



Landowner Spotlight: Birdshot Lodge

How long does it take to start a recreational business after attending a NRE workshop? For the Homans of Lee County, who attended the October 9th 2008 workshop at Circle M Plantation, it took 6 months to establish their lodge and craft a business plan. Jim Homan and his father James own and manage 500 acres in Shannon, MS, just 18 miles south of Tupelo. They had a dream to turn their long-time soybean and beef cattle operation into a recreational outfitting business.

Jim and James worked with professionals who provided expert business and habitat management advice, which was key to developing their business plan. They also worked with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to implement habitat management practices on the ground through various Farm Bill programs.

“We learned so much in such a short amount of time at the [NRE] workshop, it really opened the door for us to find out more about how to get started and what services we wanted to offer,” said Mr. Homan. “We knew we had a special place and we’ve always enjoyed hunting and fishing as part of our experiences on this farm.”

Exploring Opportunities

The Homans used conservation programs, (i.e., grassland CRP and reforestation corridors) to aid in the establishment of prime wildlife habitat on their farm. Through the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks’ private lands program and other partners, the Homans received advice and recommendations from wildlife biologists for managing and establishing native warm-season grasses (NWSG) on the property.

The next step for them was contacting the NRE Program and exploring what types of recreational

continued on page 2

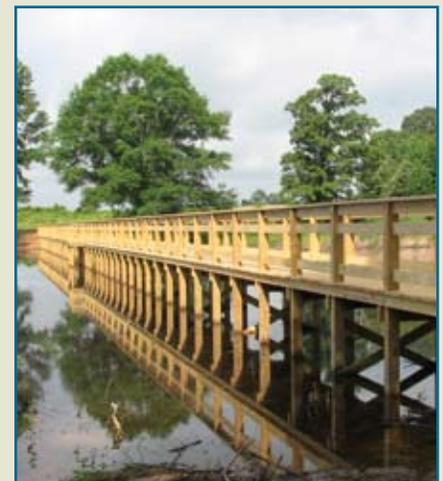
NRE Demonstration Center in Newton, MS

The NRE Program is making steady progress developing and constructing Natural Resource Enterprise Demonstration Center on the 1,172-acre Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station (MAFES) Coastal Plains Branch in Newton, MS.

Last summer, the newly renovated 10-acre pond received a new 300-ft boardwalk and the initial fish stocking took place last fall. With the final grooming of the nature trails complete, the NRE staff is currently hard at work with developing and designing the educational signage for the nature trail area.

Last fall and this spring the backyard habitat area was planted with nearly 900 wildlife friendly plants including trees, bushes, warm season grasses, and flowering plants. Final preparations (bird feeders, rain barrels, etc.) are ongoing this summer.

continued on page 4



New boardwalk



The Homans' lake, offering largemouth bass fishing

opportunities were available on their farm. We assisted the Homans in drafting a business plan and setting long-term objectives for wildlife production and business operations. Having a well-constructed business plan can greatly improve your chances for success, and the Homans developed objectives and a detailed plan to meet their goals.

Property Inventory

Many recreational opportunities exist on the farm. Deciding which ones to develop into a business opportunity requires a look at past recreational uses, assets, and infrastructure on the property as well as landowner preferences in recreational excursions to offer.

On the Homan farm, positioned between the rolling hills of southern Lee County and fertile bottomland, farming has been a tradition and lifestyle for well over 100 years. The 500-acre farm has been handed down from generation to generation and is sectioned into several landscape assets beneficial to wildlife. The Homans have several sloughs attractive to migratory waterfowl during winter, linear woodlands for deer and turkey, and drainages that provide bedding

and foraging areas for wildlife. The Homans admit that the farm has a very good deer and turkey population today, but during the mid 1900's "the glory days of bird dogs and double barrels," quail were common.

The Homans also have a cabin for overnight and weekend accommodations to complement days afield on the farm. For guests looking for more primitive quarters, the Homans have a rustic cabin in a natural secluded area of the farm that comes complete with an out-house, no electricity, no phone, and firewood for heating during winter.

Maximizing Opportunity

Birdshot Lodge primarily offers bobwhite quail hunting along three hunting courses within the newly established 245 acres of NWSG and 85 acres of buffer strips on the farm. They also manage a 10-acre lake for recreational angling, 10 acres of dove fields, and limited white-tailed deer, wild turkey and waterfowl hunting. Capping all of this off is a beautiful two bedroom cabin with a full kitchen, living room, scenic deck, and fire pit area. Just the type of relaxing atmosphere most hunters and anglers desire after a long day in the field or on the water.

The Homans chose birdhunting and angling as their major attractions for several reasons. The most significant reason was the amount of habitats in place to support these ventures. Although reestablishing NWSG's on the property is a conservation practice being cost-shared on their farm, this

habitat benefits wildlife by providing fawning and bedding areas for deer, and nesting and foraging areas for turkey and bobwhite quail. Also, the family enjoys guiding the quail hunts themselves, which doesn't require large financial investments as the land is family-owned. Additionally, Birdshot Lodge offers another low impact venue on the land, largemouth bass fishing that has limited start-up costs since a lake is present on the property.

