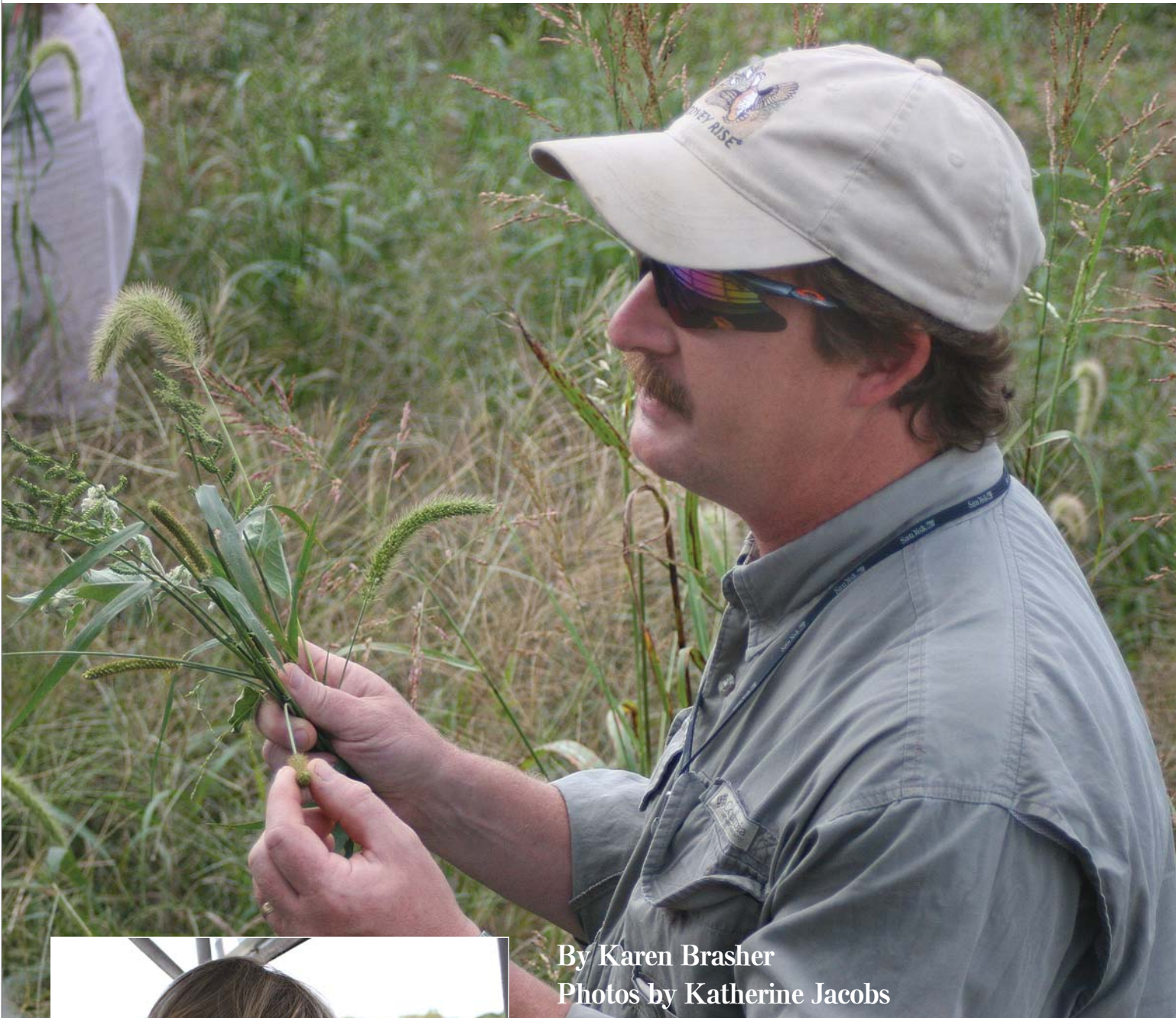


Natural Resource Businesses

Provide Income Opportunities



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By Karen Brasher
Photos by Katherine Jacobs

Landowners searching for ways to increase their income may need to look no further than their backyard. That is what Wade Henson of Montgomery County did.

Henson developed a successful fee-hunting business on his family's farm near Kilmichael. He started Cypress Lodge Outfitters on a shoestring budget in 1994, offering just a few hunts a year. "Now we stay booked most of the year," Henson said. "We offer white-tailed deer, turkey and waterfowl hunts to Mississippians and visitors from around the world."

Bruce Leopold, head of Mississippi State University's Natural Resource Enterprises program and Wildlife and Fisheries Department, said Henson's business is an example of how landowners can tap into the demand for outdoor recreational opportunities.

"A survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that anglers and hunters spent \$571 million in Mississippi on equipment and trip-related items in 2001," Leopold said. "Wildlife watchers spent an additional \$303 million."

The Natural Resource Enterprises program provides landowners with training and other support they need to add natural resource businesses to their existing farm and timber operations.

The program is a collaborative effort of the MSU Forest and Wildlife Research Center, MSU's Extension Service and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station.

"It takes research-based information and assistance to promote natural resource sustainability and wildlife economic development practices," said Daryl Jones, assistant wildlife Extension professor. "The public's demand for outdoor recreation and use of natural resources is increasing, and landowners can profit from the demand if they have the right information and training."

There are challenges involved with establishing natural-resource-based enterprises. These include compatibility with ongoing agriculture and forestry operations, renewable resource management, marketing, customer service and business management.

"Monitoring and evaluating any business requires a sound knowledge base," Jones said. "We are providing that knowledge base for Mississippi landowners through the Natural Resource Enterprises program."

Currently, 90 percent of Mississippi's natural resources are on privately owned land and are used primarily for agriculture or forestry production.

"These privately owned lands have tremendous potential for other compatible economic enterprises, but most have not been managed and marketed to attain their full economic potential," Jones noted. "There are many opportunities for landowners to learn about natural resource enterprises, including MSU-sponsored workshops and demonstration areas."

Workshops cover topics such as liability, cost-share programs, marketing and the development of a business plan. Demonstration areas provide hands-on learning opportunities.

"Through a partnership with Pennington Seed, Inc., landowners can view wildlife food plot plantings at MSU experiment stations throughout the state," Jones said. "Other sites include the demonstration pond on the MSU campus, the Natural Resources Conservation Education Center in West Point and the Natural Resource Enterprises Demonstration Area in Newton."

The program's Web site, www.naturalresources.msstate.edu, also contains information developed by MSU's GeoResources Institute. The site contains geospatial data for Mississippi and allows users to submit online requests for information and inquiries about leasing privately owned recreational properties.

The geospatial area of the Web site is being expanded to include information about the entire Southeast.

"The Natural Resource Enterprises program at MSU is now the premier program of its type in the region," Jones said. "We have received requests from across the Southeast for information about our more than 15 research projects and 25 Extension programs that deal with outdoor recreational businesses."



Mississippi landowners have the opportunity to learn how to generate extra income from their land at workshops sponsored by MSU's Natural Resource Enterprises program. Wildlife and fisheries professor Wes Burger, left, explains the importance of native plants to wildlife habitats, while workshop attendee Jan Watson of Dundee gives one of the plants an up-close examination.