



3 1799 00011 7614

**Colorado
State**
University
Cooperative
Extension

service in ACTION

no. 6.514

Wildlife as a farm and ranch business

Delwin E. Benson¹

Quick Facts

Wildlife is a big business in Colorado; ranching and wildlife are an integrated business.

Season-long or daily leases are two ways to grant access for a fee.

Developing a contract that outlines responsibilities of landowner and hunter provides for quality behavior from the hunter and quality experiences for both.

Free systems should prevail as long as producers and consumers are happy and wildlife are abundant. When that isn't possible, fee systems can accommodate landowners, hunters and wildlife in a positive way.

Wildlife is a big business in Colorado. Hunters and anglers spent \$1.04 billion in the state during 1981. The sports tied for sixth place with the ski industry as a contributor to the state's economy (Table 1). Agriculture's \$2.1 billion ranked fourth.

Many wildlife, born and raised on private lands, are enjoyed by landowners and recreationists. However, the association between farmers, ranchers, recreationists and wildlife has not been as positive as it could be. Some landowners treat wildlife and recreationists as assets while other landowners consider them to be negative.

A business needs a supply of products and a demand to use it. Elk have increased in Colorado since the turn of the century and have become the state's number-one generator of hunting revenues. Deer have their ups and downs. They are increasing again after low numbers in the 1970s and pre-1930s. Pronghorn antelope have maintained a relative static level due to management goals of

keeping numbers within tolerable limits on private lands. If landowners wanted more antelope, the population could increase. Hunters want more antelope and they usually must wait to accumulate preference points before being awarded a license. Demand exceeds supply!

Table 2 contains a few past, present and future target population levels of the three species. This will be the basic supply that landowners and hunters can work with in the future.

A Ranching Business

Wildlife are part of the ranching business, no matter how one looks at it. Landowners can manage private lands by tolerating wildlife, by making claims for damage payments or by planning for wildlife as a part of normal operations.

Wildlife provide recreational opportunities and a cash flow potential without additional investments or out-of-pocket cash expenditures. However, wildlife have a cost to landowners either directly through forage used by wildlife or indirectly through time and efforts associated with managing hunters.

Landowners manage hunters indirectly, regardless of the system, either by allowing access, closing and patrolling land or charging an access fee. The combination of wildlife presence and good hunting possibilities can mean good business for landowners.

A lot can be learned about rancher/hunter relations and livestock/wildlife management from the way things are done in Texas. Texans are proud of their cattle and their hunting. They coexist nicely because ranchers profit from wildlife. Some ranches have decreased cattle numbers to encourage more wildlife and greater profits. Ninety-eight percent of the land is private. Texas' private land supports 10 percent of the cattle and 20 percent of the deer in the 48 continental states.

Colorado is the best overall big game state. One-third of Colorado's land is publicly owned,

¹Delwin E. Benson, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension wildlife specialist and associate professor, fishery and wildlife biology (5/88)

but private lands support significant quantities of wildlife and can provide higher quality experiences for hunters than on public lands. Thirty percent of big game populations in Colorado are on private lands and many hunters prefer experiences on private property.

What Hunters Want

Speculation about the value of private lands for hunting in Colorado led Colorado State University to conduct several studies the last 20 years. One study indicated that resident big game hunters thought private land access needed to be improved. That same study showed that 25 percent of nonresident hunters paid access fees, and 50 percent of the nonresidents desired private-public land combinations for hunting.

A 1979 survey reported that 78 percent of the nonresident and 48 percent of the resident hunters would consider paying fees.

Hunters want good experiences for their money. A 1975 University of Colorado study and a 1979 Colorado State University study identified respectively that hunters desired larger game populations and greater chances of getting a deer. One study also indicated that hunters preferred few other hunters in the same area where they are hunting.

For most hunters, the combination of good wildlife populations, higher chances of success and few other hunters can be found only on private lands.

Leasing Systems

There are two main ways to grant access for a fee: season-long leases and daily leases. Season-long leases generally are most popular. A specified number of hunters are given access rights for the entire season.

Formal agreements, not necessarily complicated, between landowners and clients are made. They can include payments, procedures and acceptable behaviors. Lodging could be provided or a place to set up camp could be determined. Guide services and horses could be part of the agreement.

More profits and higher landowner satisfaction generally are received when recreational services are provided. An advantage to the season-long system is that hunters take pride of possession on the property and help patrol it. Landowners also benefit since they know who is around.

Daily leases are simple to operate. Usually only land, with no recreational services, is offered. The biggest disadvantage is having to process and direct more people each day. Profits could be higher than for season-long leases.

When one of the two systems or a combination is selected, landowners should provide quality experiences for and expect quality behaviors from hunters. Eliminate any surprises by developing a lease contract that outlines responsibilities of the seller and the buyer.

Cooperatives and Partnerships

Some ranches or farms are large enough and have sufficient number of game to be independent. When land areas are small and when game populations roam unpredictably over several properties, cooperatives or partnerships among landowners are best.

Contracts among or between landowners should be written to ensure thorough understanding of how the operation will function and the responsibilities of each party. Usually one or more persons within the cooperative will run the operation.

Cooperatives are useful when animals feed on one property then leave by the hunting season. Profits from access to some partners' lands are shared with partners' whose land helps feed and maintain the game animal supply.

Table 2: Estimates of historical, present and desired populations of elk, deer and pronghorn in Colorado.

	1890s	(post season) 1982	(post season) 1988
Elk	7,000	125,000	25,000
Deer	100,000	496,000	600,000
Pronghorn	25,000	40,140	12,000

Table 1: Total and average total expenditures in Colorado by activity participation in 1981.

Activity	Resident		Nonresident		
	Total	Per Capita	Total	Per Capita	Total
Antelope	\$ 12,522,987	\$ 971	\$ 21,210	\$ 101	\$ 12,544,197
Bighorn sheep	NA ¹ (245,332)	—	0 (°)	—	NA ¹ (245,332)
Bear	2,723,805	315	730,673	257	3,454,478
Deer	84,750,530	647	68,261,412	1,231	153,011,942
Elk	95,819,338	711	72,647,419	1,229	168,466,757
Mtn. lion	NA ¹ (147,928)	—	NA ¹ (142,136)	—	NA ¹ (290,064)
Fishing	565,158,108	1,229	32,798,556	1,658	597,956,664
Small game	102,967,968	948	1,696,360	215	104,664,328
Total	\$864,335,996		\$176,297,766		\$1,040,633,762
Percent		83.0		17.0	100.0

¹Bighorn sheep and mountain lion total spending made up only about 0.07 percent of total spending in 1973. The numbers in brackets are based on the assumption that the spending share for sheep and mountain lion have remained unchanged within resident and within nonresident fixed and variable classifications since 1970. Source: Colorado Division of Wildlife.

RECEIVED
 SEP 06 1988
 COLORADO STATE LIBRARY
 State Publications Depository