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## FISCAL YEAR 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

To the NBCI Management Board and the NBTC Steering Committee

Presented by Donald F. McKenzie, Director, August 2018

The National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) is a collaborative endeavor of the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC), the unified body of bobwhite expertise and leadership among the states, research institutions, conservation groups and other partners. The NBCI leads, leverages and enables large-scale, strategic restoration of native grassland habitats as the long-term means to restore widespread huntable populations of wild northern bobwhites (*Colinus virginianus*). The NBCI performance summarized here is made possible by the financial and logistical support of:

- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, USFWS
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife
- Georgia Wildlife Resources Division
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- Joe Crafton Family Endowment for Quail Restoration
- Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
- Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources
- Missouri Department of Conservation
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife
- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Park Cities Quail Chapter, Quail Coalition
- Pennsylvania Game Commission
- Quail and Upland Game Alliance
- Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation
- Quail Forever
- South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- USDA Forest Service
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

# **PART 1**

## **Wildlife Restoration Annual Performance Report**

**July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018**

This multi-state project is funded in part through compiled Wildlife Restoration (also known as Pittman-Robertson, or P-R) grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and several participating states, under the authority of the Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Part 1 of this annual report is submitted as required by:

- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Georgia Wildlife Resources Division
- Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
- Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Pennsylvania Game Commission
- South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries



The National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) is a range-wide habitat plan, originated by the states and the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC), for recovering bobwhites to target densities set by state wildlife agencies. Since the NBCI was originally published in 2002, it has become apparent that simultaneous bobwhite conservation attention and action are necessary at multiple levels – local, state, regional/national –for effective progress range-wide. In general, private quail habitat organizations focus largely at local levels, while state wildlife agencies provide state-level leadership and capacity; however, the nation’s bobwhite conservation community never has had meaningful capability to consistently address regional and national conservation objectives.

This multi-state Wildlife Restoration project, based at the University of Tennessee (UT), aims to build and support NBCI capacity to provide concerted range-wide leadership, coordination and ability to address priority functions and provide key services that benefit many states but that individual states cannot muster. Working cooperatively with state wildlife agencies and numerous other important partners, NBCI is helping improve bobwhite quail habitats and populations on suitable landscapes, as illuminated at a broad scale by the NBCI 2.0 strategic plan.

## NBCI Administration

- The expired 2010 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NBCI and the USDA Farm Service Agency was revised and renewed, and was signed at the September 12, 2017 NBCI Management Board meeting.
- The previous MOU between NBCI and the National Wild Turkey Federation was revised and renewed, and was signed at the September 12, 2017 NBCI Management Board meeting.
- The NBCI Management Board signed a regional MOU with the USDA Forest Service's Southern Region in autumn 2017, to promote collaborative bobwhite focal areas and grassland restoration, in conjunction with the states. Following this milestone step, NBCI will be pursuing additional or supplemental MOUs with the USFS Eastern Region and potentially at the national level.
- NBCI and the University of Tennessee have established a fundamentally new financial management system for the NBCI. The new system, known as a "recharge center," is intended to substantially improve and simplify NBCI budgeting, accounting and contracting procedures, thus streamlining that entire aspect of NBCI operations, while keeping intact the separation of restricted P-R funds from other sources of revenue. UT and NBCI now are in the process of amending existing state contracts to fit the new system, and developing new contracts in a compatible format.
- Administrative turnover in state wildlife agencies continues to re-shape the NBCI Management Board. Two key leadership positions on the Board's Executive Committee were refilled in March 2018, following the retirement of state agency directors from Florida and Kentucky. The two new members of the Executive Committee are:
  - Paul Johansen, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
  - J.D. Strong, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bobwhite Leadership Workshop is scheduled for October 31 – November 2, 2018, in Nebraska City, NE, to be hosted by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. While the 1<sup>st</sup> State Bobwhite Leadership Workshop, hosted by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, was limited to just state wildlife agency administrators, this 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop will include other key partners such as non-government organizations and federal agencies.

### **Objective 1. Devising *strategies*, developing *tools*, and providing *central database and information services* that allow state agencies and their partners to monitor and document management recovery efforts for bobwhite quail and their habitats.**

- NBCI Data Analyst – This position is vital to fulfilling the expectations of this objective. The position experienced a six-month vacancy in the first half of 2017 due to personnel turnover, but has been refilled as of June 12, 2017, by Molly Foley. Existing NBCI database services to states was maintained thanks to continual coordination between NBCI and UT's Information Technology Services to oversee maintenance and minor development of NBCI central databases. However the planned schedule for completion of database and analysis deliverables was delayed by at least a half year.

