



**Finding Inexpensive Options
for Hunting Success**

story by

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around 97 percent of land in Texas is privately owned, which makes our state unique compared to any other area in the USA.

One of the challenges many Texas hunters face is finding affordable hunting land. Cost and availability are two of the main factors that cause many would-be hunters each year to abandon hunting to seek something more affordable with an easier entry point.

When I first started hunting on my own as an adult I was nearly broke, having just graduated from college. I had purchased my first home, so I didn't have the money for a season or year-long lease. I had to learn how to be creative in finding hunting opportunities

Although it was a challenging process, it was rewarding. There are many alternatives available today that were not as common years ago.

Day hunting ranches are at the top of my list of recommendations for finding hunting property. Game hunting ranches usually fall into high-fence and low-fence categories with some having both high and low-fenced hunting areas.

One of the ranches I work with in the outdoor industry is DB Hunting Ranch in central Texas (www.dbhunting.com). On ranches such as DBHR,

hunters can pursue wild hogs or exotic game animals year-round. Game animals such as blackbuck antelope, exotic deer, and even some African game species are available. Lodging and accommodations are also available at most ranches, and your guide usually works hard to help you take your quarry.



Cost for something simple such as a hog hunt usually starts at about \$125, and your hunt is semi- or fully-guided. Although you have to follow the ranch rules, opportunities are usually greater for success.

This is because day hunting ranches want you to return year after year for anything from a meat hunt up to a trophy hunt. If you choose this route, do your research on the ranch to make sure it has a good reputation, and don't forget to tip your guide.

Another option for finding affordable hunting areas is a membership network where hunters pay a yearly membership fee and enjoy deep discounts on hunts ranging from low cost to high ticket all-inclusive trophy hunting adventures.

Joining a membership network like this is much like joining a big-box wholesale club. Your yearly membership fee allows the freedom to choose what hunt you want and where you want it, all at a discounted price from a network of hunting and fishing outfitters all over Texas and even nationwide.

One outfitter pioneering this model is Elite Outdoorsman (www.trophyhuntstexas.com). Their mission is to give more people an affordable opportunity to explore the hunting and fishing sports at a better price than sourcing an outdoor adventure themselves. They are based in Texas but outfit hunts all over North America.

With the loss of wildlife habitat, urban and suburban areas are more populated with deer and other wild game than ever before. This makes for some great hunting opportunities in these areas. I wrote an article on urban and suburban bowhunting that appeared in the October 2014 issue of TF&G, and I have even written an eBook on the subject.

If you aren't a bowhunter, think about investing in a crossbow and check out your local area for possible hunting opportunities. Talk to your local game warden about it. In most cases, it is legal to hunt outside of city limits, but some cities have ordinances that



The author with two memorable public hunt trophies: (left) a red stag from DB hunting Ranch, and (right) "Mr. Big" a trophy buck from one of his urban hunting hot spots.

within city limits with certain restrictions.

I have hunted five- to 10-acre woodlots and even smaller areas with great success. In fact, last season I killed my personal best archery buck, named "Mr. Big," from one of my suburban hunting hotspots, a property that sits just outside city limits. Looking at this property at first, it may not look like much, but it turns into a deer hunter's dream in the mornings and evenings.

Most urban and suburban hunting occurs on private property so having a great relationship with the landowner owning the property and neighboring landowners is the biggest key for success. The nice thing about hunting this way is that it can cost you next to nothing.

I always offer my landowners meat from my hunts or services to help them with whatever they need. If you want to see what a hunt like this looks like, check out my YouTube channel as I have filmed many of these hunting adventures.

Another option for finding affordable hunting land is hunting on government property. One of the first deer hunting experiences I had when I became an adult and out on my own was at Fort Hood as part of their hunt control program. Civilian hunting permits are only \$125 at Fort

lations around Texas have similar hunting programs. Although there are many rules and restrictions to follow when hunting on government property, many hunters have found success here.

Public land is another good option as Texas Parks and Wildlife has expanded its public hunting program, including a cooperative of participating land owners and state property. A good friend of mine frequently hunts public land, especially WMAs (Wildlife Management Areas) for many different species of game with great success. An annual public land hunting permit only costs \$48 and gains you access to almost a million acres of land.

There are indeed ways to make hunting more affordable. You just have to learn how to think outside of the box. Approaching the quest to find affordable hunting property may seem a daunting task at first; but as we discovered, there are many affordable options available. The journey to finding some of these low cost gems is sometimes even more fun than the destination!

