

# Issues Related to Hunting Access in the United States: Focus Group Results



**Produced by Responsive Management and the  
National Shooting Sports Foundation**

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and Administered by the Association of Fish and Wildlife  
Agencies**

**Multi-State Conservation Grant CT M-8-R**

**2008**



ASSOCIATION of  
FISH & WILDLIFE  
AGENCIES



# ISSUES RELATED TO HUNTING ACCESS IN THE UNITED STATES

## FOCUS GROUP RESULTS



**PRODUCED UNDER MULTI-STATE CONSERVATION GRANT CT M-8-R**

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The views contained in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Although numerous people assisted with this project, any errors, omissions, or typographical mistakes in the report are the sole responsibility of Responsive Management.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in cooperation with the National Shooting Sports Foundation under Multi-State Conservation Grant CT M-8-R to identify, quantify, and develop an in-depth understanding of the important issues affecting access to hunting lands in order to contribute to the development of appropriate program models and tools to address access issues. There has been a general decline in hunting participation for the past two decades. Much research has been devoted to assessing the decline in hunting participation and hunting dissatisfaction. One reason that hunters increasingly report as a cause of dissatisfaction is poor hunting access. Access problems negatively affect hunters by taking away from their enjoyment of hunting and/or causing them to hunt less often. Previous studies have shown that access is a leading reason for hunter dissatisfaction, and that not enough available hunting access is a significant factor that influences hunters' decision to stop hunting.

Scientific assessment of hunting access issues is crucial to developing appropriate programs that will effectively alleviate obstacles to access and improve access to lands by hunters. This study will provide research-based information to assist in the development of successful programs by identifying the factors that have an impact on access so that fish and wildlife and natural resources agencies and organizations know the exact extent and nature of access issues, know the elements of current programs that are most effective in addressing these issues, and can plan and develop hunting programs accordingly.

This report discusses the results of two focus groups of hunters held in Seattle, Washington, and Macon, Georgia, in June-July 2008. The study will also entail a nationwide telephone survey of hunters (including oversampling in 16 states where access programs are currently underway) to identify and quantify the full array of access issues facing hunters today and to assess the effectiveness of current access programs. One of the more important uses of these focus groups is in the development of the survey instrument.

## GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF HUNTING ACCESS

- Road closures and a general lack of available land were two of the major issues brought up in the initial discussion on access, which began with the moderator asking participants what came to mind when they thought of access. One participant in the Seattle group brought up the issue of knowing where to go to find hunting land. Another commonly discussed issue was public hunting land being blocked by private land, such as someone's yard or property.
- Several participants in the Macon group mentioned that they perceived access to be dwindling in some areas, especially access to private lands. On this point, some in the Macon group mentioned that while it used to be fairly easy to secure a landowner's permission to hunt on his/her property, this is generally not the case today.
- When asked their opinions on some of the major issues relating to hunting access, several hunters in the Seattle group discussed the closing of access roads and certain trails by locked gates. According to several participants in the Seattle group, gates tend to be problematic because many hunters are unsure of when and why they are put in place (one hunter said that gates appeared in one area during hunting season and disappeared the next season, with no clear reason being given). Others discussed the expenses involved in leasing land or using private land owned by timber companies.
- In the Macon group, several hunters discussed a general scarcity of land on which to hunt, and the expensive costs to lease land. One hunter in the Macon group mentioned that a hunting club was charging several times what he had originally paid for his membership (presumably to account for increased costs for land leases). Others in the Macon group mentioned that much land previously available for hunting is now being used for the construction of houses and subdivisions. Several Macon participants also noted property damage which sometimes left landowners wary of allowing hunters on their property, making access to private lands even more difficult.
- Seattle hunters also mentioned the need to secure funding for the maintenance of roads (not always guaranteed) as well as overcrowding issues on public lands. One participant also

mentioned using maps to locate lands for hunting, but being unsure as to whether the land was public, private, or closed altogether. Some of the Seattle hunters also noted the unfair nature in which some timber companies control access to their forests; some of these participants said that easements should be written into land use agreements in the initial phases of planning.

- Several of the Macon hunters discussed the issue of ATV and four-wheeler use on hunting lands, and how regulations often prohibited hunters from using such vehicles to bring their harvested game out of the forests. This was discussed in conjunction with the issue of closed roads: many of the Macon participants said they did not know how game wardens expected them to remove game from the land considering regulations prohibiting ATV and four-wheelers in certain areas.

### **AWARENESS OF PLACES TO GO FOR HUNTING ACCESS**

- The moderator asked hunters in the two groups about their general awareness of places to go to hunt (especially lands convenient to participants' homes). For the most part, hunters in the Seattle group did not report any great difficulties in finding lands on which to hunt, although some in the focus group noted that hunting land seems to be shrinking in general. One participant mentioned visiting a sporting goods store to learn about new hunting lands.
- In the Macon group, hunters appeared slightly more likely to report issues with knowing where to go to find hunting lands: one hunter mentioned having to travel a fair distance to finding hunting land, while another participant in the Macon group said that knowing the right people is the main way to ensure access to private lands for hunting.
- Several hunters in the Seattle group also mentioned time constraints relating to scouting out hunting lands on both maps and through actual travel, suggesting that the time required to devote to such activities is in and of itself a factor limiting hunting. Macon hunters mentioned that personally knowing private landowners and/or members of hunting clubs are among the best ways of finding good places to go for hunting. One participant in the Macon group also mentioned that although he was aware of game management areas on public land,

he preferred to stay away from such areas because of overcrowding and potentially unsafe behavior.

- The moderator asked about sources of information on places to hunt, and several in the Seattle group named friends and family, various maps (such as those provided by the state fish and game agency), and the state website's lists of harvest reports with location information. One person also mentioned scouting and traveling to learn about new hunting areas. Several Seattle hunters indicated support for a greater distribution of quadrangle maps with coordinates for hunting lands; some of these hunters reasoned that with the prevalence of GPS capabilities among hunters and recreationists, quadrangle maps could be put to good use in advertising hunting lands. According to these hunters, the key feature of such maps would be constantly updated information on closings, new lands, public versus private areas, etc.
- In the Macon group, outdoor/sportsman publications were named as a reliable source of information about hunting lands, but some in this group mentioned that finding out about hunting lands was a relatively small aspect of the overall problem of access. Otherwise, one or two Macon hunters mentioned the need for a centralized website with information on hunting lands available throughout the state—one Macon hunter compared this concept to Craigslist.org, an online network of classified advertisements.

