Wildlife Session

State Wildlife Management Programs for Private Lands in the Southeast

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Abstract: Wildlife agencies in the 16 southeastern states were surveyed by mail to determine what programs were offered to encourge wildlife management on and public access to privately owned lands. To promote wildlife management on these lands, 14 agencies offered technical services, 7 agencies provided wildlife management materials, and 1 offered tax incentives. Public access to private lands was promoted through free cooperative areas in 9 states and fee-based cooperative areas in 5 states. All agencies considered their programs successful. Seven agencies were studying new programs to encourage management and 5 agencies were examining new programs to increase public access. Opportunities for agencies to improve management on and access to private lands may be with forest industry ownerships, the federal Conservation Reserve Program, and compensation of landowners.

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Privately owned lands support valuable wildlife resources in the southeastern United States. Approximately 75% of the 245.4 million ha in the 16 southeastern states is privately owned; 90% of the forestland, 99% of the cropland, and 60% of the pasture and rangeland in the region are privately owned (Frey 1982, U.S. Dep. Commerce 1985). These lands are valuable for wildlife habitat and wildlife-related recreation.

Demand for public access to private lands and the value of these lands as wildlife habitat are likely to increase in the future (Diamond 1983). Therefore, it is desirable that wildlife resources on private lands be managed, that public access be permitted on as much of this area as possible, and that good relations be fostered between private landowners and resource users. Yet landowners often are reluctant to permit public access to their property because of actual or anticipated problems with liability, vandalism, or other inappropriate behavior of hunters (Brown et al. 1984, Thorwardson 1977, Guynn and Schmidt 1984). Problems with recreational

trespass also may be a disincentive to wildlife habitat management (Gottschalk 1977, Owen et al. 1985).

The objective of this study was to determine what programs are currently being implemented by state wildlife agencies in the Southeast for encouraging wildlife management on and access to private lands. We thank the wildlife agencies in the southeastern states for responding to the survey. We also thank R. S. Beasley, J. L. Greene, J. A. Rochelle, and L. C. Thompson for editorial assistance. Funds were provided by the Arkansas Forestry Association and the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station.

Methods

A mail questionnaire was designed to solicit state wildlife agencies' descriptions of programs being used to promote wildlife management on and public access to privately owned lands. The survey consisted of 6 questions; the first asked for a brief description of each agency-sponsored program, and the remainder requested information about the land area and number of landowners involved, program success, and new program planning and development. Also solicited were estimates of the number of employee-years annually devoted to wildlife management on privately owned lands and the amount of financial compensation received by private landowners through agency-sponsored programs.

A cover letter and questionnaire were mailed in August 1985 to state wildlife agencies in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. A reminder letter and duplicate questionnaire were mailed in October 1985 to nonrespondents. Agencies in all 16 southeastern states responded to the survey. Data summary and analyses were conducted using SPSS/PC+ (Norusis 1986).

Results

Each state wildlife agency reported a unique combination of programs for encouraging wildlife management on private lands (Table 1). Fifteen offered technical services upon request from landowners, including on-site evaluations of habitat and wildlife populations, nuisance animal control, developing wildlife management plans, presenting workshops, and making referrals to other resource agencies. Four states offered special technical services for managing white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) populations. Totals of 1,509 landowners or hunting clubs and 1,988,460 ha were reportedly enrolled in deer management programs. These programs typically required cooperators to maintain detailed records of the number, age, sex, weight, and biological condition of harvested deer. Management recommendations were defined according to cooperator objectives and were as diverse as developing a higher deer density or improving antler and physical development in the herd.

Table 1. Reported hectares (landowners) enrolled in programs sponsored by state wildlife agencies for the management of private lands in the southeastern United States, 1985.

