

## LAND ACQUISITION IN THE SOUTHEAST

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Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Game & Fish Comm. 5:318-324

Land acquisition, for game restoration, is relatively new in the southeastern states. It has only been in the last few years that there have been sufficient funds available, in this part of the country, for land acquisition; but considerable progress has been made by some states in the region. The number of acres that has been purchased by the various states in the Southeastern Region is as follows: Florida, 115,000; Tennessee, 88,900; North Carolina, 61,000; Arkansas, 48,000; Alabama, 27,000; Mississippi, 14,150; Kentucky, 9,700; South Carolina, 5,750; Virginia, 4,700; and Georgia, 3,300.

The cost of this land has varied from 57¢ per acre, which was paid for cut-over hill land in Tennessee, to \$30 per acre which was paid for a demonstration area and a valuable waterfowl marsh in Virginia. The average cost throughout the region has been about \$6 per acre for the 377,500 acres which have been purchased. In most cases the value of the land that has been purchased has increased considerably. The 62,000-acre Charlotte County Wildlife Management Area, which the State of Florida purchased in 1941 at \$3 per acre, is now worth approximately \$20 or \$25 per acre; and almost all lands which were purchased several years ago have increased in value.

This land has been purchased for almost all varieties of game. The 62,000-acre tract in Florida was purchased principally for quail, but it is carrying an increasing herd of deer. The other Florida tract, the 52,000-acre Palm Beach County Wildlife Management Area, purchased in 1947 for \$5 per acre, was for turkeys, deer and quail. Hunting is permitted on both of the Florida areas whenever game populations are sufficient.

The 88,900 acres which have been purchased by the State of Tennessee cost an average of approximately \$2.70 per acre and were acquired primarily for deer, turkeys, and other forest game.

The 61,000 acres in North Carolina cost an average of about \$3 per acre, and most of it was purchased primarily for deer. Some land, though, was purchased also for muskrats, waterfowl and turkeys. Most of the land which has been purchased in both Tennessee and North Carolina will be used eventually for public hunting; although, most of these areas are just now being restocked with game.

All of the 48,000 acres in Arkansas has been purchased primarily for ducks. It so happens, however, that most of any land in Arkansas which is suitable for ducks is also suitable for deer, squirrels and fur-bearers, and in some cases is suitable for turkeys. The reverse, however, is not true. Most land in Arkansas which is suitable for deer or some other variety of game is not suitable for waterfowl. Purchase has been completed thus far on approximately 31,000 acres in the Bayou Meto Area, 10,000 acres in the Black River Area, and 7,000 acres in the Big Lake Area. All of this land has been purchased as combination public-hunting and refuge areas and has cost an average of about \$7.90 per acre.

The 27,000 acres which have been purchased in Alabama were acquired primarily for turkeys and quail. This land cost about \$6 per acre. The Salt Springs

Area, which is located in Clarke County, is a turkey refuge. The Barbour County Area will be used as a public quail-hunting area.

The 14,150 acres in Mississippi are in two tracts: the Copia County tract contains 6,900 acres and was purchased for \$16.36 per acre; the Marion County tract contains 7,253 acres and was bought for \$5.91 per acre. These two tracts were purchased for upland game. The initial use will be for quail and rabbits and the eventual use will be for deer and turkeys.

The 9,700 acres in Kentucky were purchased for the purpose of providing a release point for wild-trapped deer and turkeys. This land cost about \$6 per acre and most of it is rough mountain land.

The 5,750 acres in South Carolina were purchased primarily as a turkey refuge and for deer and quail management. This land cost about \$8 per acre.

The 4,700 acres in Virginia have been purchased at approximately \$30 per acre. This land is in two tracts: One tract of 2,700 acres is located in Orange County and is being used primarily as a demonstration and experimental area, and is also being used to supplement the farm game project; the other tract is the 2,000-acre Hog Island Waterfowl Refuge. The chief value of this tract lies in the fact that it is probably the best potential waterfowl area in the entire State and in the almost perfect interspersion of land and water.

The 3,300-acre tract in Georgia was purchased for the purpose of research on farm game species. It cost \$25.96 per acre.

There is an unfortunate situation in the State of Louisiana which thus far has prevented the acquisition of any land by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. There is a law which provides that mineral rights cannot be reserved by a former landowner for more than 10 years. Since there are rich mineral resources in many parts of the State, most landowners attempt to hold on to the land as long as possible. There is a lot of suitable wildlife land which, except for this one reason, probably could be purchased at a very reasonable price. It is doubtful, though, that much land can be purchased in the State of Louisiana at least in the near future.