## **ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH TRAVELING TO AREAS FOR HUNTING ACCESS**

- When asked about the issues associated with traveling to areas for hunting access, several Seattle hunters said they prefer to walk in to account for unreliable roads and trails, gates preventing access to roads and trails, and general prohibitions on ATVs and four-wheelers in many areas. One hunter made the point that good hunting cannot usually be found within one to two-hundred yards of main roads, which is what hunters are often restricted to.
- In the Macon group, hunters cited gas prices and the uncertainty in visiting lands and hunting areas which may not offer a full day's worth of hunting (due to a variety of unforeseen factors such as closed roads, a lack of trails, overcrowding, etc.). According to some of the

Macon participants, these tend to affect time and overall opportunities to hunt. A second major topic of discussion in the Macon group was the problem of removing harvested game from forests when regulations prohibiting ATVs and a lack of usable trails leave hunters with little options. Prohibitions on ATVs were also cited as a discouragement to older and/or disabled hunters.

- One Seattle hunter mentioned that Forest Service trails have declined in quality (he cited hunters having to clear trails themselves), while others in the Seattle group referred to trees blocking trails or roads. Some of the Macon hunters cited a lack of roads in general in some areas (although one hunter said that roads are less of a problem on private lands).

### **OPINIONS ON POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS AND AWARENESS OF CURRENT HUNTING ACCESS PROGRAMS**

- The moderator asked participants' general opinions of administrative or policy steps that could potentially improve hunting access. In the Seattle group of hunters, one participant referenced successful programs in North Dakota in which landowners are compensated for leaving open a portion of their properties to hunting. (According to this participant, hunting lands in Montana are already so open that access programs appear to be largely unnecessary.) Some others in the Seattle group said that user fees might be a good idea: such fees would allow serious hunters to gain a key to gates that would allow individual access while keeping out trespassers and those doing property or environmental damage. One Seattle hunter spoke of a new wilderness area that had opened, but that was apparently inaccessible to those without horses.
- For their part, several Macon hunters again mentioned the issue of being unable to conveniently remove game from the woods due to limitations on ATVs. Several in the group also addressed environmentalists, who they perceived as exerting an unfair influence over authorities orchestrating the closure of roads and/or hunting lands.
- When asked whether they were aware of any current agency-led efforts to improve access, a few Seattle hunters said that they thought the state fish and game agency was working to buy

additional parcels of land. Some others had heard about the agency working with timber companies to coordinate hunter access for the early hunting seasons.

- In the Macon group, most had not heard about statewide efforts to improve access through programs or initiatives, but several discussed limitations on lease prices by private landowners. Though nearly all agreed that prices frequently climb too high, essentially making the lands impossible to enjoy by all but the wealthy, some in the Macon group of hunters were skeptical about the regulating of lease prices. One Macon hunter said that game wardens occasionally exercise unfair authority over lands, effectively instigating closings or restrictions.
- In general, one of the few programs Seattle hunters expressed familiarity with was the “Feel Free to Hunt” program which designates available public lands for hunting; most were unenthusiastic about this program, as nearly all agreed that the lands were frequently overcrowded or devoid of game. One participant in the Seattle group had heard about a “walk-in” program in Montana, and said that such a program was needed in Washington (note that, in fact, Washington State does offer walk-in access to private hunting lands). Several Seattle hunters supported private landowners charging fees for hunters to use their properties (provided such fees were reasonable).
- In the Macon group of hunters, there were lower levels of awareness of programs through which landowners may be compensated for opening their properties to hunting. One of the participants mentioned having read about such programs in *American Hunter* magazine, but many were skeptical that landowner access programs would work very well with farmlands in Georgia (some participants said that there simply is not enough land in Georgia to support such programs). Some of these participants also mentioned liability issues.
- Both groups appeared highly sympathetic to the reluctance of landowners to invite hunters onto their properties; in each group, liability was a major point in the discussions. One hunter in the Macon group described the “sue-happy” nature of residents in Georgia, and several hunters in the Seattle group said that property damage and irresponsible behavior

were understandably justifiable reasons for landowners to discourage hunting on their properties. Although many hunters in the two groups appeared to agree that landowner access programs had the potential to alleviate access issues, most of these participants seemed highly aware of the ways in which such programs could cause problems for landowners.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

### **Locked Gates and Restricted Roads and Trails**

- It appears that locked gates which block or effectively close off roads and trails are an overarching issue affecting hunting access in multiple locations: locked gates were mentioned throughout both of the groups. In Seattle, participants were more likely to note that locked gates could positively influence hunting, such as by decreasing property and/or environmental damage. However, hunters in both groups noted the arbitrary nature of many locked gates (i.e., hunters often cannot discern any schedule or reason for the locking of certain gates). Some gates are recognized as the result of concerned landowners, timber companies, or state agencies; others, however, essentially appear to hunters out of nowhere, disrupting preferred hunting areas and adversely affecting hunting trips. Some hunters mentioned being forced to leave cars or trucks on main roads while they walked around the gates, only to discover vandalized vehicles upon returning.

### **Restricted ATV Use and Removal of Harvested Game**

- In direct connection with the issue of locked gates, many hunters (particularly those in the Macon group) mentioned the growing problem of trying to remove harvested game (such as deer) from forests without adequate trails, roads, or opportunities for ATVs. Many hunters in the groups made the point that although access is often possible through walking or hiking into hunting areas, the inability to remove game harvested essentially negates the point of the hunt for many hunters. Areas that fail to provide hunters with an opportunity to easily remove game were also viewed as highly discouraging to elderly or disabled hunters. A related issue appears to be inconsistent regulations controlling the use of ATVs and four-wheelers (or, at least, the *perception* of inconsistent regulations).

### **Leasing Costs**

- Hunters in the two groups discussed the problematic issue of the rising costs of leasing lands for hunting. This was cited in conjunction with the activities of hunting clubs, which arrange for their members to hunt on private lands. However, numerous participants in the groups expressed dismay over what they considered to be steep increases in hunting club fees and the fees for hunting land leases. Hunters would like more affordable opportunities to hunt on private lands, which tend to be preferred because they are less commonly overcrowded and tend to have more opportunities for harvesting game. Many hunters are open to the concept of user fees and most appear to support the concept of paying for the privilege: however, hunters would like to see fees kept within reason, as expenses themselves represent a substantial limitation to hunting.

### **Landowner Liability and Access Programs**

- Several Seattle hunters had heard about access programs in other states, such as North Dakota and Montana, while most of the Macon participants were not greatly aware of such programs. Most hunters support the concept of access programs, particularly those in which landowners would be compensated for opening their properties to hunting. At the same time, many participants in the groups expressed reservations about the likelihood of such programs achieving success. Hunters appear to be highly aware of the fact that irresponsible behavior, property damage, and overcrowding will act as strong discouragement to landowners who may be willing to allow hunting on their lands. Hunters are also well versed in the many issues relating to liability that affect landowners' decisions to allow hunters onto their properties. As a result, the focus groups suggest that although an overwhelming majority of hunters would support the goals and concepts driving such access programs (e.g., increased access to private lands, less overcrowding), hunters are also extremely skeptical that landowners will be persuaded to participate without comprehensive liability legislation.

