

# Natural Resource ENTERPRISES

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## Bed and Breakfast Businesses

With hard work and a good business plan, the family homestead, a rustic cabin, or an antebellum home can become a source of income. All over Mississippi, people who enjoy opening their home to visitors and providing excellent customer service have opened up bed and breakfast businesses.

### *Is it for me?*

Running a bed and breakfast business has many benefits including being your own boss, having flexible hours, and allowing you to work at your home. However, not everyone is suited to this type of enterprise. Bed and breakfast owners put in long hours and may have little privacy or family time. All benefits and costs of this type of enterprise should be examined prior to making the decision to open your own bed and breakfast.

If you are interested in opening a bed and breakfast, talk to other enterprise owners first. They can provide helpful hints, insights, and share their experiences with you. One resource for meeting other bed and breakfast owners is the Mississippi Bed and Breakfast Association ([www.missbab.com](http://www.missbab.com)).

### *Getting started*

There are many forms to fill out at the beginning of any business, and opening a bed and breakfast business is no different. Be sure to properly follow laws and regulations regarding state and federal permits or licenses. Check with your local government regarding local zoning laws, codes, and business regulations.

As with any business, beginning with clearly defined goals and a good business plan is imperative. Developing operating procedures, tracking finances, and planning a marketing strategy will help you to reach your goals.

Although good word of mouth will go far, using marketing tools such as printed brochures or advertisement space in newspapers or magazines may also help draw in customers. Consider developing a Web site which is a useful marketing tool that can reach broad audiences. Marketing your bed and breakfast is important to the success of your business.



Good customer service is essential in a bed and breakfast business. Everything that you do to improve customer relations adds to the experience and will help you develop loyal repeat customers. People who frequent bed and breakfast businesses are looking for that special charm and appreciate the extra attention, amenities, or the unique experience.

For more detailed information on the many topics related to establishing a bed and breakfast business, go to our Web site [www.naturalresources.msstate.edu](http://www.naturalresources.msstate.edu) and visit the bed and breakfast page under the resources section.

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Sources: Developing a Bed and Breakfast Business Plan - University of Illinois; Starting a Bed and Breakfast Business - Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Conservation Benefits Offered by Land Trusts

Property ownership for landowners can mean much more than just a recreational investment. For many, it is about owning an important part of our natural heritage to be shared with family and friends. It is a place where previous generations grew up enjoying the bountiful natural resources. Hopefully, future generations will too.

*"Mississippi's private citizens own about 75 percent of the state's land. But the Mississippi landscape is changing. Today about 80 percent of Mississippians live in cities and towns, compared to about 25 percent 50 years ago. As our urban population grows, natural habitats and scenic open spaces are lost forever. The Mississippi countryside is changing too. One of the most significant factors affecting our landscape is the continued breakup of family-owned farms."*  
- Daniel Coggin of the Mississippi Land Trust.

Many landowners are turning to conservation easements to reduce the fragmentation of our state and ease the economic pressures imposed by land acquisition and ownership. So what is a conservation easement? It is basically a self imposed restriction a landowner voluntarily places on specific uses of property in order to protect his/her land, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, or historic buildings. Conservation easements can be tailored to meet a landowner's specific needs, whether he or she owns 3,000 acres or 300 acres.

With a conservation easement the landowner retains legal title to the property while determining the types of land uses to be continued and those to be restricted. As part of the

arrangement, the landowner grants the holder of the conservation easement the right to periodically assess the condition of the property to ensure that it is maintained according to the terms of the legal agreement.

When a conservation easement is placed on a property, the owner may give up certain rights (e.g., the right to subdivide the property, develop the property, etc.). Those restrictions the landowner places on the property are specified in the easement document. The conveyance of the property must be made in perpetuity (forever) in order to receive federal tax benefits. The easement document itself is a legal instrument signed and recorded in the county of record. Since the conservation easement continues on the land forever, the restrictions remain on the property even after the landowner dies or sells the property.

If a landowner decides that a conservation easement is right for him/her, the next step is to find a holder for the easement. A holder can be any nonprofit conservation organization like the Mississippi Land Trust or a government agency. Once contact has been made with a holder, a meeting is usually set up where the potential easement holder will come out and review the property to see if it is an easement they would be willing to hold. Holding an easement is a major responsibility and is not taken lightly by the easement holder.

