



After a prolonged trend of strong demand and generally increasing prices for Land, we get the sense that there may be a pull back in the market or at least a time to pause and wait and see. Perhaps as a landowner you are asking, “Did I miss my opportunity to sell?” We think every market presents an opportunity but we know that planning ahead always produces the best chance of success, in Life and in Land.

Many of our clients who follow this mantra have asked us over the years, “What do I need to be doing now in order to sell my property in the next few years?” Their forward thinking had led them to the right question and looking back I think it delivered better results for them when they did decide to sell. Given the current market, now is a good time to re-visit some of these case studies and see what worked, it’s a good chance it will continue to work.

In a loose order of importance the following is our guide to preparing your property for sale in the future:

Water - water is a major selling feature of any farm, ranch or plantation and we consistently see it deliver higher values compared to properties that don't. This could be included on a list of criteria when looking for a property to buy but that is a different article. Many of our clients have a river, creek or lake already on their property, in this case we recommend evaluating ways to enhance this feature. If it's a lake or water feature, how can you enhance the fishing opportunity or its attraction to waterfowl? These 2 things don't often mix so you have to decide which direction your going.

For fishing be thinking about accessibility of the lake either by dock or boat access. Both of these are relatively inexpensive to add and give the lake a big benefit. Once you're on the water, fishability means managing aquatics, both native and invasive. A healthy lake that adds value and is easy to fish definitely requires management of aquatic vegetation. An overgrown lake is definitely a negative and represents a major expense for the perspective Buyer. The quality of the fishing adds a major selling feature as something that can be enjoyed year round by friends and family that don't hunt and by hunters between seasons. Consulting with a fisheries biologist is the BEST way to get results in this department.



Harper's Pond, Estill, SC.

At the time of Listing above, the lake had just been treated for lily pads, as evidenced by the brown streaks, but just had small areas of open water for fishing.

Aesthetics are critical. This point really applies not only to lakes but also to creeks and rivers. If the lake or river is a focal point of the property, overlooked by a cabin or home, spending the money to manicure the lake / riverbanks improves accessibility and shows potential Buyers that the property has been thoughtfully maintained. I've seen numerous properties

with river frontage that can not be accessed easily. If your land sits along a river make sure you can access it and show it off to prospective Buyers. The advent of front-end mulchers and hydraulic arm mounted mowers has revolutionized the management of these areas. If you can't see it, it makes it a lot harder to pay more for it. This investment will pay a return at time of sale.

Adding a lake to a property can be costly depending on where you are but many properties have ideal lake sites that just have to be improved. If your property has one of these sites we recommend consulting with a knowledgeable Land Broker to see if he thinks it will increase the property value. An expert Broker should also have contacts for helping you design and construct the lake. If you have the right soil type and are located close to a growing population center it is likely you can find a Buyer for your dirt thereby decreasing the cost of building the lake. We have consulted on many lake construction projects over the years and are happy to meet with landowners to discuss cost and return on investment. This is a minimum 3-5 year project if you want to give the lake time to establish quality fishing so planning ahead is key here.

For Waterfowl, the improvements can be more costly and time consuming but have a big upside by adding a hunting opportunity that was not previously present. You must have a consistent water source, be able to create a food supply and be in an area that historically holds waterfowl for best results. Developing waterfowl habitat is its own article and is unique to each area of the Country but these are the factors you are looking for. The general trend over the last 10 years has seen a sharp increase in managed waterfowl habitat both on private and public land, all vying for a relatively fixed amount waterfowl in the fall flight so consulting an expert about the feasibility of waterfowl improvements and the implementation of them are critical before spending this money. When done correctly we have seen this add tremendous value to a property.



A new waterfowl impoundment designed and built by Oakwood's Habitat company, close to completion in an undisclosed location in the south. Duck Hunters are a notoriously secretive bunch...

These points take time to implement and time to take effect; planning ahead and consulting with an expert will achieve the best results!

Roads and Ditches: You would think this one is fairly obvious but we show a lot of properties that have poor roads, not enough roads and poor drainage. We have also been in a prolonged wet cycle here in the south, which has delayed many road and drainage maintenance projects. This is probably a timely tip even if you are not thinking about selling. But if you are, it's a must. A broker can not show a prospective Buyer the whole property without a good road system. To address this on your property you may have to construct some new roads to accentuate selling features on your property or you may just need to invest in maintaining existing roads, regardless this is an investment that pays a big return at

time of sale. A lot of clients just think of roads as the road surface itself but overgrown roads are just as big a hindrance as bumpy and rough roads. Daylighting roads, meaning clearing vegetation along road edges, shows thoughtful maintenance, improves visibility and aesthetics, allows roads to dry faster and creates additional wildlife habitat.

After many years of showing Land I would say one of the biggest concerns for Buyers during a showing is flooding and drainage related issues. A good drainage system keeps roads open and eliminates flooding and contributes immensely to a successful showing. Again, this will not be completed over night so plan ahead for these improvements.

