

Assistance With Bobwhite Quail Management On Private Land

Although there is a lot of interest in quail hunting in Mississippi, most hunters know bobwhite populations have declined greatly over the past 30 years. Today's quail hunter can still find bobwhite hunting opportunities across the state, but any serious bird chaser will tell you population numbers are considerably lower than the "good old days" of the past.

Bobwhite quail numbers have declined mainly because of big changes in habitats across Mississippi and the Southeast. Bobwhite quail populations thrive in areas where many habitat types are close together. Quail require nesting, feeding, loafing, brood-rearing, and escape cover within a relatively small area. Small family farms, scattered woodlots, and weedy fields used to provide excellent statewide quail habitat. But today, most major land-use practices in Mississippi do not automatically provide good quail habitat. In fact, many current practices have a negative impact on quail.

Many modern forest management practices have had negative impacts on quail habitat, too. Thousands of acres of even-aged plantations have been regenerated to dense stands of loblolly pine. In general, from huge fields cropped clean from edge to edge, to dense overgrown fields, to large acreage of dense pine stands, today's land-use practices have not provided the patchy mix of habitat types so critical to bobwhite quail.

Any of the habitat conditions just mentioned can be changed to provide good quail habitat! For example: good forest management can improve pine plantations for bobwhite quail habitat. Any landowner with the desire and interest to do "hands-on" management can enhance

quail habitat on his or her private property. Habitat management practices have been used to increase wild quail numbers successfully on private lands in every region of Mississippi. Although proper quail management usually involves a lot of work and habitat manipulation must be done at least annually in most cases, the rewards of a successful program are well worth the efforts.

Since each tract of land is unique, no one habitat management plan could be used to increase bobwhite numbers on every area. If you are interested in managing quail, conduct a field habitat evaluation to determine limiting factors on a specific area. A wildlife biologist can provide invaluable assistance with evaluating the existing habitat and developing management strategies to improve the area.

Sources of Assistance

Land managers in Mississippi can receive bobwhite quail information and assistance from several sources. This publication is not to explain the techniques used in bobwhite management, but to provide a list of potential sources of assistance and information to persons interested in enhancing quail habitat on private lands. Use the following list to help get started in the quail management business.

Mississippi Department Of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks (MDWFP)

The MDWFP provides landowners with technical guidance on wildlife management issues, including bobwhite quail management. District wildlife biologists in

each region of Mississippi can help with habitat evaluations and provide management recommendations to the private land managers interested in increasing quail numbers on an area. The MDWFP also provides free booklets on bobwhite quail ecology and management. To get information from the MDWFP, contact the Bureau of Wildlife, P.O. Box 451, Jackson, MS 39205, telephone 601-364-2214.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) The NRCS (formerly Soil Conservation Service, or SCS) office in each county is an excellent source of information on quail management. NRCS plays a critical role in implementing the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) throughout the state. This program can enhance the bobwhite quail population on your land. Through proper management, agricultural areas taken out of production and enrolled in CRP can be improved for bobwhites and other wildlife species. The NRCS also administers the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) that can provide some cost-share assistance to landowners managing wildlife on private lands. County NRCS personnel can inform you about the CRP opportunities and can provide additional information on wildlife management concerns specific to your region of Mississippi. For assistance from NRCS, contact the county NRCS office or write to the state NRCS office at Suite 1321, Federal Bldg., 100 West Capitol St., Jackson, MS 39269.

Mississippi State University Extension Service

With offices in each county of the state, Extension is one of the best sources of information on any wildlife management question. Information and various publications on life history and habitat management practices, including forest/open land management techniques and wildlife plantings, are available through the Extension Service. Also, Extension frequently conducts various wildlife management short courses. Programs include opportunities for grants and scholarships that might be available to youth who enhance habitat for bobwhite quail. To get information from MSU-ES, contact your county Extension office or the Extension Wildlife Specialist, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Box 9690, Mississippi State, MS 39762.

Delta Wildlife Foundation

Delta land managers should consider Delta Wildlife Foundation a good source of quail management information and technical guidance. This organization has experienced biologists who assist private wildlife managers. To receive information from Delta Wildlife Foundation, write to P.O. Box 276, Stoneville, MS 38776.

Quail Unlimited (QU)

Quail Unlimited is a national nonprofit organization that strives to preserve and reestablish critical upland game bird habitat needed to support healthy populations of quail and other game bird species. If you are interested in bobwhite quail hunting and habitat management, you need to check out what this organization has to offer. QU members receive useful management-related information through chapter meetings, field seminars, and a bimonthly magazine. Also, the organization regularly offers at a reduced price seeds for wildlife plantings. QU also supports bobwhite research and management efforts that have a positive impact on this game bird. To receive information on how you can get involved with Quail Unlimited in Mississippi, contact your QU chapter president.

Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC)

Good timber management and quail management can go hand in hand if you use proper techniques. MFC can provide excellent technical information on timber management and can assist with timber management practices (such as controlled burning) on private land at a small cost. Often, timber management practices that benefit quail habitat (such as thinning pine stands) can also provide the landowner some income. Additionally, private landowners managing timber on private lands may qualify for financial assistance through government cost-share programs, and MFC can provide information on these programs. Contact your county forester's office to receive information from the MFC.

Forest Industry Companies

Many quail-hunting enthusiasts who may not own or manage private lands might lease land from a timber company for hunting. Most forest industry companies have a wildlife management staff working with their leased lands in Mississippi. These wildlife professionals have excellent ideas on how to improve quail hunting on a particular club or lease. If you lease land to hunt quail, check with your specific company to find out what you can do to improve the quail population on your lease.

Private Consultants

In addition to government agencies that can assist with quail management, private companies provide professional guidance on wildlife and timber management matters for a fee. If you want the services of a private consulting forester or wildlife biologist, contact a professional land manager, who can provide information on the availability and quality of such services in your area.

Many sources of assistance are available to anyone wanting to enhance bobwhite quail numbers on private land. If you are willing to put in a little hard work, the same wildlife management practices used to increase quail numbers on areas across Mississippi could improve bird hunting on your land. While developing and implementing a bobwhite quail management plan, remember – help is available.