

Fee Fishing in Florida

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Introduction

The number of resident anglers in Florida is rapidly increasing due to the growing interest in fishing and Florida's rapidly growing population. In addition, millions of non-resident anglers vacation in Florida each year. Fishing pressure on our public waters is increasing, with many anglers looking for alternative places to fish. With increasing transportation costs and license fees, many anglers are looking for alternative fishing opportunities closer to home. Fee fishing, paying for the right to fish and/or paying for any fish that are caught, is becoming popular among anglers. Many ponds are seldom fished. In general, fish populations in ponds are underharvested. These can be turned into alternative sources of revenue.

There are three basic types of fee fisheries: long-term leasing, day leasing, and fish-out operations. Exclusive fishing rights to a private pond or lake can be leased on a long-term basis to an individual or group of individuals. This type of leasing arrangement is commonly developed between hunters and landowners (Marion and Hovis 1985). Management of the pond is often the responsibility of the lessee. Day leasing involves collecting a daily user fee from the fisherman. Pond management is the responsibility of the operator. Normally, only those fish produced within the pond through natural production are made available to the angler, however, the pond may be stocked on an occasional basis with catchable-size fish, such as channel catfish. Generally, ponds stocked with largemouth bass and bluegill are day leased. 'Fish-out', 'put and take', or 'pay by the pound' fisheries involve stocking a pond with fish and then charging the angler for each fish that is caught. Consequently fish populations in this type of operation must be maintained at artificially high levels by regular stocking of catchable-size fish, usually catfish.

Fee fishing appeals to a wide variety of individuals, experienced anglers who seek particular species such as largemouth bass, anglers who simply like to fish but are limited by time or resources such as owning a boat, families with small children, the physically handicapped, and the elderly. Fee fishing can be attractive to tourists or individuals who fish on an occasional basis because no license is required to fish in a private fish pond of 20 acres or less

provided it is located entirely within the private property of the fish pond owner. In addition, no fishing license is required to fish in a fish pond of more than 20 acres if the pond is located entirely within private property and the fish pond owner has obtained a fish pond license. The cost of this license is \$3.00 per surface acre per year and the license may be obtained from the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission.

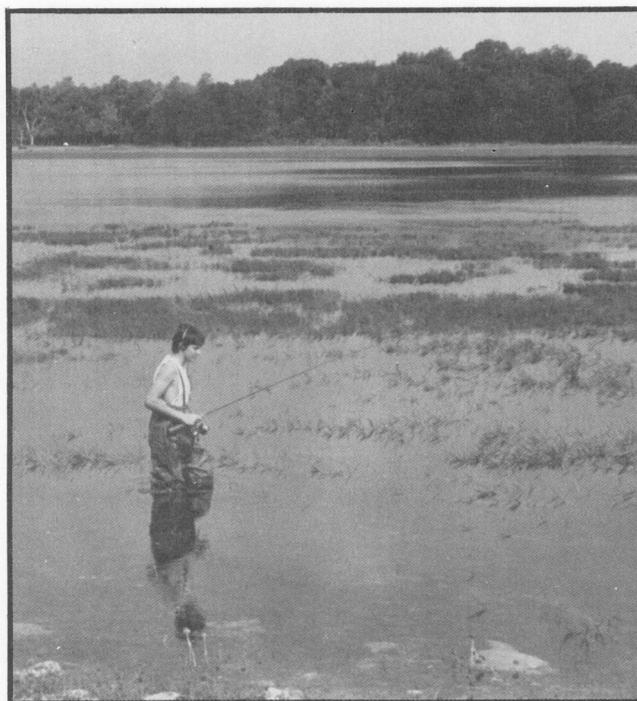


Figure 1. Long-term fishing leases generally involve quality fishing. Location, aesthetics, and good fishing are all key selling points.

Long-term leasing

Long-term leasing generally involves quality fishing for largemouth bass or panfish. Location and aesthetics are often the most important selling points (Fig. 1). Many people fish to relax and to escape the hustle and bustle of their daily life. They desire a quality fishing experience.

Unlike hunting leases which require a large quantity of land to support adequate game, fishing leases can be rather small in size. One acre of water can naturally produce 300 to 400 pounds of harvestable-size fish per year with proper management.