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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

GLCINews

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

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Cover photograph: Riders enjoy a tour through a Southwestern ranch as part of its Nature Tourism program.

Diversifying Farm and Ranch Income Through Nature Tourism

By Linda Campbell, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

There is a growing interest among agricultural producers in diversifying farm and ranch income by providing wildlife-associated recreational opportunities. Many landowners already derive substantial income from hunting. Opportunities exist for attracting other segments of the recreation market, such as birders, wildlife watchers, hikers, mountain bikers, or nature photographers…the so-called nature tourism business.

For example, ranchers with established hunting businesses might consider marketing non-consumptive activities, such as birding or biking, during the non-hunting season. This can fill empty lodging facilities and bring in off-season income. Opportunities also exist for landowners and entrepreneurs interested in developing tourism-related businesses, such as Bed and Breakfasts, that specialize in birding and wildlife watching.

Although opportunities exist to profit from the growing demand for outdoor recreation, it is important to be realistic about your assets, management ability, personal style and preferences, and how new endeavors integrate into your existing business. Nature tourism is not a cure-all to "save the ranch." It can diversify income, but those in the business will tell you that it takes commitment and vision. It is not for everyone.

Providing recreational opportunities is a people-oriented business. It's not the business for you if you don't enjoy dealing with people and providing services to your customers. The ability to enjoy the company of others, to share your experiences and knowledge with those of different backgrounds, and to be flexible enough to adjust to people with personalities and tastes different from your own are important attributes for success in a "people business" such as nature tourism.

In developing a nature-based tourism enterprise, the first step is to inventory the natural and cultural resources that form the basis of what you are selling. Ask yourself these questions:

- What does your ranch or farm have that is interesting or unique (plants, animals, geology, history)?
- What are the special habitats on your place and how can you provide viewing opportunities (watering areas, wildlife gardens close to lodging, feeders, blinds, elevated observation areas, trails and boardwalks)?

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Examples of Recreational Activities

- Guided bird and wildflower walks
- Wildlife watching from blinds (turkey, deer, birds)
- Stargazing in dark, rural settings
- Interpretive walks featuring geologic & historic sites
- Mountain bike trails
- Horseback riding trails
- Camping and backpacking
- Chuck-wagon meals with music or storytelling
- Observing or participating in working livestock

According to a 1997 national survey, 77 million U.S. residents 16 years old and older participated in some form of wildlife-associated recreation in 1996:

- **62.9 million people enjoyed wildlife-watching activities such as observing, feeding or photographing wildlife**
- **35.2 million people fished**
- **14 million people hunted**
- **Expenditures related to wildlife-associated recreation totaled $101 billion**

Diversifying Farm and Ranch Income

(Continued from page one)

- Get outside perspective.....remember the common or ordinary to you may be of great interest to urban residents or visitors from other states and countries.

Nature tourists are looking for the natural, historical and cultural heart of the place they are visiting, and their defining principle is authenticity. They are interested in what is real, and they want to be immersed in a rich natural, cultural or historical experience. Focus on providing an enjoyable experience that also teaches. Good interpretation of the resources adds immensely to the learning experience and overall enjoyment. A satisfying experience that meets visitor expectations will generate repeat customers and positive recommendations.

Once you have an adequate assessment of your natural and cultural resources, think about what activities you could offer that best fit with your current operation and interests. Start slow and focus on what you can do best based on your resource assessment and financial resources. Consider the preferences and abilities of other family members and employees. Be honest with yourself about your temperament, time, management ability and preferences for certain type of activities and people.

For many agricultural landowners, marketing nature-tourism activities is the most difficult part of starting a new business. It often is easier for people of the land to understand the resources themselves than how to sell the experience of those resources to others. Marketing is vitally important, however, as the time and energy invested in researching and developing a business endeavor is wasted if potential customers are not aware of its existence. Some of the most important marketing principles are:

First, identify the market segment that you want to attract. Segmentation allows businesses to divide a homogenous market into smaller groups, see the diversity among customers and concentrate on pleasing a segment that might find their product or service attractive.

Visit an existing business that has a product or market segment similar to the one you are considering. If you want to attract birders, visit an enterprise that offers birdwatching experiences or targets a particular segment of the birding market. Searching the Internet for related websites provides contact information, as well as information on activities and pricing.

Networking with others involved in the tourism industry provides valuable information and gives you the opportunity to meet potential customers. Develop a close relationship with your nearest Chamber of Commerce or CVB if you want to establish your business as a destination for travelers to your area.

Encourage partnerships between two or more businesses so that everyone benefits. Partnering allows small businesses to pool talent and resources to create a product that is more attractive than any one business can provide on its own. Tour packages are a good example. Cooperating with other landowners, lodging facilities and restaurants in your area attracts more visitors to your destination and encourages them to stay longer and spend more money.

Most grazing lands are blessed with an abundance of wildlife and natural beauty, and opportunities abound for sharing this natural heritage with visitors from the local area, from other states, and all over the world. For some landowners, diversifying agricultural income through nature-based tourism can be both enjoyable and profitable. For more information, contact Linda Campbell, Nature Tourism Coordinator, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Austin, Texas (512-389-4396).

ROOTER BRITE HONORED

From an article by Worth Wren, Jr., Agricultural Reporter, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

J.K. "Rooter" Brite, Jr. , member of the GLCI National Steering Committee representing the National Association of Conservation Districts, was recently honored as a recipient of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram Farm and Ranch Award. Brite was selected for the award from more than 220 nominees in 22 north Texas counties. Honorees are selected because they represent the most skilled, hardest working, and most successful people in agriculture in the north Texas area.

