

Hunter Access to Private Lands in Illinois

Executive Summary

Access to lands for hunting is a serious problem in Illinois. To determine need and support for a private land access program, four mail surveys were conducted from August 2000 through April 2001. Resident hunters, landowners, participants in Access Illinois Outdoors (AIO), and landowners enrolled in AIO were each surveyed for attitudes toward private land access, perspectives on a statewide private land access program, and hunting quality in Illinois.

Illinois Hunters

Results of the Illinois resident hunter study indicate hunters are at risk for losing access to private land and consider access to places to hunt to be the single greatest issue facing Illinois hunters. A large proportion (43%) of resident hunters reported their hunting efforts had decreased in the five years prior to the survey, and most hunters (56%) identified lack of places to hunt as the greatest factor contributing to declining participation in hunting among Illinois residents. Most hunters (59%) depend on private land owned by someone else for their hunting lands, with 48% of all hunters reporting that from 1994 through 1999 they had lost access to private lands they hunted. Of hunters who had lost access to private land for hunting, 62% stated they had been refused permission to hunt other private land in the year prior to the study (1999). Less than half of hunters (42%) reported they would be willing to pay to hunt private land in Illinois. When given certain circumstances under which an access program would operate, most hunters (63%) were supportive of paying for an access program that allowed them and a few friends to hunt private land and least supportive (23%) of paying for a program that allowed them and other hunters they did not know access to the same land. Most hunters (78%) felt the Illinois Department of Natural Resources should pursue a program to assist hunters in gaining access to private land in Illinois. Hunters most often suggested "reduced liability" as the incentive offered to landowners for providing access.

Landowners

A total of 68% of landowners reported they allowed hunting on their property. Landowners most often allowed family and friends to hunt on their lands, and 32% stated they allowed "people who ask permission." Liability was the most frequent reason given for not allowing hunters on their property. Majorities of landowners reported the number of hunters on their property was the same as in the past, however 37% of landowners in DNR Administrative Region III responded that fewer hunters hunted their land than in the past. Twenty-one percent of landowners in Region IV stated they had more hunters at the time of the survey than previously. Four percent of landowners charged fees for hunter access, and access fees were charged by 9% of landowners in Region IV. A total of 38% of landowners indicated willingness to participate in an access program, with willingness highest among landowners in Region III. Reduced liability was rated as the most desired incentive by both landowners willing to participate in the program and among all landowners. Of landowners who indicated a willingness to participate in an access program, 85% allowed hunting at the time of the survey.

Access Illinois Outdoors Participants

A total of 62% of participants in Access Illinois Outdoors (AIO) reported they were no longer enrolled in the program. Illinois hunters comprised 33% of AIO participants. When asked why they enrolled in AIO 26% of all hunters stated their reason for joining was because they could not find land on which to hunt, whereas 44 % of Illinois hunters stated this was their reason for joining AIO. Overall satisfaction with AIO was rated as "Good" to "Excellent" by 63% of participants, with 37% of participants rating the program "Poor" to "Fair." Among Illinois hunters, the ratings were 48% "Good" to "Excellent" and 53% rated the program "Poor" to "Fair" (23% of Illinois hunters gave the program a "Poor" rating). Participants overall satisfaction with the program was reported as "Extremely satisfied" by 17% of all participants, and 11% for Illinois hunters. A total of 17% expressed they were "Extremely dissatisfied" with the program, whereas 30% of Illinois participants stated they were "Extremely dissatisfied" with AIO. The average length of hunting contract was more than one day, but less than one week and the average fee was approximately \$750.00.

Access Illinois Outdoors Landowners

Of landowners enrolled in AIO, 86% reported they allowed hunting on their land prior to enrollment in the program. Family members and friends comprised the majority of hunters on these lands prior to the landowners' enrollment in AIO. The average number of hunters allowed access through AIO was 2-5 hunters per landowner. Most landowners stated their reason for participating in AIO was for extra income. Reduced liability was identified by AIO landowners as the most important incentive for allowing hunters access to property statewide. A total of 81% of landowners enrolled in AIO rated the program as "Good" to "Excellent."