and this means the demand for high-quality recreation will be satisfied by someone. Perhaps it is time to consider advantages and disadvantages to ranch-based recreation.

Outdoor recreational opportunities are highly sought after. In the West, this has occurred traditionally on public land, but private land now is recognized as having important attributes. Private lands, or ranches if you will, have not only better soils and more diverse vegetation but often better accessibility and more desirable water regimes and scenery than public lands. Big game may spend a significant part of their time on private lands. If game animals are on your property during hunting season, charging people access to your property to hunt might well make up for the amount of forage they consume. Given these general facts and trends in people's demands, should you be looking at providing recreational opportunities on a profit basis?

Forms of Recreation

Obviously, each ranch is different so only general statements can be made. Proximity to public land need not be a disadvantage although many people do recreate on public land. With rare exceptions, however, public land recreation is dispersed and undeveloped with few services offered or available. Generally, being close to public land will be an advantage as long as private land provides sufficient complementarity.

The list of recreational opportunities for your ranch could be rather lengthy. Often, we are limited only by our ingenuity and creativity. A partial list, all for a fee or charge, could include hunting for big game, small game, upland birds or waterfowl; angling (streams, lakes, or reservoirs); all forms of ranch stays or bed and breakfast which do not have to be

activity-centered or oriented; camping of all sorts including RV's; horseback riding, both trail rides and cross country; participating in actual ranch work; hiking or backpacking; all forms of water, snow, or ice-based sports, or straight-forward loafing. If you value your rural way of life, you can bet others will also. Why not consider marketing it? All ranches have unique scenery and an abundance of solitude. Both are "commodities" in demand.

Characteristics of Recreation Enterprises

By definition, recreation enterprises are people-based. This may be perceived by many ranchers as something they would rather not deal with. The numbers of people depend on just what services and opportunities may be offered, however. Example: a fee hunting set-up where you deal with a management consultant, or an agent for a group of hunters. If you are concerned about the people management part, there are ways that can be addressed. At the conclusion of this fact sheet are listed several references that will help you assess some of the concerns you may have.

One strong attribute of a recreation enterprise is that you are the master of market prices, schedules, services, etc. You are not dependent on someone else to control your market price. And, with rare exceptions, you will be offering unique services and experiences. By recognizing that people are creatures of habit, you can cultivate repeat clientele. Generally the market for such services is nowhere near being saturated. In other words, you will have a relatively scarce resource in relation to the demand for it.

Recreation Enterprise Considerations

The basic similarity among all private land recreational enterprises is the fact that fees are received for a service provided to a client. This is true whether the service is access to your property in order to hunt or for something like camping or horseback riding.

Game animals are the property of the state and even though you provide their habitat, you do not own them. Title to that public property passes to a private citizen only after it is bagged. What you can market is access to the opportunity to bag a game animal and any attendant services you may wish to provide, such as guiding, food, housing, transportation, and the like. You must adhere to the laws, policies, and regulations of your state. Because each state has its own policies, familiarity with them is mandatory. You need to be aware that a surprising amount of opposition to fee access hunting may exist from organized hunter groups and local wildlife department personnel. You can be most effective by developing a positive and persistent education program.

Because the recreation business concerns inviting people onto your premises as invited guests, you need to understand the legal liability you may incur and to make certain your insurance coverage is adequate. Do not shortcut these necessities. Only people closely familiar with law and insurance can give you clear guidance, although some general information is contained in the references.

In the West, the business of charging access for hunting is on the increase. Often some modification of a range management program is needed to enhance the habitat for game, especially during hunting season. Conversely, situations do exist where the game already are in abundance under the current kinds of management. Costs incurred in this form of operation could be quite minimal. A multi-year management plan should be developed with a high degree of involvement by people knowledgeable in wildlife management and behavior. You should be prepared to be flexible and offer multi-tiered opportunities (i.e., lowered or no fees for hunting females, which could be in excess of resource capability within a short time period).

The size, location, and configuration of your property could be a limitation to services offered. Cooperative agreements with adjacent owners could well be the key to success. Several kinds of business arrangements can be considered. Don't feel you are confined to individual entrepreneurship if you do not want to be.

Marketing recreation opportunities obviously is greatly different from selling cattle. But once an enterprise is launched, clientele must be attracted to you. Depending upon the enterprise and its uniqueness, repeat business and word of mouth can almost be counted on. Nevertheless, some advertising will be necessary. Some of the references address specific facets of marketing.

Sources of Assistance

Currently, relatively few people offer commercial recreational opportunities on ranches. For this reason,

people in the business probably will not be reluctant to share their knowledge and experience when asked. If or when more ranchers are in this business, the situation could be different.

The Cooperative Extension System should be a primary source of information. If the services you offer include fish or wildlife, you may need to contact state fish and wildlife agency personnel. They can help you with habitat management plans and census, and can actually be a strong proponent under the right conditions. If county/state land use plans are in effect, you should be in conformity. This is true also regarding rural property tax criteria. Public health regulations should be consulted under certain circumstances. Management consultants should not be overlooked if they can be located and their expertise verified.

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