Brite's JA Ranch near Bowie, TX consists of more than 3,200 acres. He, his wife Lynda, and their son J.K. operate the ranch with the assistance of one full-time hired hand. Rooter says that no ranch can survive without investing in soil, water, and range conservation. The Brite family has made, and continues to make, that kind of investment every year on their ranch. Weed control is used in pastures when needed to help increase grass growth at critical times. Rooter also uses a high-density, short-duration grazing rotation to allow his cattle to graze highly nutritious grass. Grazed pastures then receive periodic rests to allow grasses to regrow, produce seed, and regain vigor. Grazing schedules are adjusted as needed because of changing weather conditions, available forage, market conditions, and other factors.

Because of drought conditions in 3 of the last 4 years, Rooter has had to sacrifice some short-term cattle income in order to achieve long-term benefits for the grass, soil, and water. He says that he must have a "sustainable inventory" of grass in order to make his operation successful. To ensure that he has adequate forage, he has reduced his cow herd by about 25% and is prepared to make further reductions within the next three months if the drought persists.

In spite of recent unfavorable conditions, the JA Ranch continues to maintain abundant, productive, and nutritious grasses; quality cattle; and a profitable, sustainable ranching operation.

DENNIS W. NEFFENDORF

NATIONAL GLCI COORDINATOR

Dennis W. Neffendorf has been selected for the position of National GLCI Coordinator replacing Gary K. Westmoreland who recently retired. Dennis has most recently served as State Resource Conservationist and State GLCI Coordinator for NRCS in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Dennis received his undergraduate degree in Agronomy from Tarleton State University and a Master of Science degree in Soil Ecology from Texas A&M University. He began his career with NRCS in 1972. He worked as a Soil Conservationist at Seguin and George West, Texas; as an Agronomist at San Benito and Lubbock, Texas; as a District Conservationist at Robstown, Texas; and as State Agronomist at Lakewood, Colorado before coming to Minnesota.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GRAZING LANDS

DECEMBER 5-8, 2000 • BALLY'S LAS VEGAS, NV

You are invited !

Accepting abstracts for the following categories:

- **Building partnerships between agricultural, grazing, and urban communities**
- **Successful "cutting edge" management technologies for grazing practices**
- **Economic and public policy implications of grazing**
- **Optimizing grazing land health for environmental and social benefits**

To submit an abstract you need to prepare a 400 word or less description of your presentation (indicate oral or poster). Include your name, mailing address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address with the abstract. Submit abstracts by mail, fax, or e-mail to:

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DEADLINE for Abstracts - APRIL 1, 2000

Abstracts will not be returned. Notification of accepted abstracts will begin in June, 2000. **Presenters are responsible for providing their own travel, registration, and other expenses for the conference.**

"THE CHAIR'S CORNER"

The National Steering Committee continues its efforts to highlight the value of the nation's grazing lands. I, along with other steering committee members, have traveled extensively to get the word out. Steering Committee members have been working with their respective organizations to emphasize the GLCI priorities of increased technical assistance, research and education.

The President's Budget was recently released, and we are reviewing it to determine the impact it will have on our priorities. GLCI supports $60 million for the Conservation of Private Grazing Lands and $100 million for Conservation Technical Assistance.

We have been working diligently to ensure that the National Conference on Grazing Lands will be an outstanding success. John Peterson, Conference Coordinator, is taking the lead as conference organizer and is working with established committees to ensure a first class operation. State GLCI organizations are encouraged to send Peterson information about potential sponsors, exhibitors and speakers.

The following subcommittees are planning the conference:

Program - Chair Jack Cutshall - Completed development of a draft program and list of potential speakers. Will review abstracts for all submitted papers and posters. Program agenda and list of speakers will be finalized by early June.

Sponsorship - Chair Bob Drake - Seeking sponsors for the conference and for various functions during the conference. A brochure has been developed and is being distributed to potential sponsors.

Exposition - Chair Rooter Brite – Soliciting participation for the trade show and exhibits which will be an integral part of the conference. Developed a pricing structure and will be mailing exhibitor packets to potential participants in the near future. Many activities, including a mixer, are planned in the trade show area. Bally's has excellent facilities for hosting a large expo.

Marketing – Chair Roy Deason - Informational materials have been developed for distribution. A mailing list is being developed and information regarding registration will be mailed within the next month.

Social - Chair Gretchen Sammis - A variety of social events are planned, information will be included in the program. Most activities (lunches, dinners, and socials) will be included as part of the registration.

Local Arrangements – Chair Aggie Helle - Exploring a variety of opportunities that conference participants might participate in while attending the conference. Las Vegas should prove suitable to providing opportunities to meet most expectations. The Pro Rodeo Finals will be occurring at the same time as the conference with tickets being available through various outlets.

BOB DRAKE, Chairman
National GLCI Steering Committee

GLCINews

Contact these affiliated organizations:

American Farm Bureau Federation
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(202) 484-3608

American Forage and Grassland Council
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1-800-944-2342

American Sheep Industry
Tom McDonnell
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Dairy Industry
Jack Laurie
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National Association of Conservation Districts
Robert Toole
(405) 359-9011

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Myra B. Hyde
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Society for Range Management
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Soil and Water Conservation Society
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(515) 289-2331, ext. 13

Visit the GLCI homepage at http://www.glci.org