### **Centralized Dissemination of Information on Hunting Access**

- The websites of state fish and game agencies may represent the best locations for centralized and comprehensive listings of access locations and public and private hunting lands. The key here is to provide constantly updated information providing hunters with the latest

developments in the availability of access and the status of hunting lands (possibly in real-time). Throughout the focus groups, hunters mentioned being frustrated when they researched hunting land/access information, only to later discover the land was not open, not public, vastly different from the description they had seen, etc. One participant in the Macon group said that Craigslist.org offered a good template for an easily-maintained and edit-friendly website suitable for listing hunting access information.

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## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

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Scientific assessment of hunting access issues is crucial to developing appropriate programs that will effectively alleviate obstacles to access and improve access to lands by hunters. This study will provide research-based information to assist in the development of successful programs by identifying the factors that have an impact on access so that fish and wildlife and natural resources agencies and organizations know the exact extent and nature of access issues, know the elements of current programs that are most effective in addressing these issues, and can plan and develop hunting programs accordingly. By acquiring baseline data on access issues and assessing the effectiveness of programs designed to improve hunter access, this project will provide research-based information to assist in efforts to reduce hunting access conflicts and improve and increase access to lands for hunting. This research will also help to more effectively utilize the hundreds of thousands of dollars of future grant money that will be provided to states for implementing access programs by indicating which current programs are having the greatest impact and by providing data to guide and increase the success of the efforts of new and current programs.

This report discusses the results of two focus groups of hunters held in Seattle, Washington, and Macon, Georgia, in June-July 2008. The study will also entail a nationwide telephone survey of hunters (including oversampling in 16 states where access programs are currently underway) to identify and quantify the full array of access issues facing hunters today and to assess the

effectiveness of current access programs. One of the more important uses of these focus groups is in the development of the survey instrument. Specific aspects of the research are discussed below.

### **FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS AND FACILITIES**

Specific focus group facilities were selected based on availability in the cities of interest. All facility reservations were confirmed by written agreements; Responsive Management coordinated focus group room setup and food arrangements. Refreshments were provided for focus group participants.

### **SAMPLE GROUP SIZE**

A commonly encountered question about qualitative techniques and focus groups is one of sample size, and most qualitative techniques call for small sample sizes. The conclusions rest on face validity and rely on the depth of analysis rather than breadth of analysis. Focus group research, like all qualitative research, sacrifices reliability (i.e., the ability to replicate results) for the sake of increased validity.

### **FOCUS GROUP RECRUITING**

Responsive Management identified and contacted recreational hunters from hunting license records. Letters with a brief description of the focus group and a toll-free number to contact the recruiting manager at Responsive Management were mailed. A pre-screening questionnaire was used to ensure the diversity of participant selection and to minimize any bias in selection design.

The screener determined whether potential focus group participants met the established guidelines set for the group. The screener included questions to determine age, gender, state and area of residence, and hunting participation. After determining that the respondent was eligible to participate, he/she was informed of the focus group date, time, and location and mailed or e-mailed, by personal preference, a confirmation letter. Participants were also asked if they wanted to receive a reminder call the day before the focus group to ensure that they would have everything they needed to attend the discussion, such as directions and time. To encourage participation, a monetary incentive was given to all participants.

During the recruiting process, the focus group recruiting manager maintained a progress table for each focus group to track the progress of the number of participants recruited and to log participant names, contact information, and essential participant characteristics. For each focus group, 12-14 individuals were recruited to account for the likelihood that some would not attend, thereby ensuring that 10-12 would attend. The recruiting manager ensured that all confirmation letters were sent out promptly to participants and that reminder calls were made the day before scheduled groups.

### **FOCUS GROUP MODERATION**

The discussions were moderated by Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director of Responsive Management, and Steven Bissell, Qualitative Research Associate. The role of the moderator was to keep the discussion within design parameters using a discussion guide, without exerting a strong influence on the discussion content. In this sense, focus groups are non-directive group discussions and expose spontaneous attitudes of small groups. The discussion guide allowed for consistency in data collection.

Responsive Management ensured that the focus group room was set up appropriately, including furniture, recording equipment, and food arrangements. All focus group discussions were recorded on audiotape and DVD for further analysis. At the end of each focus group, any questions were answered that participants had regarding the study.

### **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

The focus groups were conducted using a discussion guide that allowed for consistency in data collection. Responsive Management's researchers developed the discussion guide based on their knowledge of hunting access issues. While the discussion guide provided a general framework for directing the content of the focus groups, question order and phrasing were adjusted according to the dynamics of the group discussions. The complete discussion guide is included in the appendix of this report.

## **FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

Throughout this report, direct quotations from hunters in the focus groups are listed in order of topic (topic headings appear in bold throughout).

### **GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF HUNTING ACCESS**

- Road closures and a general lack of available land were two of the major issues brought up in the initial discussion on access, which began with the moderator asking participants what came to mind when they thought of access. One participant in the Seattle group brought up the issue of knowing where to go to find hunting land. Another commonly discussed issue was public hunting land being blocked by private land, such as someone's yard or property.
- Several participants in the Macon group mentioned that they perceived access to be dwindling in some areas, especially access to private lands. On this point, some in the Macon group mentioned that while it used to be fairly easy to secure a landowner's permission to hunt on his/her property, this is generally not the case today.
- When asked their opinions on some of the major issues relating to hunting access, several hunters in the Seattle group discussed the closing of access roads and certain trails by locked gates. According to several participants in the Seattle group, gates tend to be problematic because many hunters are unsure of when and why they are put in place (one hunter said that gates appeared in one area during hunting season and disappeared the next season, with no clear reason being given). Others discussed the expenses involved in leasing land or using private land owned by timber companies.
- In the Macon group, several hunters discussed a general scarcity of land on which to hunt, and the expensive costs to lease land. One hunter in the Macon group mentioned that a hunting club was charging several times what he had originally paid for his membership (presumably to account for increased costs for land leases). Others in the Macon group mentioned that much land previously available for hunting is now being used for the construction of houses and subdivisions. Several Macon participants also noted property

damage which sometimes left landowners wary of allowing hunters on their property, making access to private lands even more difficult.

- Seattle hunters also mentioned the need to secure funding for the maintenance of roads (not always guaranteed) as well as overcrowding issues on public lands. One participant also mentioned using maps to locate lands for hunting, but being unsure as to whether the land was public, private, or closed altogether. Some of the Seattle hunters also noted the unfair nature in which some timber companies control access to their forests; some of these participants said that easements should be written into land use agreements in the initial phases of planning.
  
