



PROPERTIES

## A PROFITABLE HUNT: TURN YOUR PROPERTY INTO A PRIVATE TEXAS RETREAT

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The best hunting in Texas happens on private retreats, where animals are well cared for, the land is maintained, and the facilities supply for all your needs. But have you ever wondered what it takes to create that environment.

If you have a rich Texas hunting ranch, you may have considered opening it to the public as a private hunting retreat. Some landowners enjoy the extra income. Some are looking for ways to share their love of hunting with more people. Either way, where do you start? And what do you need to know before you start?

We talked to a few landowners, managers and businessmen who represent several aspects of the hunting business here in Texas, and they have some priceless insight to share.

### RAISE HEALTHY WILDLIFE

Greg Genitempo is the owner of Eslabon Ranch – 1 600 acres just outside of Carrizo Springs, Texas. Genitempo finally got tired of leasing hunts from lazy landowners, so he bought his own land.

*I got tired of landowners – who had not done their homework on what it takes to raise quality, healthy wildlife – dictating to those of us that wanted to do so. When we did show these landowners what could be done, we were rewarded with higher lease rates. In some cases we were even replaced by lessees that had deeper pockets and wanted to reap the rewards of our work. I bought my place to hunt, and to give my close friends a place to go.*

Genitempo sold hunts initially, but called it quits after a few terrible experiences with difficult hunters. Then, he made a change.

*Eight years ago I started raising whitetail deer in pens. With the pens, I'm able to produce inventory, and have a very marketable and manageable product. So we started selling hunts again. Now, we listen to our hunters as to size, antler characteristics, budget, etc., and have their animals picked out and patterned before they come out. We have a very nice facility for our hunters, and we feed them very well.*



Eslabon Ranch

The whitetail breeding program as Eslabon Ranch not only provides a superior product for their ranch, but also strives to preserve the species for future generations.

### PURSUE YOUR PASSION

Aaron Bulkley started the Texas Hunt Lodge in 2008, to share his passion for hunting.

*We started Texas Hunt Lodge, my wife Joanie and I, because we wanted to do something that we loved. I grew up hunting and it became a passion. I wanted to pass on the experiences to other hunters.*

Bulkley has chased his dream through two Texas counties, to several international awards, and has carved out a unique niche in the process.

*At Texas Hunt Lodge, there is an opportunity to harvest over 60 species of exotics. We do not have just one property; we hunt about 30 different properties throughout Kerr and Gillespie Counties. We cater to hunters looking for World Record Class animals.*

The rich Texas landscape can support a wide variety of wildlife if you are interested in expanding your options.

### NURTURE DREAMS AND CREATE MEMORIES

Dead Man's Pass Ranch, in Val Verde County, has hosted Texas hunters for 15 years because Michael W. McGee, Sr. worked hard to build his childhood dream.



*As a kid, I always wanted to own my own ranch. I grew up watching westerns on TV and to this day I still love watching them. I've always loved the outdoors. Dead Man's Pass Ranch is running today because I love seeing progress and accomplishing goals. I began with a piece of land and built the ranch from the ground up.*

Perhaps because his ranch grew out of a desire to bring his own dream to life, McGee and his staff focus as much on the intangible experience as the hunt itself.

*We provide a wonderful, casual hunting environment with a very friendly staff and awesome facilities. We want to give our customers and guests memories that will last a lifetime. When hunting with family and friends, we encourage them to talk and interact with each other – whether it's in the deer stands or while at camp playing darts or horseshoes. This not only allows for bonding time, but it also creates memories that will last a lifetime and beyond.*

Trophies are easier to weigh than memories, but they often aren't nearly as valuable.



Dead Man's Pass Ranch

## **BUILD A TEAM FOR GREATER IMPACT**

Brandt Buchanan grew up hunting with his father, and started guiding hunts at his stepfather's business at age 13. He later started his own outfitting service, but wanted to do more.

*I began fading out of the outfitting service, and decided I was going to work in every aspect of the outdoor industry to learn as much as I could. I worked as a taxidermist and learned that business for a year. I contracted my guide services to as many ranches as would let me, began sculpting wildlife art, and pestered other industry professionals with questions until they ran me off. I had also been diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum, and I realized that to be successful I needed a team to fill in the gaps. With that background and diagnosis, I recently began organizing a group of outdoor professionals, local landowners, and hunters to launch the High Desert Hunting Organization.*



Photo Credit: Brandt Buchanan

The High Desert Hunting Organization is a collection of like-minded landowners and businesspeople who are aiming to achieve more than anyone of them can do alone.

