

POTENTIAL PROFITS FROM WILDLIFE

Russell Gum¹

As ranchers look for ways to increase profitability the possibility of marketing wildlife resources is often thought of as an additional product that might generate income. In Texas the income of many ranchers depends heavily upon the marketing of wildlife resources. In Wyoming many ranchers serve as big game guides as a means of supplementing their income from ranching. Is there a possibility that wildlife resources could become a source of income for Arizona ranchers?

WAYS OF MARKETING WILDLIFE RESOURCES

There are many ways to market wildlife resources. Possibilities include:

1. Selling access to hunters.
2. Selling guided hunts.
3. Raising wildlife for the restaurant market.
4. Raising exotic game for hunters.
5. Selling hunting permits.

ACCESS

Selling access to hunters is probably the most common means of marketing wildlife resources. The basic requirements to be able to sell access is to

have both private land and a means to control access to this land. If you can meet these requirements then you have to find a way to market the product.

GUIDED HUNTS

Since ranchers typically have the equipment and knowledge of their area required to perform guiding service, many ranchers have turned to guiding as a means of generating income. However, guiding requires both excellent hunting abilities and the ability to take care of camp and get along with the hunters paying for the guiding services.

RAISE WILDLIFE FOR THE RESTAURANT MARKET

A small but growing number of fancy restaurants are now serving wild game. Producing game meat for this select market is a possibility. Not only do you need to be able to produce and market this product, you will need processing facilities and the ability to operate under a large number of regulations with respect to selling wild game.

RAISING EXOTICS FOR HUNTERS

Another possibility is to raise exotics for hunters. Obviously in addition to being able to raise the animals, you will need fencing to be able to keep the animals on your ranch. You will also face exotic disease problems and regulations on game farms. The marketing of exotics is also a potential problem. You can't just take them to the local auction.

SELL PERMITS

At the present time, hunting permits in Arizona are the property of the state

and are allocated by a lottery. Under this arrangement there is little incentive for ranchers to manage their resources in a manner that will increase wildlife. A logical change in the system would be to reward ranchers for management practices which increase wildlife resources. For example, the state could allocate permits to ranchers and allow the ranchers to sell these big game permits as compensation for the ranchers efforts to increase wildlife resources. If as a result of a ranchers actions an additional 10 elk permits could be justified in an area, why not allow the rancher to sell these permits as a reward. Such a system has been tried in California. The major problem of course is to document the increase in wildlife due to the ranchers management actions.

Such a system could, in theory, also be applied to public lands. Suppose a rancher has a lease which allows him to graze 400 cows. Why couldn't he only graze 300 cows and manage for an additional 200 elk? If his management did in fact result in an additional

200 elk, which justified say an additional 50 permits, why not charge him grazing fees for the additional elk and allow him to sell the additional 50 permits?

CONCLUSIONS

Marketing wildlife has potential to increase rancher income. However, just as with any new enterprise, there are many obstacles to be overcome. First, there are a multitude of rules and regulations which apply to marketing wildlife. Second, all of the methods of marketing wildlife require more marketing effort than just taking cows to the auction. Third, many of the methods of marketing wildlife require skills and abilities in working with people not normally required in managing a cattle ranch. Guiding hunters, for example, requires skills similar to a golf pro at a resort. While marketing wildlife is certainly not a quick fix for low profits in ranching, it does offer potential for increasing ranch income in well thought out and well managed situations.

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