- Several of the Macon hunters discussed the issue of ATV and four-wheeler use on hunting lands, and how regulations often prohibited hunters from using such vehicles to bring their harvested game out of the forests. This was discussed in conjunction with the issue of closed roads: many of the Macon participants said they did not know how game wardens expected them to remove game from the land considering regulations prohibiting ATV and four-wheelers in certain areas.

**Comments on what comes to mind when participants think of “hunting access”:**

*“Hunting access is being allowed to go on land to hunt, and not having to trespass. It’s being able to go on private property and not be charged with trespassing, whether it’s through verbal permission or written permission, like some states have.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“A two-mile walk is a long way, and where you used to be able to drive ten or fifteen miles, if you can make it in five miles or so now, you’re halfway in, and how are you going to carry anything out?” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Access to me is the knowledge of where you’re going to go. I talk to these guys who spend hours and hours just finding where the heck to go. A lot of us are full-time and work eighty hours a week, and it’s kind of hard to do all the research and find a place, so there’s a lot of logistic stuff [involved in access issues].” -- Seattle hunter*

*“I’ve talked to Bureau of Land Management people, and we know there’s a section of land there open to the public—but how do you get into it? There’s houses on it by the road, so the only way to get through to that public land is to go through somebody’s yard. And we’re talking about a pretty good section of land. But there’s no road.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“There’s a lot of places where there’s state land on the ridges, and the ranches will have the access on the lower lands. So if you can lock up everything behind you, you have a bigger area.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“[Access] is going away.” -- Macon hunter*

*“You’ve got to lease just about everything. You can’t find any private land, can’t knock on a farmer’s door to ask permission. It used to be okay, but it’s not like that anymore.” -- Macon hunter*

*“With all the subdivisions and whatnot, all the people—I mean, there’s no land anymore. A lot of people come up from Florida, and they make the lease prices increase. It used to be three dollars an acre, and now it’s eight dollars an acre.” -- Macon hunter*

*“We had some timber company property, and they told us the first year they were going to cut it, but after hunting season. The next year, right before turkey season, they told us they were going to cut it again.” -- Macon hunter*

### **Opinions on major issues regarding access to hunting lands:**

*“I’ve been hunting with the same people for fifteen years, and this family has been hunting the same general area for about seventy-five years. Now they’ve gated off that property so we can’t get in there. The farmer meanwhile owns his own gate, so he can drive into the closed area and drive up to our gate, and then drive back down and hunt it on the way. He’s pushing the deer up to his ranch, where he’s got his private club.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“In some areas, one time the gate is open and another it’s closed—we don’t know when it’s going to be open.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“You have to admit, the gated roads have improved the actual experience of the hunts. The quality and amount of game has improved with gated roads.” -- Seattle hunter*

*I was on land that must’ve belonged to a timber company. I couldn’t take my truck in because of the gate, but I went in two or three miles, four or five hours in, and when I came back, I guess somebody decided to bust all the windows on my truck. So now I hunt on Weyerhaeuser private land. For three-hundred bucks you get a key.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“I’m all for paying [for access to certain private lands], but hope the Fish and Game Department can get worked out with all the timber companies the landowner tags and how expensive they’re getting. You have to be a rich guy to shoot an animal now. You’re paying all the way to ten thousand dollars for a tag, and I’d hate to see it go to that.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“All the people are moving out and building more houses, more property. More land is being sold.” -- Macon hunter*

*“I knew some people who had to sell their land and pay off debts. They had lawsuits brought against them and lost money on a deal, and had to sell a lot of land.” -- Macon hunter*

*“When I first starting deer hunting, I joined a club. I paid fifty dollars, and when I got out of that club, about ten years later, it was three-hundred and fifty dollars. Years ago, you didn’t really have any problems. You’d find out who owned the house and get permission, but it’s not like that anymore.” -- Macon hunter*

*“People don’t want [hunters] on their land because they trash it. People with ponds, especially: [hunters] will trash it and leave stuff around. And you can’t blame the landowner for that, once people start trashing the land.” -- Macon hunter*

*“People who don’t ask [permission to hunt on a private property], and just walk on the property—that comes down on the people who do ask. That doesn’t help anybody.” -- Macon hunter*

### **Opinions on general issues accessing public and private hunting lands:**

*“If you get on public land that’s really popular, you have every Tom, Dick and Harry out there.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“A lot of roads are getting washed out and overgrown, and they just don’t have the funding for maintenance and to fix these things.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“The Game and Fish Department has been dogged for years to put a gate up [on a road leading to a public hunting area]. It’s open in rifle season and closed during bow season. I don’t understand that. But we see a farmer driving from the other end [of the road, which isn’t gated off].” -- Seattle hunter*

*“My husband will pour over all the things, the maps, and he’ll find a place that he thinks is public. And we’re not able to get there because it’s fenced or gated. And it might be private, but I’ve got a map that says it’s public.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“For two-hundred bucks, I get a key from [a company called Hancock] to a hundred-thousand acre forest. Now we can drive back in there, and that’s private land at that point. You have to have a sticker on the truck. You can take your family hunting with you, but not your friends.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“I had back surgery and had to use a four-wheeler to [bring game out of the woods]. I’d bring the four-wheeler up to a ditch or a hill, but I can’t drag a deer that far. That’s been hard for me.” -- Macon hunter*

*“All the management land has strict rules about four-wheelers. And if you’re far back into the land, it’s rough. I mean, I don’t want to hunt somewhere I can’t take my four-wheeler.” -- Macon hunter*

*“What’s it going to hurt somebody to let [hunters] take their four-wheelers back there? Put a little gravel down on the roads [to compensate for tracks being dug up].” -- Macon hunter*

*“Both [public and private land are equally hard to access]. Private land, like a lease, you can do just about anything you want to, as long as you don’t destroy the timber.” -- Macon hunter*

**Opinions on areas with a general lack of land versus areas where land exists but cannot be easily reached:**

*“It’s an issue of land-locked public land that you can’t get to. They should write in easements in the very beginning. It should be against the law to keep taxpayers who are supporting the land off of public land.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“It’s an issue of land being gated off.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“You have public land, national forests that are crowded, and then you have land on our side, national forests that are completely overgrown. And the animals have all moved down into more private areas. And the timber companies can shut their gates at any time and deny access. So in a sense, they are the deed holder, leasing the land from the government, and can shut their gates at any time.” -- Seattle hunter*