Five of the southeastern states are now planning additional land acquisition. The total amount of land which will be purchased eventually will depend to a large extent upon the amount of funds which will be available.

In response to my question concerning the types of land which in the opinion of the coordinators is the most advisable to purchase in their respective states, most of them replied that waterfowl areas are the most desirable type. Several replies stated or indicated that there is not much need to purchase land in some portions of their state because sufficient public land is already owned by the Forest Service. One reply, however, was received which stated that the small tracts of lands which are already surrounded by public-owned land are the type of land that is the most desirable to purchase. The purchase of such tracts is desirable, especially if the state is carrying on an intensive and cooperative program of game management on public land, as is being done in this particular State.

Land acquisition like everything else has its disadvantages. The most obvious disadvantage is that it is expensive. Land could have been purchased much cheaper a few years ago, but the most important factor to consider is not the heavy cost but the need to purchase while suitable areas are still available. Actually, as far as the cost is concerned, it probably will be very difficult for some

states to expend constructively all of the current Federal Aid funds that are available unless major portions are expended on land acquisition.

A second disadvantage is the fact that there is, in some sections, considerable opposition to public ownership of anything. None of the states reported that they pay general property tax. Part of this opposition to the states' purchasing large blocks of land can be done away with by the states' setting up a revenue reversion program similar to that of the U. S. Forest Service.

A third disadvantage, or weakness, in the program of land acquisition is the slight danger that some future game and fish commission or group of politicians in one or more of the states might, through lack of understanding of the values of the wildlife areas, suddenly decide to dispose of valuable game areas.

Since one of the major advantages of land acquisition is in the permanency of the benefits to be obtained, it might be advisable to take whatever steps that there may be to prevent the future disposal of the property. On the other hand, if an area should already be acquired which has no special wildlife value, such property should be sold. One of the southeastern states has already sold one tract of land which apparently had little or no special value for wildlife.

One other feature of land acquisition which might be called a disadvantage is that, quite frequently, land acquisition is a difficult and time-consuming task. Most of the southeastern states have an inadequate staff for handling this somewhat specialized type of work. Fortunately, though, all of the southeastern states have available the efficient services of the land appraisers from the Atlanta office of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. One of the chief advantages of purchasing land with Federal Aid funds is that the state will not only receive a reimbursement of three-fourths of the cost but, also, will receive help from the experienced personnel of the Lands and Federal Aid branches of the Fish and Wildlife Service. There are a lot of problems though that have to be solved almost entirely by the state game and fish commissions. Some of these problems will require the help of an experienced attorney. If the land acquisition program of a state game and fish commission is a particularly large program it may be best for the commission to hire an attorney, at least on a retainer basis, rather than use entirely the services of the state attorney general's office.

One of the major problems concerning land acquisition in most states will be the determination of which areas should be purchased. This problem can be greatly simplified if land acquisition is preceded by a survey of all of the wildlife resources in the entire state. This will, among other things, help prevent overlooking little-known but important wildlife areas which probably exist. Needless to say, the areas should be selected through prior planning, and purchase should actually be completed as a result of that prior planning rather than as a result of pressure from some individual or group that has no official connection with the state game department. It certainly is not desirable to purchase an area unless it either already has, or can be developed into, an area of outstanding value for wildlife. Land acquisition for wildlife restoration carries with it the responsibility to protect both the environment and the wildlife, to enhance if possible the wildlife values by development or other improvements, and to utilize the area and the wildlife as wisely and as efficiently as possible.

One problem which is sure to come up sooner or later in all states that embark upon a large land acquisition program is what to do about those tracts of land within the purchase boundary which belong to owners who do not want to sell at

the same price that was paid for adjacent tracts. What seems to be the best advice along this line came from Mr. O. E. Frye, coordinator of Federal Aid to Wildlife in the State of Florida. Mr. Frye wrote, "In our experience of purchasing land with several ownerships involved, we have found that a policy of sticking to one price regardless of pressures has paid off. We had only one bad situation along these lines. This was in the Palm Beach County tract where we finally induced one hold-out landowner with one section of land to reduce his price from \$25 to \$5 per acre."

It may be best, however, to pay a premium for an individual tract or two, if not having the tract will seriously delay or prohibit the development of the area for waterfowl or for some other special purpose.

