

Recreational Management on Private Rangelands

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Rangeland resources of the United States have provided recreation for generations of outdoor-loving people enjoying activities varying from photography of a pretty flower or scenery to the harvesting of wild game. At one time, finding this recreation was a simple matter of asking the permission of a landowner or by making other arrangements if the area were public land. However, in these changing times, a landowner must seek out every opportunity to produce more revenue from the land in order to make ends meet. Thus, in many parts of the United States, the landowner is now charging a fee for public access to privately owned land. Because of the high demand for recreation and the scarcity of land open to the public, the American Sportsman's Club was founded in 1968.

The American Sportsman's Club is a privately owned corporation providing family-oriented outdoor recreation to its members on a year-round basis. It does so by leasing the recreational rights of privately owned properties and assuming responsibility for management of the wildlife and recreation resources. The Club's acceptance of responsibility for the use of the land offers important benefits to the landowner. These include relief from liability, poaching, protection against damage to livestock and property, a full time patrolman during primary use time, and a game management program.

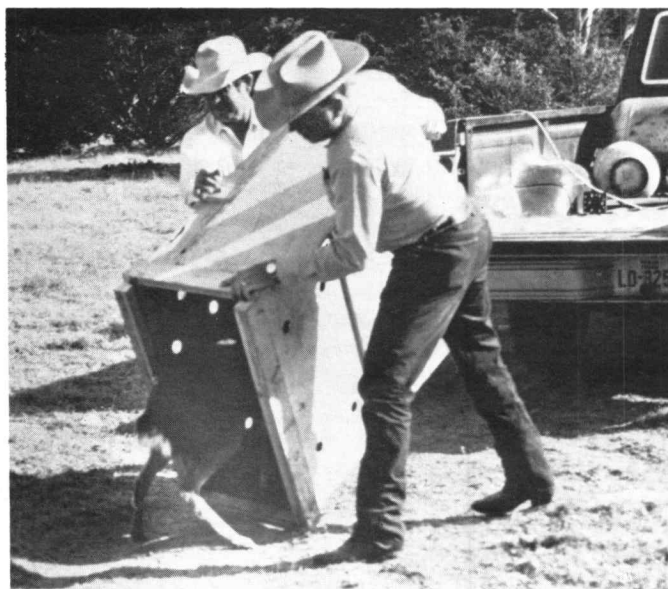
The Club offers its membership a great variety of outdoor recreation. Families wishing to join are interviewed by a membership representative and are subject to a screening committee. Upon approval of membership applications, families are admitted to the Club and thus are able to enjoy recreation on Club-leased properties. Presently the American Sportsman's Club is functioning in Colorado, Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, and Louisiana.

The primary interest of the clientele of the ASC centers on the wildlife that can be utilized in conjunction with their outdoor experiences. Preferred recreation is primarily hunting of big game, upland game bird, and waterfowl. Camping and fishing are strong seconds in popularity and are being requested more frequently. To better meet these needs, the Club exercises three basic management practices: (1) management of wildlife habitat, (2) direct management of wildlife, and (3) management of people utilizing the resources.

This article is based on a paper presented at the 1978 SRM Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas. The author is the Texas Land Leasing Director, American Sportsman's Club, 4502 Centerview Dr., San Antonio, TX 78228.



Author posting Restricted Area sign.



Transplanting a sika deer to a new location.



A.S.C. patrolman issuing a permit to a member and son.

Wildlife Habitat Management

Management of habitat is accomplished in conjunction with ranch livestock operations. Landowners following good conservation plans such as those developed by the Soil Conservation Service generally have both good wildlife populations and property that is aesthetically pleasing. Outdoorsmen are much more likely to be attracted to a property where grass and other forage species are in abundance than to one that has been abused. Well-regulated grazing systems provide not only better forage but some areas where livestock are not grazing.

Competition for forage between wildlife and livestock is found to be a common problem. One solution which many of our landowners utilize successfully is to include big game numbers as animal units when calculating the carrying capacity of their property. This calls for population control of both wildlife and domestic livestock if all species are to coexist and thrive.

Range improvements recommended by the Club include the control of noxious brush to improve both livestock and wildlife habitat. As much preferred wildlife browse species as possible should be left in a checkerboard of criss-cross type pattern. As an aid to management of livestock and wildlife, watering facilities should be placed in strategic locations. Then wildlife and livestock are better able to spread across the ranch, thus obtaining better grazing distribution and forage utilization. Earthen tanks or storage tank overflow are preferred for wildlife, especially upland game birds.

Wildlife Management

Control of wildlife numbers is accomplished by a controlled harvest set by mutual agreement between ASC and the landowner. These harvest limits are arrived at through census and landowner observation with the desired goal for the animal population in mind. Harvest can be regulated for quality trophy types or quantity of animals. Age structure of the deer herd and general body condition can be determined during the harvest as animals are brought into check stations on each ranch. Thus, an evaluation of the progress of the biological plan can be made.

People Management

The final segment of the American Sportsman's Club operation, and probably the most difficult, is the management of people. To properly utilize a property without abusing it requires a system of checks and balances. Prior to usage the maximum number of people that can be on a ranch property at any one time is set. In hunting situations this number is set primarily with safety in mind. Each hunter must have ample area in which to move about as well as privacy to enjoy the outdoor experience. Every hunter, regardless of state regulations, is required to wear a blaze-orange vest while in the field, and hunter safety education is required of those hunters under the age of 18.

Members wishing to utilize a property must first make a reservation for that land unit on a space available basis. Members arriving on the property must first check in with the patrolman for that ranch and present an authorization code. Each Club member receives a detailed map of the property showing fence lines, roads, and landmarks as well as any special regulations for that property. Signs are also utilized to mark off limit areas and to help the member find his way across the ranch.

The patrolman then assists the member in choosing a pasture or area suitable to his particular taste. If the member wishes to change areas during the hunt he must coordinate with the patrolman. This keeps hunters scattered across the ranch yet aware of the location of others. Upon completion of the hunt the member must check out with the patrolman and report the game harvested. At this time the patrolman can gather biological data such as age, weight, reserve fat, antler development, and location where harvested.

He also coordinates with the landowner to help ensure that the hunters do not hinder livestock operations. He can clear the hunters from a pasture if livestock must be worked to ensure the safety and convenience of the workers.

Recreation today is considered by experts to be a necessity rather than a luxury. Outdoor recreation is becoming increasingly popular as urban populations grow and the need for people to get away from the pressure of city life increases. The world's great rangeland resources can provide this outlet and with proper management can always continue to do so.

rangeland reference areas

by

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This third publication in the Range Science Series reviews the published literature dealing with rangeland reference areas, summarizes current programs of other groups in the United States and Canada who are interested in natural area preservation, lists activities in other countries, and outlines a program useful for encouraging preservation of reference areas. Rangeland Reference Areas is of particular value to those interested in range research as well as preservation of reference areas and would be an excellent supplementary text for range students at the college level.

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