State	Technical services	Management materials	Tax incentives	Cooperative areas	
				Fee	Free
Alabama	121,457	0	0	0	267,206
	(a)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(150)
Arkansas	[a]	374,899	0	0	46,559
	(500)	(2,581)	(0)	(0)	(5)
Florida	0	0	0	2,472,935	0
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(41)	(0)
Georgia	137,652	[a]	0	0	202,429
	(3,000)	(592)	(0)	(0)	(20)
Kentucky	[a]	0	0	0	0
	(a)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Louisiana	344,130	202,429	0	0	0
	(410)	(850)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Maryland	[a]	16,964	12,146	0	22,753
	(a)	(360)	(155)	(0)	(33)
Mississippi	809,717	0	0	0	404,858
	(700)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(50)
Missouri	65,587	6,478	0	0	0
	(7,450)	(9,980)	(0)	(0)	(0)
North Carolina	40,486	2,024	0	737,271	57,795
	(1,510)	(6,576)	(0)	(100)	(528)
Oklahoma	[a]	28,175	0	0	0
	(a)	(815)	(0)	(0)	(0)
South Carolina	[a]	0	0	313,765	0
	(a)	(0)	(0)	(28)	(0)
Tennessee	[a]	0	0	99,851	469,979
	(a)	(0)	(0)	(3)	(43)
Texas	607,287	0	0	0	0
	(254)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Virginia	[a]	0	0	20,243	223
	(a)	(0)	(0)	(4)	(5)
West Virginia	[a]	0	0	0	75,951
	(a)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(10)
TOTAL	2,126,316	630,969	12,146	3,644,065	1,547,753
	(13,824)	(21,754)	(155)	(176)	(844)

[a]Program offered by agency but no participation data provided.

Seven agencies provided wildlife management materials to private landowners; most programs were entitled "Acres for Wildlife." Landowners usually received a packet each year that included seeds of wildlife food plants and sometimes tree seedlings valuable to wildlife. Louisiana offered a separate program for distributing tree seedlings that was entitled "Oaks for Wildlife." Landowners typically agreed to develop food plots with seeds and seedlings and to undertake other management practices such as protecting existing cover and developing water sources. In exchange, four agencies provided tokens of appreciation such as shoulder patches,

certificates, or subscriptions to agency publications. No agency offered financial incentives to participants in these programs.

Only Maryland offered private landowners tax incentives for managing wildlife. Under state law, landowners and the state wildlife agency may enter into a 10-year agreement to create, enhance, or maintain waterfowl habitat. Expenditures made on approved projects are then considered to be a tax deductible contribution to the State of Maryland.

No state offered landowners tax incentives to permit public access to their lands. (In Alabama an amount equivalent to ad valorem taxes was paid 1 cooperative area participant.) In contrast, some states in the northern United States have such incentives. In Wisconsin, for example, managed commercial forest land enrolled under the state's Managed Forest Law (Wis. 1985 Assembly Bill 85 Statutes 77.8) is subject to reduced taxation. Landowners who permit public access pay $1.83/ha/year in property taxes; landowners not allowing public access pay $4.30/ha/year. Local governments are reimbursed by the state wildlife agency for lost revenue.

Cooperative area programs were popular with wildlife agencies in the Southeast for encouraging wildlife management on private land and for increasing public access. Agencies in 11 states offered programs where neighboring landowners combined their lands to form cooperative areas. Nine states sponsored cooperative areas featuring free public access and 5 states sponsored areas requiring a fee for access. Florida had 2 forms of fee-based cooperative areas; landowners set and collected access fees on 1 and the state agency was responsible for these duties on the other. In all states with cooperative areas the state wildlife agency was at least partially responsible for wildlife management activities, access regulation, and wildlife law enforcement. Most agencies also published and distributed maps and regulations for the recreational use of these areas.

In only 3 states were landholders reimbursed for participating in free-access cooperative areas. In Florida, an annual $500,000 allocation was divided among participants, while in Alabama and North Carolina participants received payments of $0.74/ha/year. Access fees on fee-based cooperative areas were variable and most agencies did not report an average fee. Access permits in Florida ranged in price from $5 to $35, all of which was retained by the landholder. Landowners in fee-based cooperative areas in South Carolina received $1.63/ha. In 3 states owners were withdrawing their lands from cooperative area programs because they considered compensation inadequate.