## **AWARENESS OF PLACES TO GO FOR HUNTING ACCESS**

- The moderator asked hunters in the two groups about their general awareness of places to go to hunt (especially lands convenient to participants' homes). For the most part, hunters in the Seattle group did not report any great difficulties in finding lands on which to hunt, although some in the focus group noted that hunting land seems to be shrinking in general. One participant mentioned visiting a sporting goods store to learn about new hunting lands.
- In the Macon group, hunters appeared slightly more likely to report issues with knowing where to go to find hunting lands: one hunter mentioned having to travel a fair distance to finding hunting land, while another participant in the Macon group said that knowing the right people is the main way to ensure access to private lands for hunting.
- Several hunters in the Seattle group also mentioned time constraints relating to scouting out hunting lands on both maps and through actual travel, suggesting that the time required to devote to such activities is in and of itself a factor limiting hunting. Macon hunters mentioned that personally knowing private landowners and/or members of hunting clubs are among the best ways of finding good places to go for hunting. One participant in the Macon group also mentioned that although he was aware of game management areas on public land, he preferred to stay away from such areas because of overcrowding and potentially unsafe behavior.
- The moderator asked about sources of information on places to hunt, and several in the Seattle group named friends and family, various maps (such as those provided by the state fish and game agency), and the state website's lists of harvest reports with location information. One person also mentioned scouting and traveling to learn about new hunting areas. Several Seattle hunters indicated support for a greater distribution of quadrangle maps with coordinates for hunting lands; some of these hunters reasoned that with the prevalence of GPS capabilities among hunters and recreationists, quadrangle maps could be put to good use in advertising hunting lands. According to these hunters, the key feature of such maps would be constantly updated information on closings, new lands, public versus private areas, etc.

- In the Macon group, outdoor/sportsman publications were named as a reliable source of information about hunting lands, but some in this group mentioned that finding out about hunting lands was a relatively small aspect of the overall problem of access. Otherwise, one or two Macon hunters mentioned the need for a centralized website with information on hunting lands available throughout the state—one Macon hunter compared this concept to Craigslist.org, an online network of classified advertisements.

### **Awareness of hunting lands convenient to participants' homes:**

*"Our area is just shrinking. I'd like to just keep going back to the hunting area I know well."*  
-- Seattle hunter

*"First thing I do when I want to go to a new hunting area is go to a sporting goods store, and those guys are usually pretty knowledgeable."* -- Seattle hunter

*"[Hunting lands] aren't convenient enough."* -- Macon hunter

*"I have to travel about twenty-five to sixty miles to find hunting land. But I hunt in my backyard, too. I do both."* -- Macon hunter

*"It's a matter of knowing people, too. I find out a place over in Washington County, which sounded great, until I found out the price was eleven or twelve-hundred dollars [to use the land]."* -- Macon hunter

### **Opinions on issues associated with knowing where to go to access hunting lands:**

*"You lay out a map and the hunting regulations on a table and start flipping through, and start drawing it out. It's kind of hard, figuring out the crossroads and boundaries. That's how you got to do it."* -- Seattle hunter

*"The research is hard enough, let alone getting the time off from work, and gas. We can't go out three times a year to inspect places and knock on doors. We're lucky enough to get the time off for hunting season."* -- Seattle hunter

*"I think private landowners are a little more afraid of lawsuits and letting hunters on. We'd talk to people years ago who'd say it wasn't a problem [for hunters to hunt on their properties]. But now people say, 'No, you can't do it.' It's a lot of work to get an area you can hunt in."*  
-- Seattle hunter

*"Knowing people is what you have to do. Word-of-mouth is a big part of it, too."* -- Macon hunter

*“I hunt as a guest, but I’ve been trying to get into a hunting club. I have a friend in a hunting club.” -- Macon hunter*

*“I try to stay away from the management land because of the safety aspect: you don’t know who these [hunters] are or where they are. I went to a place years ago and climbed a tree and probably counted twelve guys [in the area].” -- Macon hunter*

**On sources of information for hunting access and means of learning about hunting lands:**

*“Friends, family and maps [are the main sources for finding out where to hunt].” -- Seattle hunter*

*“You can go to any national forest office and they’ll give you a map. You can buy several maps for a couple dollars and they’ll show you a lot of places to go.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“[Magazines and websites] tend to recycle articles. You can find articles about places to hunt from three years ago still being used today.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“The Fish and Game website is really starting to improve. They’re really starting to get that down. And management changes all the time, areas are being gated, clear-cut, the amount and quality of the game—it’s all constantly changing. ...There’s a hotline you can call, but there’s also on the website harvest reports and trends that will give you an idea of what’s going on in an area.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“My girlfriend loves going scouting with me [to find hunting spots]. There’s no pressure to shoot anything.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Knowing the people in the clubs is a big part of it. You need to know who you’re hunting with.” -- Macon hunter*

*“Some of the outdoor publications have information about where to find hunting land.” -- Macon hunter*

*“They sometimes advertise [hunting land] in the paper. But [learning about new places to access land] is a minute part of the [overall problem].” -- Macon hunter*

*“There’s no general website that I know of for learning about new areas to access lands, but they do advertise areas to lease [on certain websites].” -- Macon hunter*

**Opinions on additions to or improvements in the dissemination of information regarding access to hunting lands:**

*“You know, most of us have GPS. If they would put latitude or longitude coordinates on some of these [hunting] points, so we can find these things. Mark these things on a map and we’ll find them.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“You can get a quadrangle map that shows ownership with GPS markings from the state. The maps don’t tell you who owns land, but it’ll indicate that land is private.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“It would be nice to have a quadrangle map with game management units. They could overlay that with the ownership of Weyerhaeuser and Hancock [timber companies].” -- Seattle hunter*

*“A lot of the information [needed to find hunting lands] is publicly available, like on Google. But the overlays, making it available so it’s clickable and updated with the things that are constantly changing—it’s hard. It would open up so many new [opportunities]. You could [set up maps] by harvest reports, by what people are hunting. You could overlay the state with harvest reports. You want to be able to see who you would need to contact, who owns the land.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Something like Craigslist.org where you could go on [and find new or updated information].” -- Macon hunter*

*“I’d like to know what leases are going to entail, what the time period for leasing is, and what kind of hunting the lease entails.” -- Macon hunter*

**ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH TRAVELING TO AREAS FOR HUNTING ACCESS**

- When asked about the issues associated with traveling to areas for hunting access, several Seattle hunters said they prefer to walk in to account for unreliable roads and trails, gates preventing access to roads and trails, and general prohibitions on ATVs and four-wheelers in many areas. One hunter made the point that good hunting cannot usually be found within one to two-hundred yards of main roads, which is what hunters are often restricted to.
- In the Macon group, hunters cited gas prices and the uncertainty in visiting lands and hunting areas which may not offer a full day's worth of hunting (due to a variety of unforeseen factors such as closed roads, a lack of trails, overcrowding, etc.). According to some of the Macon participants, these tend to affect time and overall opportunities to hunt. A second major topic of discussion in the Macon group was the problem of removing harvested game from forests when regulations prohibiting ATVs and a lack of usable trails leave hunters with little options. Prohibitions on ATVs were also cited as a discouragement to older and/or disabled hunters.
- One Seattle hunter mentioned that Forest Service trails have declined in quality (he cited hunters having to clear trails themselves), while others in the Seattle group referred to trees blocking trails or roads. Some of the Macon hunters cited a lack of roads in general in some areas (although one hunter said that roads are less of a problem on private lands).