Paying an extra price just to add acreage to the area already purchased is not a good plan unless the state is willing to pay the extra price for all of the remaining tracts. It is not very likely that the price of land within an acquisition area will decline after a precedence has once been established. That is why it is so important to buy the first tract within each area as reasonable as possible and then maintain that price level as long as possible.

It is highly desirable to complete the purchase of the entire area in order to have well-defined boundaries and in order to have as complete control as possible of the harvest of game and of the wildlife habitat. The lack of ownership of some tracts, though, need not necessarily seriously reduce the success of the project as a whole. If the area is carefully selected and if the price is reasonable, there should be enough wildlife benefits on each individual tract to completely justify the purchase even if some other tracts are never acquired.

Now that we have discussed the disadvantages of land acquisition, let us look into the advantages. The advantages are to be found in the permanency of the benefits to be obtained and in the completeness of the control, which can be had through actual ownership of the wildlife habitat. One of the main advantages of land acquisition is that the land that is purchased will usually produce revenue. Indeed, if the area is properly selected and purchased in the first place, and if properly managed in the second place, there may be enough revenue produced eventually which will not only take care of the expense of developing and managing the area but will also completely repay the state for the entire cost of the acquisition. This is the ultimate attainment of game management, and it can be reached through a carefully planned program of land acquisition and land management.

The importance of land acquisition as a method of game restoration is in the fact that land acquisition fulfills a critical need which exists in most states. In attempting to explain this critical need, I should like to take the liberty of describing the need for land acquisition which exists in my own State. The first factor which brought about this critical need for land acquisition in Arkansas was the destruction of so much of our most valuable wildlife habitat. The bottom- and terrace-land-hardwood areas are the most valuable type of wildlife habitat in Arkansas. These are practically the only timber types which exist throughout the rich delta lands of eastern Arkansas. These are the types which are by far the most productive of our native game and also the most attractive to our migratory game. These are also the types of habitat which have suffered the most from draining, clearing, and the overharvest of timber. These types of habitat are being destroyed at an alarming rate.

Another need for land acquisition in Arkansas is found in the status of our game refuge program and of our deer and turkey population. A few of our game refuges are on national forest lands, but most are on privately owned lands. There are 21 refuges with a total of about 385,000 acres on privately owned lands. These refuges were established for periods of 10 or 15 years by agreement between the Commission and the landowner. These agreements are binding until date of expiration, on the heirs and subsequent owners. These refuges have been very successful in helping to prevent the complete extermination of our deer and turkeys and in substantially rebuilding our deer population. Most of the deer and turkeys in Arkansas are in and around these refuges. The chief danger in this situation is that, after the game has been restored through the expenditure of a large amount of public funds and efforts, the game refuge may become a private shooting preserve at the expiration of the refuge agreement. This danger is not an imaginary one — it has already happened in Arkansas.

I do not wish, however, to imply that agreements should not be made with private landowners. The use of agreements is another method, and in some cases the only method, of getting the opportunity to manage game on some areas, but it certainly does not do away with the need for actually owning some of the best game areas.

Another need for land acquisition in Arkansas is in the critical need to provide areas for public duck-hunting. Arkansas always gets its share of the ducks that are available each year, but the average duck hunter in Arkansas certainly does not get his share of duck hunting. The reason for this is because so much of the duck-hunting area is posted. Now in Arkansas, we do not particularly care whether or not every duck hunter gets his exact share. We realize that some of this unequal distribution of duck hunting is due to factors which are beyond the scope of influence of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. We are certainly not seeking to readjust the entire social structure; but, we do think that this business of making a private shooting place out of every decent duck area in the entire State is going too far. Our Game and Fish Commission is supported almost entirely by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. We have a regulation that requires people who hunt and fish to purchase a license — and we sell a lot of them. In fact, the number of hunting and fishing licenses sold in Arkansas is greater than the number of poll taxes sold. A lot of duck stamps are also bought in our State; 54,214 duck stamps were purchased in Arkansas last year. Yet, in spite of the number of people who would like to go duck hunting, an estimated less than 3,000 have a place to hunt. Practically all of the best duck hunting areas are taken up by solid rows of private duck clubs. Even most of the duck hunting places which are in the not-very-good category are being rapidly withdrawn from public availability.

