

# Integration of Natural Resource Enterprises and the Economic Potential for Ames Plantation

**T. Adam Tullos**, *North Mississippi Research and Extension Center, Mississippi State University, Verona, MS 38879*

**W. Daryl Jones**, *Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762*

**Bruce D. Leopold**, *Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762*

**Allan E. Houston**, *Ames Plantation, PO Box 389, University of Tennessee, Grand Junction, TN 38039*

**M. Shelton Whittington**, *PO Box 389, Ames Plantation, University of Tennessee, Grand Junction, TN 38039*

**Adam T. Rohnke**, *Central Mississippi Research and Extension Center, Mississippi State University, Raymond, MS 39154*

**Kathy M. Jacobs**, *Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762*

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*Abstract:* Expenditures by hunters, anglers, and wildlife enthusiasts represent an important segment of income potential to most rural economies from natural resource-related activity. Research conducted at Mississippi State University (MSU) found that non-industrial private (NIP) landowners in Mississippi could diversify incomes derived from their properties through the development of fee hunting enterprises. In 1998, revenues collected from fee hunting on Mississippi private lands ranged from US\$2,964 to \$5,254 on average per landowner or \$7.50 to \$14.28 per ha while net revenues averaged from \$1,539 to \$3,244 per landowner or \$3.90 to \$9.54 per ha. Nationally these expenditures are echoed in direct sales from wildlife-associated recreation, which grew to \$108 billion in 2001. Educational programs focusing on business planning and management, cost-share assistance programs, and wildlife habitat management are needed to enhance NIP landowner knowledge related to income diversification on their properties with fee access recreational businesses. Additionally, educational examples showing how to establish natural resource enterprises on working, privately-owned farms and timber operations are few. Thus, the Natural Resource Enterprises Program (NRE) was established in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Cooperative Extension Service at MSU to educate NIP landowners in the South about enterprise development (i.e., fee hunting and angling, wildlife watching, agritourism), compatible habitat management practices, and integrating enterprise operations with agriculture and forestry. To demonstrate these components, a relationship was developed with Ames Plantation to establish fee hunting, angling, and shooting sports enterprises on its property to supplement and diversify incomes from existing agricultural and forestry operations. These demonstrations examine ways existing farms are able to combine wildlife and fisheries enterprises with their main sources of generating income. By implementing a bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) hunting course, waterfowl hunting areas, morning dove (*Zenaida macroura*) hunting fields, a shooting sports course, and improving impoundments for recreational fishing, wildlife-associated income derived from the 7541-ha plantation was increased from \$25,000 to \$205,500. This represents a two-year income increase of \$23.93/ha or a 700% increase in income collected on plantation property engaged in recreational enterprises. Other factors contributing to this economic success involved assisting plantation managers with the initiation of a quality white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) management program and unbundling plantation leasing options for hunting eastern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). Importantly, these enterprises were established without measured negative impacts to the existing cattle, row-crop, corn silage, or silvicultural production on the plantation.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 61:142