**Opinions on issues related to traveling to the hunting lands and methods of traveling to hunting lands:**

*"You can't typically drive ATVs down Forest Service roads. You can get a ticket so easily. They've really eliminated ATVs."* -- Seattle hunter

*"I like the gates, like I said: they've improved the hunting. But you can't even walk in. The access is being shut down."* -- Seattle hunter

*"I do a lot of walking."* -- Seattle hunter

*"We walk and hunt as we go."* -- Seattle hunter

*"Hunting within a hundred and fifty yards of a road is pretty worthless. I do like to be able to drive my truck and park it alongside the road to be able to walk. There might be potholes or*

*something that falls across the road every once in a while, but it's nothing that limits me like a gate."* -- Seattle hunter

*"Gas prices [are a major issue associated with traveling to hunting lands]."* -- Macon hunter

*"You know you might not be there the whole day, so it's hard trying to decide if it's worth the trip."* -- Macon hunter

*"It also has to do with the rules and regulations the state has. A lot of areas force you to walk a few hundred yards to hunt. It just seems like they should change it so you can at least get a deer out of there."* -- Macon hunter

*"A lot of people aren't willing to walk, especially on these management lands. They'll just climb a tree fifty yards from where they parked, because they know it's going to be hard to get out."* -- Macon hunter

*"I don't know where to begin to get changes to the issue of being able to bring in ATVs to get the game out. You can't take game off the main road, you need to get an ATV down a fire road or something."* -- Macon hunter

### **Opinions on issues and constraints associated with the maintenance of trails and roads used to access hunting lands:**

*"The trail system from the Forest Service has really dropped down [in quality] lately. We sometimes have to cut the trails ourselves, because the Forest Service has a lot of volunteer kids, and they're pretty slow. They used to hire outfitters to clear the trails but they quit doing that."* -- Seattle hunter

*"You got big trees across trails that hurt access."* -- Seattle hunter

*"You can't carry a chainsaw in the wilderness, so after you cut four or five trees by hand, you're done for the day."* -- Seattle hunter

*"Some people will take a tractor and make a pathway. There's not enough access roads, though. The main roads run by the woods but it would be nice if they would put some access roads way back in there, spread out a little."* -- Macon hunter

*"On private land I've had to drive six or seven miles to get to the other side [of the hunting land], but roads are less of a problem on private land."* -- Macon hunter

*"They'll put gravel on roads to get log trucks in and whatnot, but why don't they just fix the road to make it so you can get a car down it?"* -- Macon hunter

## **OPINIONS ON POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS AND AWARENESS OF CURRENT HUNTING ACCESS PROGRAMS**

- The moderator asked participants' general opinions of administrative or policy steps that could potentially improve hunting access. In the Seattle group of hunters, one participant referenced successful programs in North Dakota in which landowners are compensated for leaving open a portion of their properties to hunting. (According to this participant, hunting lands in Montana are already so open that access programs appear to be largely unnecessary.) Some others in the Seattle group said that user fees might be a good idea: such fees would allow serious hunters to gain a key to gates that would allow individual access while keeping out trespassers and those doing property or environmental damage. One Seattle hunter spoke of a new wilderness area that had opened, but that was apparently inaccessible to those without horses.
- For their part, several Macon hunters again mentioned the issue of being unable to conveniently remove game from the woods due to limitations on ATVs. Several in the group also addressed environmentalists, who they perceived as exerting an unfair influence over authorities orchestrating the closure of roads and/or hunting lands.
- When asked whether they were aware of any current agency-led efforts to improve access, a few Seattle hunters said that they thought the state fish and game agency was working to buy additional parcels of land. Some others had heard about the agency working with timber companies to coordinate hunter access for the early hunting seasons.
- In the Macon group, most had not heard about statewide efforts to improve access through programs or initiatives, but several discussed limitations on lease prices by private landowners. Though nearly all agreed that prices frequently climb too high, essentially making the lands impossible to enjoy by all but the wealthy, some in the Macon group of hunters were skeptical about the regulating of lease prices. One Macon hunter said that game wardens occasionally exercise unfair authority over lands, effectively instigating closings or restrictions.

- In general, one of the few programs Seattle hunters expressed familiarity with was the “Feel Free to Hunt” program which designates available public lands for hunting; most were unenthusiastic about this program, as nearly all agreed that the lands were frequently overcrowded or devoid of game. One participant in the Seattle group had heard about a “walk-in” program in Montana, and said that such a program was needed in Washington (note that, in fact, Washington State does offer walk-in access to private hunting lands). Several Seattle hunters supported private landowners charging fees for hunters to use their properties (provided such fees were reasonable).
  
- In the Macon group of hunters, there were lower levels of awareness of programs through which landowners may be compensated for opening their properties to hunting. One of the participants mentioned having read about such programs in *American Hunter* magazine, but many were skeptical that landowner access programs would work very well with farmlands in Georgia (some participants said that there simply is not enough land in Georgia to support such programs). Some of these participants also mentioned liability issues.
  
- Both groups appeared highly sympathetic to the reluctance of landowners to invite hunters onto their properties; in each group, liability was a major point in the discussions. One hunter in the Macon group described the “sue-happy” nature of residents in Georgia, and several hunters in the Seattle group said that property damage and irresponsible behavior were understandably justifiable reasons for landowners to discourage hunting on their properties. Although many hunters in the two groups appeared to agree that landowner access programs had the potential to alleviate access issues, most of these participants seemed highly aware of the ways in which such programs could cause problems for landowners.

