

Pond Leases Can Catch Angling Dollars

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As a source of income, landowners can lease the fishing rights to their ponds and small lakes to anglers. Ponds and small lakes that provide quality fishing for largemouth bass or panfish such as bluegill or redear sunfish are prime candidates for long-term leasing. In addition to quality fishing, location and aesthetics are often important selling points. Most people fish to relax or to escape the hustle and bustle of their daily lives. They desire a quality fishing experience.

Unlike hunting leases, which generally require a large quantity of land to support adequate game, fishing leases can be rather small. With proper management, one acre of water can easily produce 300 to 400 pounds of harvestable-size sportfish. So a small number of acres of water can produce many hours of productive fishing.

Steps to Follow

The major steps involved in leasing a pond are (1) locating the individual or group of individuals that wishes to lease fishing rights, (2) establishing the terms of the lease, and (3) drawing up the written lease.

Interested parties can be contacted through word of mouth or through newspaper or magazine advertisements. The amount of effort and money that is expended in locating possible lessees should depend upon the quality of the fishery and the location and visual attractiveness of the site. These factors will also determine the value of the lease. A trophy bass fishery, in close proximity to a large metropolitan area and at an attractive site, should bring top dollar. Adequate effort should be expended to ensure that the best price is obtained by the property owner.

The lease should describe the rights and responsibilities of each party. In particular, (1) who will have access/fishing rights to the pond; (2) how long the lease will be in force; (3) the price per year; (4) under what conditions the lease can be broken; (5) any fishing limits or regulations that are to be followed; (6) other privileges that are included in the price such as camping or swimming; (7) what management practices will be followed (*i.e.*, aquatic weed control, lake drawdown, and stocking); (8) who will provide the cost of seeing the work through; and (9) what privileges will be retained by the owner.

The lease should be drawn up with the advice of an attorney, certified public accountant, fisheries biologist and/or other professionals. The lease can be an informal agreement that is not written down if the two parties know and trust each other. Generally, it is highly recommended to have a written lease.

Costs and returns

The major costs to the pond owner will be in locating a suitable lessee and having the lease drawn up. Advertisement costs can be highly variable. The cost of having the lease prepared by an attorney should be minimal. Any work requested by the lessees and liability insurance is generally paid for by the lessees.

Returns for fishing leases in Florida vary substantially from less than \$100 per year to almost \$100,000 per year. Lease prices vary primarily due to the size of the water body and the quality of the fishing, but also due to site location and configuration. The renewal price of

the lease is often linked to the CPI (Consumer Price Index).

Advantages and Limitations

A long-term fishing lease can be beneficial to the land owner. The pond owner needs only to deal with one or several individuals on an occasional basis, minimizing his labor. The landowner will have someone on the property looking after it, decreasing potential problems with theft, vandalism and fire. This should be particularly appealing for absentee landowners. Often the lessee will "post" the land for the landowner which will further serve to limit trespass problems.

One limitation to this form of fee fishing is that not all ponds have suitable fisheries, locations or aesthetics to interest someone into desiring to lease the fishing rights. The typical long-term leased lake

also tends to be larger in size than what many land owners have available on their property.

Sources of Information

Contact your County Extension Agent for additional information on fee fishing and pond management.

References

- Cichra, Charles. E. 1989. "Managing Florida Ponds for Fishing." Florida Cooperative Extension Service Circular 802. Gainesville, Florida.
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- Higginbotham, Billy J. and Greg M. Clary. 1992. "Development and Management of Fishing Leases." Southern Regional Aquaculture Center Publication No. 481, Stoneville, Mississippi.