

Natural Resource Enterprises Educational Center in Mississippi: A Tangible Wildlife Management Tool Available for Mississippi Private Landowners

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Abstract: Over 1 million people participated in wildlife-associated recreation in 2001 in Mississippi, spending a total of US \$974 million. Research conducted at Mississippi State University (MSU) documented net revenues averaging from \$1,539 to \$3,244 (varied regionally) per landowner in 1998 for Mississippi non-industrial private landowners operating fee-hunting enterprises. Habitat management activities associated with fee access wildlife recreational enterprises benefit wildlife when integrated with existing land management activities. MSU research documented that bird species richness and abundance is higher on conservation agriculture field buffers (51 spp.) as to mowed agriculture field buffers (25 spp.; $P < 0.05$). Enterprises based on natural resources can enhance Mississippi's economy, help landowners diversify their revenue base, and help conserve the state's natural resources. The MSU Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Natural Resource Enterprises (NRE) Program has initiated the development of a Natural Resource Enterprises Demonstration Area/Environmental Center in central Mississippi to provide landowners the opportunity to learn about enterprise and habitat development and management hands-on. This multi-purpose center is a 1,172-acre matrix of agriculture, pasture, and forestlands at the Coastal Plain Branch of the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station. Five demonstration areas will be developed and include a nature trail, backyard habitat, wildlife habitat management, and enterprise integration with agriculture and forestry. Topics such as wildlife and natural resource conservation and management, operating fee access recreational enterprises (i.e., hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation, wildlife viewing), integration of wildlife and agriculture, wildlife damage management, forest management, and cost-share assistance programs will be covered at various stations along a self-guided tour. The NRE Program is currently designing a comprehensive outreach program to complement this demonstration area that includes interpretive tours, signage, workshops, and research on natural resource management on private lands in Mississippi. This education and research center will facilitate innovative programming and outreach to landowners and the public in natural resource management and enterprise development in Mississippi and the southeastern United States.

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