**Opinions on policies or programs to improve hunting access:**

*“If you go to North Dakota, they have programs where farmers are getting paid to leave their properties open. But property owners can put up ‘No trespassing’ signs to keep the public off. In Montana, it’s much more open—there’s access everywhere because it’s all open to everyone.”*  
-- Seattle hunter

*“I think fees [could help with hunting access]. There’s still families out there with kids and wives who like to go, and they like to camp. But they can’t get behind the gate. I don’t like the fees but with those, there’s safety, because your truck and stuff are safe, and the wife and kids can go hunting and camp, too.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Fees weed people out, the serious from the not-so-serious. It gives hunters a place to go and non-hunters can go as well. Fees would protect the environment more, the woods and the animals. ...There’s so many people at a gate right now, where are you going to camp?” -- Seattle hunter*

*“They made a new wilderness area down at the three thousand-foot level, and it’s supposedly fairly accessible. Most of the wilderness areas in this state are on top of the Cascades, so it’s not really an access problem so much as if you don’t have horses, you can’t get to them. The first thing they do is gate it off. But to take and close off that big of an area, I think, is criminal. The roads are already there.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Not closing off roads—I don’t like driving while hunting but I want to be able to get my deer out.” -- Macon hunter*

*“You’re going to have people abuse the roads, abuse everything. But if it’s understood that you have a four-wheeler on your truck to bring out a deer you harvested—they should put the rules in place and enforce them.” -- Macon hunter*

*“I think the ‘tree-huggers’ don’t want anyone to harm the environment. But the hunters are some of the most environmentally responsible people out there. They’ve been trying to shut down [hunting lands] for years; they don’t want anybody out there.” -- Macon hunter*

*“The environmentalists are the biggest problem. Quit listening to the environmentalists. It’s common sense. I can see protecting from erosion and certain things, but [hunting lands or roads should not be closed].” -- Macon hunter*

#### **Awareness of current agency-led initiatives or programs to improve access:**

*“The Game Department now is actually buying up some property, some leased property, and they’re giving us access to places we’ve never had access to before. They’re doing good. I just think it’s going to take a little bit longer.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“They just opened up some new farmlands, they’re giving us more areas to hunt.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“I noticed the Game Department working with Weyerhaeuser to gain access for the early season. You may not be able to drive in, but they at least try to keep walk-in access open. They’ve been working on it.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Most people who have private land don’t mind you driving through to get where you need to go. But I think there should be a limit on lease prices. ..For people you know real well, it’s not a problem. It might be a problem for other people, though.” -- Macon hunter*

*“I don’t think any federal regulation for landowners is needed. We probably don’t need more regulations.” -- Macon hunter*

*“Some of these rangers and wardens treat the land like it’s their own private land, acting like a private landowner and trying to deny access. I don’t think that’s right.” -- Macon hunter*

### **Familiarity with programs designed to improve access to public and private lands:**

*“A guy who works in Montana has been telling me about [the walk-in program]. I’ve heard about it there but not here.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“The only thing I’ve seen in this state is the Feel Free to Hunt [program] and things the state has done with some of the farmers. The Game Department has posted private lands but they say to feel free to hunt those areas.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“The Feel Free to Hunt [program] to me means, ‘Feel free to hunt here because there’s nothing here.’ That’s why they open the lands.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“I just can’t believe you’re going to find quality hunting within a hundred and fifty yards of a road.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Sure, [a landowner program] would provide more areas to hunt. But do they have enough money to do that?” -- Seattle hunter*

*“Private landowners or timber companies [would need assistance from] us, something out of our pockets. Three-hundred dollars is a fair price for three-hundred sixty-five days of...accessing land.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“I think it’s a key point that if you have an organization like a sportsman’s club that can hook up a hunter with a landowner—it’s something right now that’s really difficult to do.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“I’ve read in American Hunter magazine about [programs such as the Walk-In Program and Open Fields], especially out west and where they do a lot of pheasant hunting.” -- Macon hunter*

*“I’m not aware of any programs like that.” -- Macon hunter*

*“I think they just open up land to anybody and the government or somebody gives them some kind of incentive. I doubt we’d have enough land around this area for that, though.” -- Macon hunter*

*“I can’t really imagine farmers just letting anyone come on their private land.” -- Macon hunter*

*“It’s mainly farmland here in Georgia, and then you get into the liability issues. Somebody gets hurt and then goes back and says the property belongs to so-and-so.” -- Macon hunter*

**Opinions on issues concerning landowner liability on private lands used for hunting or hunting access:**

*“A lot of times these homeowners complain about people coming in and damaging their property, but when hunting season comes around, they’re on an on-call basis: you can’t come out to hunt until they call you.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“There aren’t any landowner programs, like through Fish and Game.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“They need a landowner program, where the state compensates the landowner for access. I mean, it works great in Montana.” -- Seattle hunter*

*“They have to provide insurance [to landowners]. Landowners have a right to be scared—everyone’s ‘sue-happy.’ They ought to have some kind of protection from lawsuits.” -- Macon hunter*

*“[Lawsuits] are the biggest reason landowners probably would turn someone down if they knocked on their door to hunt. There needs to be some kind of protection. “ -- Macon hunter*

## MAJOR FINDINGS

### LOCKED GATES AND RESTRICTED ROADS AND TRAILS

- It appears that locked gates which block or effectively close off roads and trails are an overarching issue affecting hunting access in multiple locations: locked gates were mentioned throughout both of the groups. In Seattle, participants were more likely to note that locked gates could positively influence hunting, such as by decreasing property and/or environmental damage. However, hunters in both groups noted the arbitrary nature of many locked gates (i.e., hunters often cannot discern any schedule or reason for the locking of certain gates). Some gates are recognized as the result of concerned landowners, timber companies, or state agencies; others, however, essentially appear to hunters out of nowhere, disrupting preferred hunting areas and adversely affecting hunting trips. Some hunters mentioned being forced to leave cars or trucks on main roads while they walked around the gates, only to discover vandalized vehicles upon returning.

### RESTRICTED ATV USE AND REMOVAL OF HARVESTED GAME

- In direct connection with the issue of locked gates, many hunters (particularly those in the Macon group) mentioned the growing problem of trying to remove harvested game (such as deer) from forests without adequate trails, roads, or opportunities for ATVs. Many hunters in the groups made the point that although access is often possible through walking or hiking into hunting areas, the inability to remove game harvested essentially negates the point of the hunt for many hunters. Areas that fail to provide hunters with an opportunity to easily remove game were also viewed as highly discouraging to elderly or disabled hunters. A related issue appears to be inconsistent regulations controlling the use of ATVs and four-wheelers (or, at least, the *perception* of inconsistent regulations).

### LEASING COSTS

- Hunters in the two groups discussed the problematic issue of the rising costs of leasing lands for hunting. This was cited in conjunction with the activities of hunting clubs, which arrange for their members to hunt on private lands. However, numerous participants in the groups expressed dismay over what they considered to be steep increases in hunting club fees and the fees for hunting land leases. Hunters would like more affordable opportunities to hunt on

private lands, which tend to be preferred because they are less commonly overcrowded and tend to have more opportunities for harvesting game. Many hunters are open to the concept of user fees and most appear to support the concept of paying for the privilege: however, hunters would like to see fees kept within reason, as expenses themselves represent a substantial limitation to hunting.