Still another need for land acquisition in Arkansas is found in the need to do something constructive for the squirrel hunter. The importance of the squirrel hunter in Arkansas is not generally appreciated. The fact that our hunting license sales jumped 124 per cent when we included the squirrel hunter in the license requirement, however, indicates the heavy contribution which is made to the support of the Commission by the squirrel hunters who hunt no other game. That the squirrel hunters' sport is deteriorating is also something that is not generally understood. The continued draining and clearing of the rich bottom lands has the worst effect. Every acre that is cleared results in the complete destruction of

squirrel habitat that cannot be restored in less than 40 or 50 years. The continued overharvest of timber in those areas which cannot be drained does not completely destroy the habitat, but it does seriously reduce the number of squirrels that such areas will support. These conditions exist in many parts of the State, but it is in East Arkansas where the squirrel hunters' sport is approaching a most serious condition. It is also in East Arkansas where the greatest opportunities exist to do something constructive for our Number 1 hunter. Land acquisition, in order to control eventually mature stands of hardwood timber, is the only known method of bringing permanent increase to squirrel populations. Most other activities, such as the enforcement of the squirrel bag limit, are merely providing for the equal distribution of a slightly cyclic but steadily declining remnant.

As previously stated, all three areas which have already been purchased in Arkansas were purchased primarily for ducks, but they are also excellent for squirrels. Thirty years from now, there will be a mature stand of timber on all of these areas. If clearing of land continues in the future as it has in the past, 30 years from now these areas will be the only places in the entire State where the public can enjoy the pleasures that are to be derived from hunting squirrels in a big-bottom hardwoods area.

I realize that the examples that I have given and the situations that I have described are those which we have in Arkansas. I realize, also, that there will be some difference between the exact conditions which occur in every other state. Maybe in your state the squirrel hunter is not the Number 1 hunter; maybe your state does not have the same kind of waterfowl areas; and perhaps, also, the deer and turkey population is not concentrated in and around your state game refuges. The exact conditions are not the same, but there are comparable situations which exist in every one of the other 47 states.

Where is the state that has such an unbounded wealth of excellent wildlife habitat that there will always be plenty?

Where is the state whose valuable wildlife areas are beyond the reach of the forces of destruction?

What kind of an agreement can be made with a private landowner which will provide adequately for the protection of the environment, the management of the wildlife, assure an equal distribution of the benefits and, at the same time, be made so binding and so permanent that it will never be canceled nor expire—even in some future generation?

Where is the state that does not have more and more of its land being posted?

Which state is it that has a game and fish commission that is not supported by public funds and therefore can afford to sit idly by and watch the remaining wildlife areas become posted by a comparatively few people who seek to prevent the public from sharing in the wildlife benefits?

Land acquisition is by no means a cure-all which will completely solve all of the problems of any game and fish commission. Land acquisition in the absence of knowledge of wildlife and of the over-all conditions, and in the absence of good judgment, may even do more harm than good; but the proper kind of land acquisition is needed in any state. The acquisition of suitable areas where game cannot only be restored by where the benefits will be made available to the general public is the greatest accomplishment which can be made by most any game and fish commission. When one considers the critical need to provide, the

urgency to purchase while suitable areas are still available, and the permanency of the benefits to be obtained, all other game restoration proposals shrink in comparison.

## SUMMARY

In summarizing the foregoing information I wish to call special attention to the following points:

1. Game and fish commissions of 10 of the 11 southeastern states have purchased land for game restoration purposes. Purchase has been completed on a total of about 377,500 acres at an average price of approximately \$6 per acre.
2. This land has been purchased for almost all varieties of game and for demonstration and experimental areas. Most of the land that has been purchased is or will be open to public hunting.
3. The greatest over-all need is for land acquisition for public hunting, and the greatest individual need is for the purchase of areas suitable for waterfowl.
4. The land acquisition program should be based on a thorough understanding of wildlife conditions in the individual state.
5. The lands which are the most desirable to purchase are those areas of valuable wildlife habitat which are most likely to be destroyed as valuable game areas or those which are the most likely to be posted.
6. The disadvantages of land acquisition are:
  - a. the expense
  - b. the opposition to public ownership
  - c. the danger of future disposal
  - d. the fact that it is time-consuming and causes many problems
7. The advantages of land acquisition are:
  - a. permanency
  - b. completeness of control
  - c. probability of deriving revenue
8. Land acquisition has its limitations, but the purchase of the right areas at the right price is the greatest accomplishment which most any commission can make.