

# Landowners, hunters benefit from leasing private property

By DAVID LOWE  
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If planned carefully, deer leases can provide Central Texas landowners with a reliable source of income and can help them manage their wildlife populations.

Lease rates vary based on several factors, including the quality of deer available, the condition of ranch roads, the amount of land made available to hunters and whether the leased property features amenities such as deer cabins, said Jason Byrd, Texas AgriLife Extension agent for Lampasas County.

The body and antler condition of bucks have the greatest effect on lease prices, Byrd said, although the size of a lease probably ranks as the second most important factor.

"If you have 250 acres, you can't charge as much as if you have 2,500 acres," Byrd said.

Many leases in Lampasas County, the AgriLife Extension agent said, cost \$10 to \$15 per acre and allow hunters year-round access to the property so they can set up blinds and pursue birds or other animals in addition to deer.

A smaller number of landowners, Byrd said, lease with a per-gun charge and only open their property to hunters during the hunting season.

Property owners can make more money through a hunting lease than a livestock grazing agreement, Byrd said. Although property owners still can hunt on their land when they have grazing leases, most landowners do not hunt on their property when they lease to other hunters.

Those who lease property both for grazing and hunting should make sure the land is not overstocked with sheep or goats, Byrd said. Because those livestock, like deer, browse for much of their food, having too many ruminants on a ranch can deprive deer of the nutrition they need for growth and antler development, he said.

Along with stocking rates, landowners and hunters should consider brush management, Byrd said. Although brush can benefit deer, Byrd said it should be managed so game animals have room to browse and so hunters have sufficient open areas in which to shoot.

Like clearing land, negotiating a hunting agreement is not exclusively an autumn chore.

"People are looking for leases year-round," Byrd said.

Rather than retaining an attorney, most landowners develop their lease agreements based on samples, which are available through the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Byrd said.

In their contracts, landowners should specify starting and ending dates for the lease, whether a lease continues if property ownership changes -- Byrd said leases

## Resources available

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University have a number of resources available for landowners considering hunting leases. Web site links follow.

- **Management deer hunts:** <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/private/hunt/deer/>

- **Managed Lands Deer Permits:** [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/permits/land/wildlife\\_management/mldp/#](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/permits/land/wildlife_management/mldp/#). From that page, links are available to information about Wildlife Management Plans, the Antlerless and Spike-Buck Deer Control Permits Program, white-tailed deer Managed Lands Deer permits and mule deer MLDP.

For additional information, contact a TPWD wildlife biologist or technician through the following Web site: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/habitats/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/habitats/).

- **Deer lease guide:** Written by senior lecturer and attorney Judon Fambrough, "The Texas Deer Lease" is a detailed guide to lease scheduling, legal concerns, wildlife management and other issues landowners often consider when negotiating a hunting lease. "The Texas Deer Lease" is available at <http://recenter.tamu.edu/pdf/570.pdf>.

often remain in effect -- and the extent of landowners' liability.

A typical contract clause, the Extension agent said, states that lessors are not liable for injuries or accidents, except those that result from landowner negligence. If a hunting cabin roof collapses and causes injuries, for example, the lessor typically is held liable, Byrd said.

"The Texas Deer Lease," a detailed informational report written by attorney Judon Fambrough for the Real Estate Center, discusses several categories of liability. The report also mentions safety provisions lessors may want to include in their contracts.

A notary public should sign the contract to make it legally binding, Byrd said.

After a year or two of successfully leasing their property, landowners often develop "a good working relationship" with their lessees, Byrd said. At the same time, hunters tend to continue leasing the same property.

As a result, landowners usually have a steady annual source of income off their land. Hunters without property of their own, however, often have to search hard for a ranch available for lease.

"Deer leases are hard to come by in Lampasas County," Byrd said.

Because hunters pay premium prices to shoot a buck, many property owners do not limit their lessees strictly to harvesting doe.

Landowners can negotiate lease agreements with TPWD for the harvesting of surplus deer, however. A limited number of hunters are selected through TPWD drawings for either antlerless/spike buck hunts or either-sex hunts.

Landowners define the type of bucks they will allow to be killed in either-sex

number and type of hunter positions offered. Payments are about \$150 for each antlerless/spike hunter and \$500 for each management buck hunter.

In addition, some Lampasas County ranch owners participate in TPWD's Managed Lands Deer Permits program, Byrd said. Property owners with Managed Lands Deer Permits have more flexible hunting seasons and increased harvest quotas.

MLDP has allowed many deer statewide to be killed outside of the regular hunting season, he said.

To participate in the program, landowners contract with a TPWD biologist or technician to develop a Wildlife Management Plan, a prerequisite for a Managed Lands permit. The management plan uses a fall deer population survey to establish annual harvest recommendations for does and/or bucks, depending on which of the three permit levels a landowner tries to obtain.

For more information about Managed Lands Deer Permits, phone Derrick Wolter, wildlife biologist for the 25-county Texas Hill Country district -- which includes Lampasas County -- at (254) 501-4125. Mike Krueger, the Kerrville-based district leader, can be reached at (830) 896-2500.

David Lowe is a staff writer for the Lampasas Dispatch Record.



### WHITE-TAILED DEER

Archery Season: **Oct. 3-Nov. 6**

General Season: **Nov. 7-Jan. 3**

Special Late General Season: **Jan. 4-17**  
(antlerless and spike buck only)

**Bag limit 5. No more than 2 bucks all seasons combined.**

### SQUIRREL

**No closed season. No bag limit.**



### TURKEY

Archery Season: **Oct. 3-Nov. 6 (either sex).**

Fall Season: **Nov. 7-Jan. 3 (either sex).**

Spring Season: **April 3-May 16 (gobblers only).**

**Bag limit for all seasons combined: 4 per license year.**

### DOVE

General Season: **Sept. 1-Oct. 25 and Dec. 26-Jan. 9.**

Daily bag limit: **15 mourning, white-winged and white-tipped doves, to include not more than 2 white-tipped.**

Possession limit: **twice the daily limit.**



### QUAIL

General Season: **Oct. 31-Feb. 28.**

Daily bag limit: **15 quail.**

Possession limit: **45 quail.**