Presentation: Part of this topic was covered under Water in maintenance of your lakes and ponds but it is much broader. Habitat, fences, improvements and houses are also key to good presentation. A fresh coat of paint or clearing a fence line or adding a perimeter firebreak will yield a far greater return than their cost.

Consulting your Broker in advance will lead to a great Presentation, faster sale and a higher sales price. A simple example that yields multiple benefits is creating a border between different stand types. I first saw this as we opened our Charleston brokerage office and I began to tour different SC plantations. I'm not sure if it originated there but it really jumped out at me. I thought, here is something that creates a unique and attractive aesthetic, shows thoughtful management, benefits multiple wildlife species at once by creating significant edge habitat and a food source and makes timber management easier. It's a win-win-win but again it didn't happen overnight.



Photo courtesy of Stro Morrison, Morrison Forest Management, Estill, SC. While not currently planted as a food plot this buffer serves multiple purposes as discussed above, most importantly creating edge habitat for wildlife over a long corridor.

Habitat - Timber and Understory condition: This one is a little more subtle but you know it when you see it, it is definitely of high importance in the High Quality Properties we typically sell and is sought after by astute Buyers. It can pay dividends on any property but takes the most time to achieve.

It is one thing to run a prescribed fire through an overgrown pine stand the year you plan to

sell, mulch an overgrown hardwood stand or do some mowing to create a manicured effect but it is entirely something different to achieve a diversity of well managed, fire maintained habitat with a sustainable timber income for the benefit of all wildlife, reduction of wildfire risk and financial return to the Owner during ownership. Many of our clients have committed substantial time and money to implementing these practices on their property over many decades and we have endeavored as brokers to make sure they are rewarded for it.

Looking back this is the single biggest driver of value in our sales and distinguishes the High Quality Properties from the rest.

Well managed timber and it's associated understory go hand in hand and are most often linked together by prescribed fire. When it comes to value at time of sale we consistently see properties that are managed for wildlife and timber income deliver higher values than properties managed exclusively for timber income.

The catch is that managing holistically is not significantly more expensive than managing to maximize income and it doesn't have to sacrifice return. It just takes vision, experience and beginning with the end in mind, which is why it cannot be done in the year you plan to sell and why it delivers it the most value to a landowner.

These forces take many years to shape the landscape and restore a diverse habitat and it is definitely part art and part science. It requires varying degrees of upfront costs depending on the condition of the property, but once established it is relatively easy to maintain. Even on the quail plantations we achieve significant, sustainable income from timber and many, many families have demonstrated over the years that sound, thoughtful management that benefits wildlife achieves a higher return in the long run.

Habitat improvement starts with sustainable timber management. A diversity of age classes in association with a harvest plan will deliver sustainable cash flows to the Owner. Managing the logging operations, including the post harvest cleanup, is an often overlooked task but dramatically improves aesthetics, makes road improvement and repair easier and adds wildlife habitat. Frequent harvests, sustainably managed, creates an early successional

habitat preferred by wildlife for its many food sources. Logging operations also create openings and disturbance, which if managed correctly can add even more wildlife habitat. When you combine these management techniques with prescribed fire in your stands that have already been thinned or are managed as an uneven aged stands you are well on your way to excellent land stewardship.

Property Records: If your property generates income or your managing for wildlife keeping good records demonstrates the longevity of your program and helps us as your Broker demonstrate the value of the Property. For income producing parts like farm leases, government subsidies, timber sales or Ag sales it doesn't take much extra time to keep good records that a Buyer can easily understand but it is really hard to piece back together years of records after the fact. For wildlife, trail cameras have become an essential tool in demonstrating what is actually on the Property. Keep in mind that a Broker compiles his marketing during just one time or season on the Property but demonstrating the history of a property and the progression of quality management over the years helps the Broker to demonstrate why your Property is different than others and creates confidence in a Buyer that he knows what he is Buying. This can be as simple as trail camera pictures of mature deer or memorable duck hunts over the years or as detailed as a 10-year history of the number of coveys moved per hour on every quail hunt. Every bit of history helps demonstrate the value of your Property.

Collectively these tips will increase your properties potential to achieve the highest possible value at time of sale. This is not an exhaustive list, there are certainly many other ideas and tips that's could be considered worthwhile. The main thing is to begin with the end in mind and thus be prepared when the time comes to sell.

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Oakwood Realty Group is a real estate brokerage firm offering brokerage and consulting services to buyers and sellers of high quality hunting, recreational, and income-producing land in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama. Our clients choose us for

*the **trust** and **expertise** we provide. We strive to build long term client relationships through hard work and integrity in everything we do. We hope you have found these tips to be helpful and that you will consider Oakwood when the time comes to sell your property. In the meantime, we are happy to meet with you on your Property to review in more detail the strategies discussed in this article.*