



Fire breaks are planted with clover and cool-season grasses.



Native grasses provide wildlife habitat on the property.



Sioux, an English pointer, pounds the brush searching for bobwhites.



Photos by Creston Shrum

Northern bobwhite quail search for food.

Restoration project improves quail population, habitat

After purchasing 1,200 acres in Fulton County for hunting and recreational use, Al Heringer started clearing fence rows and mowing pastures to clean up the property. But, the work had a detrimental impact on the quail population.

“I’ve always been interested in conservation and wildlife,” said Heringer, who is an avid upland bird hunter. “When the quail went from a hutable population to very few birds, I decided to seek technical assistance from NRCS.”

Through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Heringer has implemented a conservation plan on 640 acres.

Using prescribed burning once every three years to set back the vegetative succession, fire lanes with clover and cool-season grasses, and edge development with an annual plant community, quail and other wildlife are increasing on the property.

“Quail numbers have probably quadrupled as result of the work,” said James Baker, a Biologist on the Ecological Sciences staff at the NRCS state office. “The

number of turkeys followed suit.”

The plan includes forest stand improvement measures to reduce the canopy coverage. “Reducing the canopy coverage lets more sunlight reach the forest floor and promotes the growth of native grasses that wildlife use for food sources,” Baker said.

“We have also planted big and little blue stem, switch grass and Indian grass, along with native perennial forbs,” Baker said.

“In the past, we have focused on individual parcels creating a patchwork of habitat. A focal area allows us to install practices over a broader area – increasing the amount of quality habitat for quail in the area,” Baker said.

Heringer’s property lies within Fulton County’s 40,000 acre NRCS Quail Habitat Restoration Focal Area.

The restoration project gives Arkansas an additional \$150,000 to study the response of northern bobwhite quail populations to large-scale habitat restoration using NRCS conservation practices. Searcy County also has a 17,000 acre focal area.

2005 Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Overview

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program is a voluntary program that encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations of national, state, Tribal, and local significance.

Through WHIP, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and others to develop upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas on their property.

WHIP is reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill). Through WHIP, NRCS works with private landowners and operators; conservation districts; and federal, state, and Tribal agencies to develop wildlife habitat on their property. Funding for WHIP comes from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Benefits

Since WHIP began in 1998, nearly 14,700 participants have enrolled more than 2.3 million acres into the program. Most efforts have concentrated on improving upland wildlife habitat, such as native prairie, but there is an increasing emphasis on improving riparian and aquatic areas. The 2002 Farm Bill greatly expands the available tools for improving wildlife habitat conditions across the Nation.

Species that have benefited from WHIP activities include the grasshopper sparrow, bobwhite quail, swift fox, short-eared owl, Karner-blue butterfly, gopher tortoise, Louisiana black bear, Eastern collared lizard, Bachman's sparrow, ovenbird, acorn woodpecker, greater sage grouse, and salmon.

Eligibility

Eligible lands under the program are:

- ◆ Privately owned land;
- ◆ Federal land when the primary benefit is on private or Tribal land;
- ◆ State and local government land on a limited basis; and
- ◆ Tribal land.

If land is determined eligible, NRCS places emphasis on enrolling:

- ◆ Habitat areas for wildlife species experiencing declining or significantly reduced populations;
- ◆ Practices beneficial to fish and wildlife that may not otherwise be funded; and
- ◆ Wildlife and fishery habitats identified by local and state partners and Indian Tribes in each state.

The Adjusted Gross Income provision of the 2002 Farm Bill impacts eligibility for WHIP and several other 2002 Farm Bill programs. Individuals or entities that have an average adjusted gross income exceeding \$2.5 million for the three tax years immediately preceding the year the

County	Contracts	Funding Approved
Arkansas	3	\$56,897
Benton	1	\$25,000
Boone	5	\$78,211
Cleburne	3	\$29,559
Franklin	1	\$10,405
Fulton	11	\$73,807
Izard	2	\$26,055
Jefferson	1	\$11,911
Lonoke	1	\$14,737
Madison	4	\$29,261
Marion	1	\$13,492
Monroe	10	\$371,410
Newton	3	\$38,922
Prairie	4	\$193,245
Searcy	6	\$81,310
Sharp	6	\$87,363
Stone	4	\$66,954
Van Buren	3	\$42,914
White	3	\$48,876
Woodruff	5	\$161,345
Yell	1	\$13,736
Total	78	\$1,475,410

contract is approved are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments. However, an exemption is provided in cases where 75 percent of the adjusted gross income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations.

For More Information

If you need more information about WHIP, contact your local USDA Service

Center or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farbill/2002/>.