

In Brief: How to Establish and Maintain a Fee Hunting Program

SUMMARY

Fee hunting can contribute to the enhancement of wildlife and provide a good source of supplemental ranch income. This can help to ensure a profitable ranching operation. Established programs are available to fit the goals and requirements of most ranchers. Indeed, these programs blend well with the rancher's talents and experiences because they are directly applicable to wildlife management.

Elaboration and Links

A. Why a Fee Hunting Program is Important

1. Plight of Ranching

Ranches are going out of business because of lack and low stability of income. Fee hunting has necessary offshoots that include the maintenance and improvement of wildlife habitat, scenic value, and other public benefits. Importantly, it is suitability to a traditional ranching operation and the skills and experiences of the rancher in managing the cattle operation. Said differently, you manage wildlife like you would cattle.

2. How Fee Hunting Can Help

Many ranchers have an innate interest and love of open spaces and the wildlife that these open spaces provide. That's why they do what they do. However, they are not always familiar with the opportunities that their ranch provides for a fee hunting operation that can greatly benefit ranch economics by providing a source of income from year to year that can be counted on. In addition to the economic benefits, the members of a well-managed fee hunting operation can help with the general management and improvement of the ranch, such as with water development and water line repairs, habitat enhancement projects. It can provide ranch security, including protection from poachers, unwanted traffic, vandalism, and property destruction. Running a ranch is like a pizza. It consists of many pieces, such as the cattle operation, farming, vineyards, bee hives, and a hunting operation. It takes all of the pieces to make the whole operation work. If you take any one piece away, including the hunting operation, you may not have enough to go around. Fee hunting can provide a good source of supplemental income for the ranch along with helping to enhance wildlife.

B. What is Required

Although the number of members that the ranch can support is the most important determiner of the "ranch profit" from fee hunting, there is a program to fit nearly any rancher's needs. A hunt club run by the ranch owner and/or a hunt-club manager is one option, whereas the California Department of Fish and Wildlife runs the Private Lands Management program (PLM; <<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Hunting/PLM>>). In any case, a written management plan developed by the ranch owner and hunt club manager as to what you want to achieve is essential. The plan should include bylaws developed by the club and owner and should be reviewed and adjusted yearly as needed. A harvest quota should be in place for each species of huntable wildlife and

adjusted as needed from time to time. In essence, it is important to be open and honest on what it is you want to achieve.

C. Fee Hunting Assistance Available

California Department of Fish and Wildlife Private Lands Management Program (PLM):

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Hunting/PLM>
