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Posting Your Property

by Dr. Neil A. Waer

A very important but often overlooked land management practice is to post your property. Trespassing and the related poaching that often accompany it sometimes can negate successful outcomes from other management efforts. We all know how expensive it can be to manage for wildlife. Not only can one spend many dollars for each deer, turkey, or quail produced, but time (often years) is invested for each individual animal also. Just think of the heartache associated with feeding and saving your best bucks each year just to have trespassers poach them from you because you spent no, or marginal, effort to prevent it.

Here in Alabama the actual placement of signs along the borders of your property is not necessary to legally protect against trespassing. However, I believe securing your boundaries is critical. You see, one of the most important things to managing wildlife has nothing to do with wildlife at all. It's managing people! And in this case, it's doing your best to keep unintentional and often even deliberate trespassers off of your land. The purpose of this article is to encourage all of us who have put this chore off for too long to get out there and do it!

So what can be done to help reduce or minimize potential trespass problems? The answer is to make a very clear and visible proclamation that you are serious about unlawful trespass (Figure 1). It is my opinion that most properties are not adequately posted and that the wrong or no message is being sent to the trespassing public. By poorly



Signs should communicate a very clear and directed message - that the landowner is serious about unlawful trespass.

In this Issue

- **Posting Your Property**
by Dr. Neil A. Waer
- **Is There a Best Time to Feed Deer?**
Nutrition and the Life Cycles of White-Tailed Deer
by Wallace Whitley
- **Wild Turkey Management**
by Dana K. Johnson
- **Food Plot Development**
by Brian Sheppard

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Inexpensive paper-type or thin plastic signs often fade, crack and tear after a short time. One might be communicating the wrong message in this situation – that the property is neglected or abandoned, and the owners are no longer or not that serious about trespassing.

or not even posting your boundaries, you might be unintentionally communicating apathy about trespassing. Over the years I have had numerous “run-ins” with trespassers/poachers who almost always have the same response. They usually say “I thought it was ok to hunt/fish here ‘cause I didn’t see any signs” or “I didn’t know it wasn’t ok to hunt/fish here.” Well, I think we should all make a strong effort to that say it **isn’t** ok to hunt/fish on our land without permission by doing a thorough and professional job of posting our boundaries.

There are three things one needs to know to do a good job of posting your boundaries: what to use, how to hang it, and how far apart to hang it. So what type of sign should you use? Probably the most common sign seen hanging on thou-

sands of acres across Alabama is a thin, inexpensive paper-type sign available at most hardware stores, home centers, and farmer’s Co-ops. These signs sell for about \$0.50 to \$1.00 and usually are seen wrapped around and nailed to trees and fence posts or placed on wooden backer boards (Figure 2). Most look weathered and paled by the end of the first hunting season. These types of signs tear and fall off easily. The second most common choice, and a better one, seems to be a rigid plastic or corrugated plastic sign available at the same types of stores that usually sells for about \$1 to \$2. While these types of signs do last longer, my experience has been that they eventually fade or crack with increasing sun exposure. The best and most professional-looking sign I have found is a heavy gauge aluminum sign. These high quality signs can be purchased from your local sign company, over the Internet, or by mail order. I have had a very satisfactory experience mail ordering from Voss Signs, LLC (800-473-0698). I have purchased 0.032-gauge aluminum signs for under \$4, delivered. Bulk orders from most companies receive a discount. This is a very thick and rigid sign that will not bend in the wind and does not need a backer board. While signs can be ordered in several colors, my preference is an orange sign with the message seen in Figure 1. I believe orange is more visible in the woods than yellow or another color. Additionally, I believe the message on the sign pictured in Figure 1 is more inclusive and specific than just the words “No Hunting” or “No Trespassing.” I don’t want to accidentally give trespassers a loophole. Most sign companies also will allow customized messages.

So how should you hang your signs? Because I want to be as professional as possible to communicate a clear and serious message, I try to neatly hang all of my signs at about the same height (4 feet above the ground) in one of three ways. If fences are already present along the property boundary, I screw signs directly to the fence posts using stainless steel screws. If no posts are available and I need a very professional look in highly visible or vulnerable areas (such as along road

frontages), I bolt them to 1 5/8" x 5', 18-gauge galvanized pipes used for chain link fence posts (Figure 3). These pieces of pipe are readily available at home centers for about \$4 apiece. I drill all the way through the pipe starting about 2 inches down from the top and use small stainless steel bolts with washers to attach the sign at the top and bottom of the sign (most aluminum signs come predrilled). Before you attach the sign, a fence-post driver can be used to drive the post in the ground. To finish it off, a post cap (about \$0.50) can be added to keep rainwater from collecting in the pipe and rusting it prematurely. While it may seem like overkill, the result is a very professional-looking job that communicates the right message. The other and most common way to mount signs along extensive boundaries with no fence posts already available is to attach them to boundary trees. I don't like to use nails because nails have a tendency to work out over time. Instead, I prefer to use stainless steel screws to attach signs to trees because screws can be adjusted and backed-out as the tree grows. A drawback to attaching signs to trees, however, is that it can be somewhat inconsistent and "messy" due to differences in tree diameters and tree growth angles.

The final decision is how often to hang a sign. While this will depend upon your budget and if you have 10 acres or 10,000 acres, I think about every 100 yards is good. In highly vulnerable areas or thickly vegetated areas, closer spacing might be needed. While posting your property will not automatically keep every trespasser off (I once caught a poacher hunting on one of my greenfields just 100 feet over a boundary even though 2 signs were visible; he claimed that he hadn't seen either of them), it probably will keep most unintentional and even intentional trespassers off if done in a way that communicates how serious you are. In addition, it will give you peace of mind, not to mention a rock solid case in a court of law.



Where fence posts are not already available along vulnerable or high-profile areas, signs can be bolted to galvanized pipe for a clean and professional look.

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