

PAID HUNTING - 1939

Observations which were made during the hunting season seem to indicate that paid hunting of farm game is definitely on the increase in certain sections of the state. This situation is most noticeable in Bay, Huron, St. Clair and Sanilac Counties, with Sanilac by far the leader. Charging for the privilege of using the land for hunting purposes can be divided into three situations:

1. A charge made by individual farmers for hunting a single farm.
2. The leasing of an area for hunting by a few men to the exclusion of all others.
3. The organization of a large number of farms into a cooperative where a charge is made for a hunter to have the privilege of going on the land.

Examples of land owners charging to hunt their individual farms are numerous. This charge ranges from 25 cents to \$1.00. This practice is usually confined to farms of at least 100 acres, since hunters are not inclined to pay for the use of a smaller area. The motive appears to be an opportunity to secure some remuneration, since through a charge trespass difficulty for the individual farm is not decreased. Friends and relatives are still admitted free - only the stranger being subjected to the charge, and hunters trespassing on his land without permission continues. One farmer in Sanilac County who had a sign in front of his house advertising hunting for \$5.00 per person and no dog allowed, said that while

trespass was as bad as ever, at least no one bothered him by inquiring for permission to hunt. Another farmer in a neighboring section stated that he had taken in \$27.00 from hunters at \$1.00 per person. His farm was 275 acres in size. This income was large enough to warrant consideration.

The leasing of several farms to a number of sections of land by a few individuals as a private hunting area is appearing more common each fall. Again this was observed to be more prevalent in Sanilac County. Since the amount generally received per farm is small, it is evident that the chief motive of land owners is the control of trespass, the income being a secondary consideration. This assumption was verified upon talking to various farmers in these private clubs. An example of such an area is the Calinas Hunt Club. For one section of some of the best pheasant territory in Sanilac County, eighteen Detroit hunters paid the farmers \$125.00 or approximately 20 cents per acre for exclusive hunting rights. In addition they posted and patrolled the area. This not only provided the land owner with some remuneration, but also insured him an orderly harvest.

The only objection heard in connection with this procedure was the fact that after the land was leased to outsiders the friends and relatives of the land owner concerned were faced with the situation where they either could not hunt at all or they had to hunt

on neighboring land. Naturally envious neighbors would not look upon that practice with much favor.

Similar organizations were also found in St. Clair County. One of these private clubs embraced four sections of land. Each owner, regardless of the size of his farm, was paid \$5.00. The land was posted for him, but no patrol was given. The farmer was expected to keep outsiders off the land.

The type of paid hunting involving the most land is the organization or cooperative type where a group of farmers meet and agree to post their land as a unit, issue a limited number of tickets per farm for hunting very similar to the well-known Williamston Plan, but the individual is charged for these permits. Hunting is not reserved for any special group of hunters. Approximately 50,000 acres of good pheasant range in the Thumb is under this type of paid hunting. For the most part these areas are loosely organized. A friend or relative of the land owner has no difficulty in getting on the land without charge. It has even been found that a stranger providing he makes the proper approach to some of the members of such cooperatives may be let on as a non-paying guest. In some of these organizations one is limited to hunt only on farms issuing tickets, while others allow the guests to roam over larger areas. A regulation frequently found is one limiting the paying guest to the farm issuing tickets while a member of the club may

hunt over any land in the organization. Then, too, instances were found where membership tickets were sold to residents in nearby towns. These members were then allowed to hunt over any or all of the cooperative. The money thus obtained was used to pay special deputies and to post the club area. Very little in the way of financial return is secured by the farmer unless he has a large acreage of desirable pheasant cover. The local boy with a membership ticket is assured of almost unlimited hunting while the outsider must either pay a series of charges to individual farmers, locate a large farm and hope that there are not too many already there, move on to other territory or take a chance and trespass.

The chief advantage evidently obtained is the trespass protection secured from an organization employing special officers. Of course it must be admitted that some land owners take in enough money to make it a factor. One such land owner stated that his income this year was \$23.00. The chances are that an equal amount would have been received had he not joined the organization.

As stated in the beginning, these cooperatives are loosely organized. They are far from being solidly blocked and the turnover in membership is large. Where sections of their club join areas of wild land, trespass is not entirely controlled. Then too, a few object to the boys from town running over their farm without individual permission. In some of these areas I look for the next

transition step to be the leasing of blocks of such land by a small group of city hunters, as illustrated by the Sylvian Club which is located in the center of the Marlette Cooperative.

