An unpublished survey made in 1964 by the Soil Conservation Service showed that private rural-urban groups, primarily nonprofit types, owned or leased more than 39 million acres of land and water for recreational purposes.[10] More than 51,000 groups were involved, and their memberships totaled nearly 9 million people. The lands leased by these groups belonged to more than 47,000 owners, more than half of whom received income for the leases.

Information about real estate investment in these lands is unavailable. But assuming that the average acre is worth $100, the value of these 39 million acres would approximate $4 billion. No information is available about the value or capacity of recreation facilities provided on these 39 million acres.

Neither is information available about the number, value, or services provided by other private, nonprofit facilities such as cooperative swimming associations, tennis and golf clubs, hunt clubs, and many others.

B. Costs and User Charges

1. CAPITAL AND OPERATING COSTS

Construction costs for recreation facilities vary according to the size, shape, and quality of the structures utilized. Generally, construction costs for recreation facilities need not be more expensive than those for comparable commercial, industrial, or residential uses. A minor exception might arise from the need for safety features required by regulation due to public use of specific facilities.

Similarly, a great range exists in capital invested in various enterprises. It is easier, financially, to enter some types of recreation businesses than others. Some require little capital outlay. For example, a farmer can start a vacation farm enterprise using resources already available, whereas a shooting preserve requires investment in specialized equipment and facilities. Capital investment for recreation increases as the size of the operation increases and as specialized services are provided.

The range in value of capital investments for certain types of recreation enterprises in selected States is shown in table 2.[11] Income, expenses, and net returns are also shown.

Only about 60 percent of the enterprises showed a positive return to family labor and management after allowing a 5-percent return on capital investment. Guide services, hunting areas, and youth camps most often showed a positive return to family labor and management. The first two yielded supplementary income with small capital investment. The latter required considerable capital investments and management ability. Most of these enterprises had been in operation for 5 years or more. During this period, the successful operators had expanded demand for their ventures through satisfactory services and advertising.

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[10] RAC study report, p. 65.
[11] Bird, Ronald, and Inman, B. T., "Income Opportunities for Rural Families from Outdoor Recreation Enterprises," U.S. Department of Agriculture, AER No. 68, March 1965, pp. 7–8.