All wildlife agencies considered their programs to be "successful." Seven were planning new programs to promote wildlife management and 5 were planning new programs to increase public access to private lands. Arkansas was developing a warm-season grasses program similar to a Missouri program. This program would encourage landowners to introduce to their pastures warm-season grasses such as switchgrass (*Panicm virgatum*), Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), and bluestems (*Andropogon* spp.) to complement grazing resources provided by cool-season grasses and enhance wildlife cover. Tennessee was expanding its fee-based coop-

erative areas. Missouri was designing an expanded wildlife habitat improvement program. Within this program, wildlife specialists would work full-time with Soil Conservation Service (SCS) staff in training SCS personnel in landowner contact, wildlife habitat appraisal, and wildlife habitat management practices. Texas was studying the establishment of temporary wildlife management areas to regulate high deer populations and to provide increased public access. Hunter access to these temporary management areas would be through a lottery and a $25 fee.

Agencies reported from 0 to 25 employee years ($\bar{x}$ = 9.2, SD = 9.0) allocated to wildlife management on private lands or approximately 1 employee year per 1.5 million ha of privately-owned lands.

Discussion

Although 75% of lands in the Southeast are privately owned, a relatively small amount of effort is expended by wildlife agencies on managing these lands. Many agencies concentrate efforts on state-owned lands. The administrative difficulty of a public agency managing private lands may be partially responsible for this unbalanced concentration. Private ownerships are dispersed, often small, and many owners have primary objectives other than wildlife management. However, forest industry ownerships in the Southeast of approximately 15.5 million ha (Wall 1981) may provide opportunities for agencies to work with larger land areas under single ownerships.

Private lands hold many opportunities for wildlife management. Studies in several southeastern states (Kluender 1978, Nabi et al. 1983, Owen et al. 1985) have indicated that "wildlife" is second to timber as an ownership objective of many private forest landowners. Therefore, it appears that many landowners may be willing to modify current land management practices to some degree to favor wildlife. The federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) authorized in the Food Security Act of 1985 may be a means for state agencies to promote wildlife management on privately owned lands. This program provides agencies the opportunity to establish contacts with interested landowners through local soil conservation districts and influence land management practices. There are approximately 14.3 million ha in the 16 southeastern states eligible for the CRP (1982 SCS National Resources Inventory). The new programs being considered by Arkansas and Missouri are examples of wildlife programs that are designed to take advantage of the CRP.

Compensation of landowners for implementing wildlife management practices and providing public access needs additional attention. There is increasing public acceptance of user fees for outdoor recreational activities. Leasing of hunting rights on private lands by individuals, clubs, or state wildlife agencies is practiced throughout the Southeast (Halls 1975, Burger and Teer 1981, Lassiter 1985), and fee-hunting is being considered for federal lands (Thomas 1984). Although it has been advocated for 50 years that landowners should be compensated for wildlife management (Leopold 1930, Burger and Teer 1981, Cordell and Stevens 1983), few wildlife agencies in the Southeast promote user fees and landowner compensa-

tion. Wildlife agencies must be willing to provide landowners with competitive fee income if they are to maintain or expand landowner interest in private lands programs. Wright and Kaiser (1986) found that state wildlife administrators did not perceive that lack of incentives or compensation was a factor in landowners' decisions to deny access. Gyunn and Schmidt (1984), however, found that charging a fee for hunting priviliges was one of the most satisfactory methods of hunter management because landowners believed that charging fees helped them to know who was on their land, to control hunter numbers, to promote greater landowner-hunter cooperation, and to decrease vandalism.

The payment of fees or purchase of special "habitat stamps" to hunt private lands helps agencies finance private-land programs and may increase awareness of resource users of landowner costs associated with wildlife management and providing access. In addition, there is a need for education programs to provide landowners with information on the advantages of fee-based hunting systems, to provide information on starting and operating a fee-hunting program, and managing for wildlife species (Guynn and Schmidt 1984). The personal contact required to implement fee-hunts may help resolve landowner-hunter conflicts that have rendered many private-land wildlife management programs useless (Guynn and Schmidt 1984).

Conclusions

State wildlife agencies in the southeastern United States have established programs to encourage wildlife management on and public access to private lands. Agencies provide numerous services including assistance with management plans, nuisance animal control, provision of seeds and tree seedlings, and operation of cooperative areas. There remain opportunities to improve private-lands programs and increase landowner participation. Offering competitive direct economic incentives, tax incentives, and liability relief may promote more management on and access to private lands (Stoddard and Day 1969, Gottschalk 1977, Burger and Teer 1981, Shelton 1981).

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