### **LANDOWNER LIABILITY AND ACCESS PROGRAMS**

- Several Seattle hunters had heard about access programs in other states, such as North Dakota and Montana, while most of the Macon participants were not greatly aware of such programs. Most hunters support the concept of access programs, particularly those in which landowners would be compensated for opening their properties to hunting. At the same time, many participants in the groups expressed reservations about the likelihood of such programs achieving success. Hunters appear to be highly aware of the fact that irresponsible behavior, property damage, and overcrowding will act as strong discouragement to landowners who may be willing to allow hunting on their lands. Hunters are also well versed in the many issues relating to liability that affect landowners' decisions to allow hunters onto their properties. As a result, the focus groups suggest that although an overwhelming majority of hunters would support the goals and concepts driving such access programs (e.g., increased access to private lands, less overcrowding), hunters are also extremely skeptical that landowners will be persuaded to participate without comprehensive liability legislation.

### **CENTRALIZED DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON HUNTING ACCESS**

- The websites of state fish and game agencies may represent the best locations for centralized and comprehensive listings of access locations and public and private hunting lands. The key here is to provide constantly updated information providing hunters with the latest developments in the availability of access and the status of hunting lands (possibly in real-time). Throughout the focus groups, hunters mentioned being frustrated when they researched hunting land/access information, only to later discover the land was not open, not public, vastly different from the description they had seen, etc. One participant in the Macon group said that Craigslist.org offered a good template for an easily-maintained and edit-friendly website suitable for listing hunting access information.

## **APPENDIX: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Moderator reviews the rules and the goal of the focus group series with participants.
  - Goal: To better understand hunter concerns about access and to seek information on ways to enhance access.
- B. Moderator asks participants to state their name and describe their level of hunting activity (i.e., how long they've been hunting, the type of land (public or private) on which they typically hunt, who they hunt with, etc.)

### **II. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF ACCESS**

- A. What comes to mind when you think of "hunting access?"
- B. What are the major issues regarding access to hunting lands?
- C. Have you ever had difficulties accessing lands on which to hunt? Why or why not?
  - 1. Describe the difficulties you have experienced. (Probe on method of access; road closures; expenses; landowners; crowding; location of land; hunting leases, etc.)
  - 2. How have you dealt with the difficulties encountered to overcome obstacles?
- D. Is it more of a problem accessing public lands, private lands, or both about equally?
- E. Would you say access problems more commonly stem from a general lack of land on which to hunt, or situations where land exists but cannot be easily reached?

### **III. KNOWLEDGE / AWARENESS OF PLACES TO GO**

- A. Are you aware of hunting lands convenient to your home or where you live?
- B. What are the major issues associated with knowing where to go for hunting lands or access?
- C. How do you typically hear or learn about hunting lands or places to hunt?
  - 1. Are there any websites particularly useful for finding hunting lands, access points, or boundaries? (Such as state fish and game agency websites or federal land management agency websites)
  - 2. Have you experienced difficulties getting information on places to hunt?
  - 3. Do you know where to go to find information on mapping or signage?
  - 4. What improvements would you like to see in the dissemination of information regarding access to hunting lands?
- D. What types of information related to hunting access would you like to see be made available?

### **IV. GETTING TO THE LAND**

- A. Do you typically access hunting areas via public land, via private land, or both about equally?
- B. What are the major issues involved in traveling to the hunting lands you utilize most frequently? For example, do you typically arrive by vehicle but access the hunting lands on foot, hike in, or use an ATV?
- C. Are there issues or constraints associated with using roads to access isolated parcels of public or private land?

- D. Are there issues or constraints associated with the maintenance or upkeep of trails used to access public or private hunting lands?
- E. Have you experienced problems with blocked lands, either public (i.e., federal) or private lands? What are the major issues regarding blocked lands?
- F. What are the major differences in getting to public hunting land versus private hunting land?

**V. POLICY / ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES AND AWARENESS OF PROGRAMS**

- A. What sorts of policies or programs could be put in place to improve hunting access on private lands? On public lands?
- B. What kinds of policies or programs could be put in place to improve travel to public hunting lands? To private lands?
- C. Are you familiar with “walk-in” or “open fields” programs for access on private lands, in which landowners may receive a small payment in exchange for allowing public hunting access?
  - 1. Are you aware of such programs in [state]?
  - 2. Do you participate in any such programs? If so, do they work? Why or why not?
  - 3. Do you think a “walk-in” program would work in [state]?
- D. What do you think are the major issues concerning landowner liability on private lands used for hunting or hunting access?
  - 1. Are you aware of landowner liability legislation in [state] that determines whether or not landowners who allow public hunting access incur liability for property damage or injuries caused by hunters?
- E. Are there any other policies or administrative steps that you think should be taken in [state] to improve hunting access and minimize constraints?
- F. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

## **ABOUT RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT**

Responsive Management is a nationally recognized public opinion and attitude survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Its mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public.

Utilizing its in-house, full-service, computer-assisted telephone and mail survey center with 45 professional interviewers, Responsive Management has conducted more than 1,000 telephone surveys, mail surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups, as well as numerous marketing and communications plans, need assessments, and program evaluations on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues.

Clients include most of the federal and state natural resource, outdoor recreation, and environmental agencies, and most of the top conservation organizations. Responsive Management also collects attitude and opinion data for many of the nation's top universities, including the University of Southern California, Virginia Tech, Colorado State University, Auburn, Texas Tech, the University of California—Davis, Michigan State University, the University of Florida, North Carolina State University, Penn State, West Virginia University, and others.

Among the wide range of work Responsive Management has completed during the past 20 years are studies on how the general population values natural resources and outdoor recreation, and their opinions on and attitudes toward an array of natural resource-related issues. Responsive Management has conducted dozens of studies of selected groups of outdoor recreationists, including anglers, boaters, hunters, wildlife watchers, birdwatchers, park visitors, historic site visitors, hikers, and campers, as well as selected groups within the general population, such as landowners, farmers, urban and rural residents, women, senior citizens, children, Hispanics, Asians, and African-Americans. Responsive Management has conducted studies on environmental education, endangered species, waterfowl, wetlands, water quality, and the reintroduction of numerous species such as wolves, grizzly bears, the California condor, and the Florida panther.

Responsive Management has conducted research on numerous natural resource ballot initiatives and referenda and helped agencies and organizations find alternative funding and increase their memberships and donations. Responsive Management has conducted major agency and organizational program needs assessments and helped develop more effective programs based upon a solid foundation of fact. Responsive Management has developed Web sites for natural resource organizations, conducted training workshops on the human dimensions of natural resources, and presented numerous studies each year in presentations and as keynote speakers at major natural resource, outdoor recreation, conservation, and environmental conferences and meetings.

Responsive Management has conducted research on public attitudes toward natural resources and outdoor recreation in almost every state in the United States, as well as in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan. Responsive Management routinely conducts surveys in Spanish and has also conducted surveys and focus groups in Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese.

Responsive Management's research has been featured in most of the nation's major media, including CNN, ESPN, *The Washington Times*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and on the front pages of *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*.

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