Without doubt the most successful paid hunting organization with which I am familiar in the state, is located in the area surrounding Port Sanilac in Sanilac County. Its success is unquestionably due to the rigid rules and regulations under which it operates, and in the quality of its leadership. This cooperative includes ten sections of land. Three tickets per day are allotted to each farmer to sell at \$1.00 each. These tickets are dated and a stub attached. No one is admitted on the area without a ticket, and the land owner is held accountable for the tickets allotted to him. If a stub is detached from the ticket he must turn in \$1.00 for it. When the guest hunter buys a ticket, the stub is removed by the farmer. The hunter then can hunt over the entire ten sections - but he must leave his car in the yard where he purchased his ticket, and start his hunting on foot from there. All money is turned over to the treasurer who pays for the posting and the salaries of the deputies. The net income is then prorated back to the farmer on an acreage basis. A season permit may be purchased by outsiders for \$5.00, and by the resident hunter in Port Sanilac for \$2.00. The only objection that I heard against the operation of this club involves the very reason that makes it successful - its rigid

regulations. Two farmers told me that they had close friends and relatives whom they would like to invite to hunt, but that they did not feel like charging them nor did they believe that they could pay \$1.00 for each of these guests. However, there is no regulation which would prevent these farmers from letting their particular guests on to hunt without charge, providing they limited their activities to the individual farms.

Even in this apparently successful organization the chief benefit derived is an orderly harvest, since not more than three to four cents per acre is returned to the farmer. I cannot predict the future of this club. It may continue on its present basis for some time, or it may follow the suggestion already given by Detroit hunters and raise the hunting permit fee for outsiders to a much higher figure. Then too there is a possibility of a group of hunters buying out the hunting privilege, either of the entire club or blocks of the present area. The only check on this procedure is the apparent desire not to discriminate too drastically against the residents of the town of Port Sanilac and secondly, their reluctance to surrender for a fee a place for themselves and their friends to hunt.

Conclusion

Paid hunting is apparently on the increase. This is especially so for the city hunter who wishes to hunt pheasants and who has no friends or relatives living on farms in the pheasant territory. Land

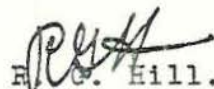
situated in areas where game is plentiful will, of course, be the first to come under paid hunting. The purpose is two-fold - a supplementary income and reduced trespass. At the present time the most satisfactory practices from the standpoint of the farmer and hunter concerned are leased areas by a few hunters; and, the charging of a fee by the owner of a large farm for the use of his land only.

Organized paid hunting is definitely handicapped. In every community there still are individuals who believe in the old American tradition of free hunting. Farms vary in size and game is mobile. In addition the ability to support game does not exist in proportion to size of the farm. From an organization standpoint the difficulty of distributing money will not exist as long as the charge for hunting is small enough so that only expenses are secured. Small farms at the present must belong to an organization if they hope to charge. Large farms situated in these organizations are ahead from the income viewpoint if they stay clear of the organization and operate independently. However, better trespass control can be secured through organized efforts. Many farmers look upon hunting as a courtesy that can be extended to relatives and friends without charge. In an organization of rural individuals one will usually find members who due to jealousy or neighborhood feuds will not allow the guests of one on the land of another. There are other land owners who believe

that a hunter who has paid for the privilege of hunting on his land will expect to be promised something in return. The use of land for the recreational value of walking in the great out-of-doors without bagging some trophies is not yet in demand. Then too some farmers believe that such persons after they have paid their rental will take more liberties on their land than they care to give them. Trespass control rather than income is still the primary consideration.

The city hunter has several alternatives: He can make friends with a land owner before the hunting season, he can marry the farmer's daughter, he can pay a fee for hunting privilege on a large farm or in paid hunting organizations, he can ask land owners for free hunting privileges on their farms, he can locate a Williamston Plan cooperative and find a possible hunting spot, he can go north and hunt without charge on the extensive state owned land, or he can now go to those areas in southern Michigan recently purchased for his use with federal and state funds.

One need not get overly concerned about paid hunting. There still are about 500,000 acres of free hunting in Williamston Plan cooperatives and probably 8,000,000 more acres where pheasant and cottontail rabbit hunting may be secured in southern Michigan through good conduct and respect for farmers' rights on the part of the hunter.


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