Although conservation easements are an excellent tool for landowners, they are not for everyone. Costs for setting up conservation easements are high and can range from \$10,000 to \$25,000. However, all of these costs are tax-deductible and may even qualify for state income tax credits if the easement benefits a scenic river/stream or lands of the Mississippi Natural Heritage Program.

Recently, Congress approved an expansion of federal conservation tax incentives which offers increased benefits for the donation of conservation easements. This expansion will raise the deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%. (continued on the next page)



### ***Conservation Benefits Offered by Land Trusts continued***

It also will allow qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; the number of years over which a donor can take those deductions will be increased from 6 to 16 years. This bill awaits the President's signature before it can become law. President George W. Bush is expected to sign the bill into law. It is also important to note that this only applies to easements donated in 2006 and 2007.

According to Daniel Coggin, Director of the Mississippi Land Trust, "Land that qualifies for a conservation easement typically is land that is undeveloped, forested in native species or has a minimum amount of agricultural or intense timber use. This type of land will meet the basic qualification for conservation easement conveyance. In Mississippi, most property currently in prairie, upland or bottomland hardwoods, mixed pine/hardwoods or longleaf pine qualifies for development of a conservation easement."

For more information on land trusts and conservation easements throughout Mississippi, please call Daniel S. Coggin of the Mississippi Land Trust, at (662) 256 4486 or visit the Trust on the Web at [www.misslandtrust.org](http://www.misslandtrust.org). For a free conservation easement handbook, call (662) 686-3375.

## **Upcoming Events**

October 10th - Natural resource enterprises workshop in Raymond, MS

October 21st - Waterfowl Demonstration Field Day in Charleston MS.

Visit [www.naturalresources.msstate.edu/events](http://www.naturalresources.msstate.edu/events) for more information.

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## **Feral and Free-roaming Cats: Not Wildlife's Friend**

Throughout the United States the house cat is a very popular pet. Census data indicates 30% of households have cats as pets. Many of these cat owners allow their cat to freely roam in the urban and suburban areas where they live. In recent decades wildlife biologists have become very concerned about the impact that free-roaming pet and feral cat populations have on local wildlife populations.

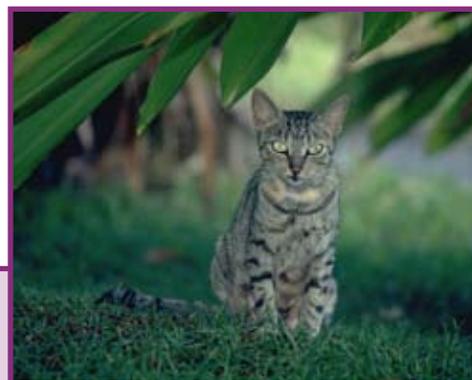
### ***Effects of Cats on Wildlife***

Cats are very efficient and skillful predators. Studies have shown that an outdoor cat's diet consists of 60% small mammals, 30% birds, and 10% other animals. Current estimates indicate that a typical free-roaming cat in a suburban-rural area can kill 14 wild animals per year. In 1990, scientists estimated that free-roaming and outdoor cats killed approximately a billion small mammals and hundreds of millions of birds each year.

The negative impact of feral and free-roaming pet cats on wildlife populations doesn't stop with predation. Outdoor cats directly compete with native predators for prey. They also transmit several diseases (rabies, leukemia, feline distemper) to wildlife, other cats, and humans.

For more information go to American Bird Conservancy website and click on the link *Cats Indoor! Campaign* at [www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org)

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## **What you can do to help**

### **Keep your cats indoors**

Well fed cats and cats with bells still kill wild animals. The only way to ensure your cat doesn't kill wildlife is to keep them indoors. Likewise keeping your cat indoors will protect them from injury and possibly from contracting diseases. The average outdoor cat only lives 5 years whereas an indoor cat can live 12-17 years.

### **Don't feed stray cats**

Feeding free-roaming or feral cats only increases the population and intensifies the probability of disease exposure for cats, wildlife, and humans.

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