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Leasing for waterfowl supports watershed conservation

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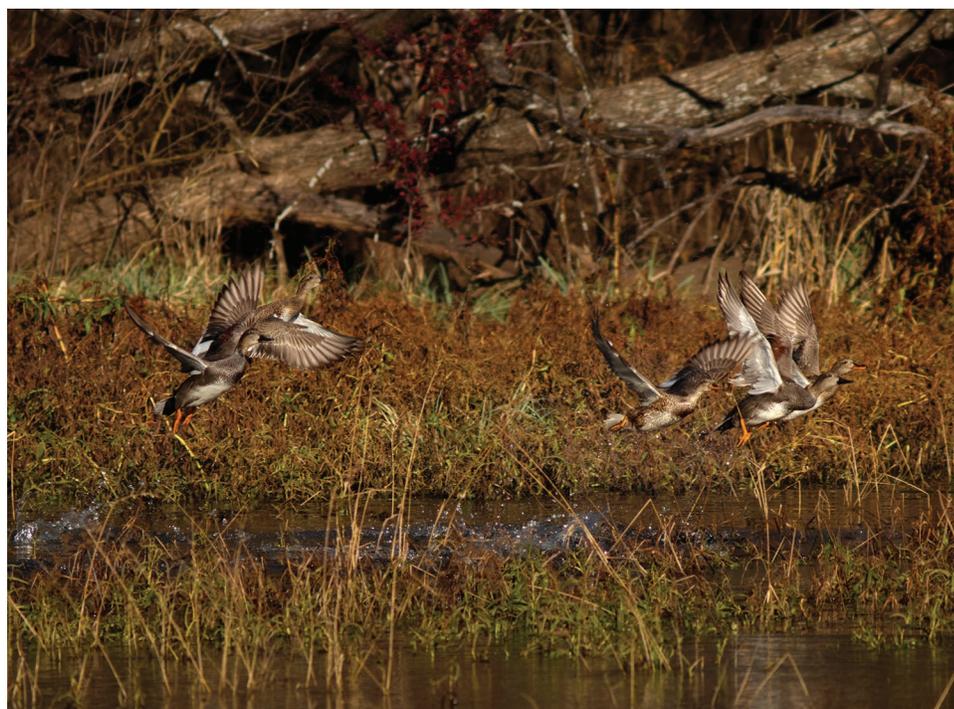
Recreational

leases have gained popularity in Texas and Oklahoma because they provide additional income and support land management

goals. Recreational leases for waterfowl are not uncommon, and committing one or more water resources to this practice may help promote good land stewardship.

Unfortunately, in most areas, the days of knocking on a landowner's door and gaining permission to hunt are gone, and waking up at 3 a.m. to beat other hunters to the best spot on public land can age a hunter quickly. Because hunters are looking for something more stable and convenient than the hassles of public land hunting, finding interested hunters may be easy.

The price for access to hunt waterfowl is highly variable and dependent upon a number of variables including but not limited to the number of water bodies available to hunt, acreage, quantity and variety of birds, consistency of birds, quality of hunting, blinds, and other amenities offered. Some landowners may grant access in exchange for labor or habitat improvements, while others



try to optimize income from leased hunting and commonly charge \$25 to \$100 per acre for access to waterfowl impoundments.

Waterfowl hunting opportunities for avid hunters can be limited due to competition on public hunting areas, low availability of quality habitat or water, or low abundance of birds. Hunters who want a place to go for a quality hunting experience may consider leasing access to private property. Furthermore, because hunters place high value on having a

spot with stability, convenience and exclusive access, they are often interested in improving habitat to attract more birds.

Some impoundments are more attractive than others to prospective lessees. Making impoundments more attractive to perspective lessees means making them more attractive to waterfowl. Aquatic vegetation is one of the most important characteristics when attracting waterfowl to an impoundment. Some landowners decide, in lieu of ►

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grazing to the water's edge, it may be more profitable to conserve aquatic and shoreline vegetation, and maintain good water quality to earn income from leased hunting.

For most producers, leased waterfowl hunting is not the primary source of income for their properties, thus making a decision to lease waterfowl hunting rights may require an assessment of current agricultural practices. Certain practices limit habitats suitable for waterfowl or waterfowl hunting. Wetland ecosystems can be sensitive to disturbances such as those created by congregations of grazing

animals. If livestock have unlimited access to wetlands, they commonly impact plant composition and abundance. Overgrazing and excessive trampling of plants in watersheds, streams or impoundments may lead to poor water quality (muddy ponds hinder growth of aquatic plants) and increased soil erosion. Eroded or bare soil watersheds also make poor waterfowl habitat. Fencing livestock out of impoundments is one way to ensure watersheds and water interfaces maintain vegetative cover. If livestock need access to water in an impoundment, creating a water access point that funnels all of the

activity to a small, stable portion of the pond bank is an option. See how to construct a livestock water access point at <http://bit.ly/nf-ge-96-02> and <http://bit.ly/nf-ge-97-01>.

Planning to establish lease-worthy impoundments can improve your stewardship of the resource, generate a new source of income for the property and create relationships with hunters willing to lend a hand when it comes to wildlife conservation on your property.

View or advertise waterfowl hunting and recreational lease listings at <http://bit.ly/hunting-lease-registry>. ■