wildlife REVIEW

UTAH DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

More outdoor fun on private land

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A blue pickup is parked on the gravel outside the fence, and its owner is nowhere in sight. There's a good chance that he or she walked onto Arlin Judd's rural property and wandered down to fish for trout in the Weber River.

Arlin and his visitor probably don't know each other—and might never meet—but that's okay. His land is open to the public as part of Utah's Walk-In Access program.

New places to hunt and fish

Launched in 2006, the Walk-In Access program gives hunters, anglers and trappers unprecedented access to thousands of acres of private land across Utah.

It's a program that benefits everyone. Wildlife enthusiasts can recreate in new areas, and landowners earn money for opening their properties to the public.

Here's a summary of the program:

- The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) pays qualified landowners who open their properties to the public for wildlife-related recreation.
- The DWR works closely with each landowner to customize a plan and outline the terms of access.
- The public can then use the area—on foot only—to hunt, fish or trap wildlife.

By early 2008, there were more than 60,000 acres of Walk-In Access properties located across the northern half of Utah. With continued success, the program may expand into the state's southern half in years to come.

Diverse habitats and wildlife

If you enjoy hunting and fishing in Utah, the Walk-In Access program offers an adventure with each property you visit.

There are calm, slow rivers with undercut banks, and mountain slopes dotted with pines and aspen. Some properties include sagebrush, shrubs and agricultural land while others consist of oaks, maples, wildflowers, evergreens and other vegetation.

These diverse habitats support many species. Depending on where you are, you might see one or more of the following animals:

- Deer
- Pheasant
- Forest grouse
- Elk
- Chukar partridge
- Mourning dove
- Moose
- Hungarian partridge
- Waterfowl
- Pronghorn
- Sage-grouse
- Sandhill crane
- Turkey
- Sharp-tailed grouse
- Cottontail rabbit

Keep in mind that vehicles are prohibited in nearly all Walk-in Access areas. By limiting visitors to foot traffic, landowners can better preserve both agricultural land and wildlife habitat.

Landowner requirements

The Walk-In Access program strives to provide you with a memorable hunting or fishing trip. That's why the DWR is selective about the properties it enrolls.

Landowners who want to participate must meet one of the following criteria:

- Own at least 80 contiguous (or connected) acres
- Own at least 40 contiguous acres of wetland or riverbank habitat
- Own or provide access to at least 0.25 mile of stream or river
- Own or provide access to at least a five-acre pond or lake
- Provide access to isolated public land*

**There are exceptions to the minimum acreage required if the land provides access to public land that is otherwise inaccessible.*

In addition, the property must provide good habitat for wildlife and support a reasonable number of species.

Before finalizing the contract, a DWR representative meets with the landowner to evaluate the property and to determine if it meets acreage, habitat and wildlife requirements.

Great turkey hunting

Turkey hunting is on the rise throughout Utah, but many of these big birds roam on private land that has been historically difficult to access.

As of spring 2008, there were a handful of Walk-In Access areas that offered excellent opportunities to hunt turkeys. These properties are located in the Cache Valley and East Canyon areas of the state.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is working with prospective landowners and hopes to open additional Walk-In Access areas to turkey hunters in the upcoming months and years.

All currently enrolled properties are listed at *www.wildlife.utah.gov/walkinaccess*. By clicking the property links, you can identify areas that have turkey populations.

Landowner compensation

If a property qualifies for the program, compensation depends on two criteria: the size of the property and how long it's enrolled. Larger tracts of land—and long-term agreements—are worth more money.

Annual compensation ranges from a few hundred dollars to more than $1,600. And with two- or three-year agreements, landowners receive an additional monetary bonus (five or 10 percent, respectively).

The program is extraordinarily flexible. In addition to signing short- or long- term contracts, landowners can choose to end their agreements with only 30 days' written notice—but this rarely happens.

Most landowners like what they see. Approximately 95 percent have renewed their contracts since the program began in 2006.

Other benefits

In addition to monetary compensation, landowners also receive:

- Assistance in managing wildlife on their property

- Occasional conservation officer patrols of the area
- Assistance in posting the property, so visitors know where they can hunt, fish or trap, and which species they are permitted to take
- A registration box or kiosk that includes a map of the property, a list of any special requirements and a sign-in book
- Liability coverage under Utah law (per Title 57, Chapter 14 of the Utah Code)

One of the best aspects of Utah's Walk-In Access program is that it doesn't require a huge time commitment from landowners. They assist DWR staffers with a few preliminary decisions:

- Designating a parking area
- Deciding how and when the property will be accessed
- Identifying where signs should be posted

However, these obligations require very little time and effort. A landowner's primary responsibility is to grant access to the property.

More opportunities

As a member of the public, you benefit most from the Walk-In Access program.

Thousands of acres that were previously off limits are now open. And each property offers unique terrain and challenges.

Much of this land is agricultural and delivers a different type of hunting and trapping experience than you'll find on public land.

The program also features many miles of streams for anglers. There are streams on private land as well as streams and ponds on isolated public land. Depending on when you go, you could easily be the only angler on the water.

Another benefit is that most Walk-In Access areas are relatively close to cities and towns. You can hunt and fish near home and might even have time for a quick trip after work or school!

Common courtesy

Of course, with increased access comes additional responsibility. Whatever area you visit, you must respect both the landowner and his or her property. The success of the program depends on it.

You can show respect by following the rules for each property and by leaving the land in better condition than you found it. One way to accomplish this is by picking up any trash and litter you see, even if it isn't yours.

You should also keep in mind that each Walk-In Access

property has different rules and regulations. Some landowners:

- Allow you to hunt species that others won't permit
- Prefer to have you sign in and out at the registration kiosk—no contact necessary
- Require you to contact them by phone or e-mail before you access the property

It is your responsibility as a hunter or angler to research each property you will be using.

Before you go, know the rules, regulations and boundaries specific to that property. You can find this information online at *www.wildlife.utah.gov/walkinaccess/property_index.php* or on the property's registration kiosk.

Funding and future growth

Utah's Walk-In Access program is currently funded by hunting and fishing license sales, donations from nonprofit wildlife organizations and appropriations from the state legislature.

It has been a successful, solid investment that has opened exciting new opportunities for wildlife recreation in Utah. Continued success and additional funding will help the program expand in years to come.

For more information on Utah's Walk-In Access program—and to find the best hunting and fishing properties near you—visit *www.wildlife.utah.gov/walkinaccess.*