Offering several recreational activities increases the likelihood that the lodge will be busy for a good portion of the year and will have broader appeal. The Homans are using their current property assets and making improvements to the land and accommodations to best meet customer demand. In the future, the family plans to offer shooting sports as an additional outdoor recreational pursuit.

Partnering to Share Costs and Increase Opportunity

A recreational enterprise can increase business by 20% by offering guest lodging. An additional 20% can be gained by offering customers a diversity of recreational opportunities (e.g., horse trail riding, bird watching) to participate in while on the farm. Economists call both of these types of revenues, on-site expenditures, which can profoundly increase profitability of a recreational business.

Even landowners with property limited in size or habitat can offer diverse recreational opportunities by partnering with adjacent landowners or having an agreement with a local bed and breakfast operation

Contact your local chamber of commerce and tourism office to increase the visibility of your enterprise and for business-related assistance. For additional wildlife conservation and enterprise management information, please visit us on the web at www.naturalresources.msstate.edu.
- Adam Tullos, adamt@ext.msstate.edu

Get a Head Start on Pond Weed Problems

The best way to avoid pond weed problems is prevention. Shallow areas where light reaches the pond bottom are ideal for the growth of rooted aquatic weeds. Deepening pond edges so that the water depth quickly reaches 2 1/2 to 3 feet helps reduce weeds. For safety, make the slope 3:1; or one foot increase in depth for every three feet further from shore. To help prevent weeds from becoming established, grass carp can be stocked at about five fish per acre in new or weed-free ponds.

Too many or not enough nutrients can lead to weed growth. Excess nutrients from livestock or other sources can run off into a pond and lead to weed problems, especially algae. Duckweed and watermeal also thrive in nutrient-rich waters. This is especially evident in dry winters when ponds are not flushed out by rainwater.

In clear ponds, sunlight can penetrate to the pond bottom and stimulate the growth of rooted plants. One way to prevent this problem is by fertilizing the water to stimulate the production of microscopic plants that shade the pond bottom. Ponds with existing weed problems should not be fertilized, as this will only stimulate the growth of the weeds. Fertilization is not a good option for stock watering ponds.

The first step in weed control is to properly identify the problem weed(s). The most effective control measures vary with the kind of plant, so be sure to identify the plant accurately. Your local Cooperative Extension Service office can help with identification, and there are several good online resources you can use.

Once you know the weed, there are three forms of weed control: physical, biological, and chemical, and these control measures are usually most effective when combined. Biological



Watershield, photo by K. Jacobs

control, such as grass carp, is effective for some types of aquatic weeds. Grass carp prefer tender, succulent vegetation submerged in the water like hydrilla, pondweed, and naiad. They will not control tough, fibrous plants that grow up out of the water, such as alligatorweed and cattails. Other types of weeds may or may not be eaten by grass carp, depending on how hungry the fish become due to food availability, so results are sometimes not predictable.

Physical control by cutting or pulling plants is possible for small ponds or isolated patches of weeds. Weeds that are cut often grow back and they have to be cut again. Also, some plants can form new plants from small fragments, so disturbing these plants may make matters worse. Floating weeds often are blown into a corner of the pond, where they can be scooped out with a fine mesh net.

Chemical control of aquatic weeds should generally be considered the last resort in weed management. Spot treatments of weedy areas usually can be accomplished without problems, but when whole pond treatments are required, actually measuring the pond area is important. To visually estimate the area of a pond is amazingly difficult, even for "experts," but it is necessary to get an accurate estimate so that herbicide dosage can be calculated correctly. The

best time to treat aquatic weeds with herbicide is during the spring when the plants are growing rapidly and water temperatures are cooler (70°F to 80°F). Extension publication 1532, "Weed control guidelines for Mississippi - 2009", provides the latest on approved herbicides and which plant species they control, as well as use restrictions and other valuable information. This publication is available online.

Decomposition of weeds killed by herbicides removes oxygen from the water and can even result in a fish kill, especially in the summer months. When using a fast-acting herbicide, treating only a section (up to a third of the pond area) at a time will reduce the chances of oxygen problems. Unless the herbicide is intended for whole pond application (i.e., fluridone), treating only a portion of the weeds at a time allows affected weeds to decompose before the next application.

For additional information on aquatic weed control, consult your county Cooperative Extension Service office. If you have additional questions about farm pond management, contact Dr. Wes Neal at 662-325-8363 or by email at jneal@cfr.msstate.edu.



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This spring the Forestry demonstration and research area was completed with the addition of the educational signage. The area highlights traditional and non-traditional forest management techniques integrating wildlife friendly practices and bio-energy research.

NRE staff planted 22-acres of native warm season grasses this spring in multiple sections of the property. In collaboration with NRCS, 12-acres were planted for a demonstration pasture for landowners and professionals to learn about the potential of native warm season grasses in the pasture systems.

All of these areas will be the focus of several events to be held on the station this fall including the Fall Wildlife Festival (TBA), Central Mississippi Forestry Celebration (October 14th), and Natural Resource Enterprise Nature Tourism Workshop (TBA), and the 1st Bioblitz in spring 2010.

All events will be advertised on our websites and in the next newsletters. Stay Tuned!

- Adam T. Rohnke, arohnke@ext.msstate.edu



Installing educational signage



Planting bushes