*We're forming a network of conservation-minded hunters, outfitters and landowners in order to manage wildlife and promote a healthy, bio-diverse ecosystem on a scale much larger than an individual ranch. We believe that property owners, hunters and private business can do a much more effective job of managing quality game and improving habitat. We can also contribute to and facilitate educational programs, and provide opportunities for the future generations to be involved in the outdoor industry.*

Ask for help if you need it. Glean inspiration and wisdom. Get some good partners, or build a strong team to help you build the best business possible.

## **NEVER STOP GROWING**

The Karankawa Plains Outfitting Company at Pierce Ranch is a nature resort on the Gulf. Pierce Ranch was founded in the 1800's, and has been evolving ever since. Laurance Armour currently owns the property, and remembers when it became a hunting ranch.

*As a farm and ranch manager, you need to always be looking for ways to make the land more productive in terms of the bottom line. Hopefully, this will be done without any detriment to the land or the wildlife who reside there (except maybe the feral hog population). We decided in 1998 to begin the hunting operation out here. Part of the ownership of the ranch were dead set against this for liability reasons. It*

*almost resulted in a partition, but we survived and find that the hunting operation actually produces benefits to other parts of the operation as well as the hunting enjoyment of the owners.*

By the late 1800s, the Pierce Ranch was a half-million acre cattle ranch. The property isn't quite that big today, but the quality of the real estate still allows for flexibility and growth.

*The advantage that we have is the size and diversity of the ranch. We are able to offer hunting experiences for all kinds of hunting enthusiasts. From waterfowl to deer, and pigs to upland game, we are able to keep hunters as busy as they want to be. Our irrigation capabilities add to the quality of our waterfowl populations which allow us to provide high-quality hunting. Lastly, our location 60 miles southwest of downtown Houston right off of US 59, make us a convenient destination.*

Any small business needs to keep an eye on the future, and keep evolving and expanding. Ranches are no different!

## PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

We asked these five owners and managers if they had any advice for someone who is thinking about turning his Texas property into a hunting ranch. Here is what they had to say:

### 1 – PROVIDE A QUALITY EXPERIENCE.

*The hunters' time is very limited and they all expect results – fast, a great experience, and a very comfortable place to stay. That's what we give them. It's all about how you treat people. Treat your hunters better than you'd expect to be treated. Have their deer patterned. Include them in ranch stuff, show them around. They are very interested, and it creates a great experience. Today's hunters are accustomed to quality – give it and you will do well. – Genitempo, [Eslabon Ranch](#)*

### 2 – CRUNCH THE NUMBERS.

*There are a few things you need to look for when starting a ranch. The size of your ranch is key – 1000-2000 acres will make a great place to hunt, and to breed exotics. The initial investment in animals could reach \$500,000 to \$1,000,000, but this money can be recouped quickly as long you have a good outfitter to keep clients hunting your property. We grow our company every year by adding new ranches to hunt and adding new clients to our clientele. – Bulkley, [Texas Hunt Lodge](#)*

### 3 – REALIZE IT WILL TAKE TIME.

*The best advice I can offer is to not get in a hurry. It will take one or two lifetimes to get the ranch the way you want it. It has taken years to get our ranch where it is today, and my ultimate goal is to put the ranch back in time where it was in the 1830's. – McGee, [Dead Man's Pass Ranch](#)*

### 4 – TREAT IT LIKE A BUSINESS.

*Develop a diverse team. Establish a common goal and put these goals in writing in order to promote healthy communication and transparency. Keep the long term in mind at all times. Start an ad platform, consult with a web designer or SEO specialist, launch an ad campaign, and work hard to provide a good value and consistent results. Educate yourself and never stop learning as the dynamics of the industry changes rapidly. – Buchanan, [High Desert Hunting Organization](#)*

### 5 – IMPRESS THE RIGHT PEOPLE FIRST.

*My advice to someone starting out would be that word of mouth sells a hunting operation better than anything else. I would offer free hunting to influential outfits, like sports writers, Ducks Unlimited and the Safari Club or Texas Parks and Wildlife, before spending a lot of money on for-hire marketing. Obviously, getting known this way will require a quality product that impresses those whom you host. – Armour, [Karankawa Plains Outfitting Company](#)*

Opening up your Texas ranch as a hunting establishment can be a rewarding way to generate an income, and a great way to share your passion for the hunt. Make sure you count the cost first, though, and remember that you are actually starting a small business. It's hard work, but hard work is something that most Texas ranchers come by naturally.

If you're considering opening up a hunting ranch in Texas, but you're looking for new land, look no further! We represent some of the most beautiful and rich hunting real estate in Texas. You can browse our listing of hunting ranches [here](#), or give us a call at 830-569-3500 to talk about some great new options.