- Joint Quail Conference: Quail 8 National Quail Symposium and NBTC Annual Meeting – NBCI completed the Joint Quail Conference, a combined meeting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> NBTC Annual Meeting and 8<sup>th</sup> National Quail Symposium (Quail 8) in Tennessee in July 2017, in partnership with Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency, NBTC and the University of Tennessee. The 8<sup>th</sup> National Quail Symposium and the annual NBTC meeting drew more than 300 bobwhite conservationists to attend. The 8<sup>th</sup> National Quail Symposium Proceedings were printed and provided to all participants at the symposium. The NBTC proceedings is published on <https://www.quailcount.org/quail8/home.html>.
- NBCI Science is coordinating, on behalf of NBTC, the application process for selection of a host for 9<sup>th</sup> National Quail Symposium and/or Joint Quail Conference, in 2022, via an invitation to submit a Letter of Intent for review at the annual NBTC meeting in August.
- NQSP ejournal – NBCI Science collaborated with University of Tennessee Libraries to publish in the Digital Commons Network™ (bepress™) the new ejournal, National Quail Symposium Proceedings, <http://trace.tennessee.edu/nqsp/>, including proceedings of the 1972 and 1982 National Bobwhite Quail Symposia, and Quail III-VIII. This ejournal provides an exponential increase in dissemination of works published in the symposium series, including high quality, 100% searchable, digital copies of each paper. The ejournal has >500 abstracts, presentations and papers, and 365 institutions have made 4,292 downloads of content since publication in July 2017. The ejournal ensures permanent and easy access to past and future national quail symposia.
- NBCI Habitat Inventory – NBCI conducts its annual inventory of quail habitat management conducted in each of the 25 NBCI states. The NBCI science team completed 7<sup>th</sup> annual NBCI Inventory, including data from 23 state agency quail coordinators (Ohio and West Virginia exceptions). The entire Inventory database initially was housed independently, but was migrated to the NBCI technical web site, <https://www.quailcount.org/inventory.html>, in December 2016. The data gathering is coordinated and provided to NBCI by the state quail coordinators, using the online data entry tool developed by NBCI on QOrg. Coordinators can immediately view their data via an interactive data visualization tool – e.g., see [Graph of Habitat Programs and Acres of Management for 2017](#) for a summary. Data entry was improved by adding state-specific habitat program menus. NBCI compiles, conducts basic analyses and publishes the results every year in the NBCI Bobwhite Almanac, State of the Bobwhite report, accessible at [www.bringbackbobwhites.org](http://www.bringbackbobwhites.org).
- Hunting Inventory – For 2016, 2017 and 2018, NBCI conducted a Hunting Inventory for all states that collect such data, to take a snapshot of quail hunting effort across the NBCI states, during an extended “boom” period for quail populations and hunting effort, especially in the western range states. Results have been published in the annual NBCI Bobwhite Almanac, State of the Bobwhite report, accessible at [www.bringbackbobwhites.org](http://www.bringbackbobwhites.org). Data for the 2017-18 hunting season will be published in the 2018 Almanac.
- NBCI was invited to submit a proposal to identify effects of the FSA Conservation Reserve Program on bobwhites and grassland birds. Subsequently, NBCI Science is coordinating through FY 2020 the delivery of “Study of Population Response of Bobwhite to the Conservation Reserve Program within the NBCI Coordinated Implementation Program.”

- NBCI, in partnership with University of Tennessee Libraries, provides free access for state agency personnel to online technical journals, as part of state agency and partner enrollment in the NBCI database.
- NBCI Science maintained the NBCI 2.0 conservation planning tool, accessed here [https://www.quailcount.org/nbci2\\_0.html](https://www.quailcount.org/nbci2_0.html), and provided consultation on the Biologist Ranking Information to the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Many state agencies continue to step-down NBCI 2.0 spatial data to their state quail plans.
- NBCI Science continues to provide a reliable and secure national database for quail conservation through the partnership with University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture Information Technology Services Department, which houses and supports the NBCI Data Analyst and the NBCI data servers.

**Objective 2. Providing *technical guidance, coordination and targeted information services* that enhance the ability of state and federal land management and other conservation agencies and private landowners to manage habitats and increase population levels of bobwhites.**

- Technical support to states – NBCI continues providing various technical support and coordination services directly to most of the 25 NBCI states, such as responded by email, telephone or in person to myriad requests throughout the year from most of the NBCI states, for technical assistance, CIP implementation, or various other questions;
- Technical engagement with partners – NBCI engages, works with and provides technical/informative information to myriad partners, to inform the broader conservation community about bobwhites, declining grassland birds, and native grassland habitat management, for example:
  - NBCI chairs the Management Board of the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture, supporting the CHJV’s emphasis on grasslands and open woodlands habitats;
  - Consulting with Pea Ridge National Military Park in developing public outreach opportunities for the NBCI CIP focal area on its property.
  - Convening the National Park Service, Alabama Wildlife Federation, Quail Forever and the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division to explore quail habitat restoration at Horseshoe Bend National Military Park.

USDA Farm Service Agency:

- NBCI recently obtained a commitment from the FSA to establish an employee liaison position that will work with NBCI to assist with CRP practices that benefit bobwhites.
- To promote the CRP thinning/burning incentive program that was announced by FSA in December, 2016, NBCI produced a one-page informational and customizable fact sheet for use by states, USDA and partners. NBCI distributed the customizable flyer via email to all “pine belt” state quail coordinators, for circulation to state private lands biologists. The fact sheet was also distributed through AFWA’s Farm Bill Working Group and other venues.

- Conservation Reserve Program:
  - NBCI continues to monitor the key CP33 practice and report to the states on progress in enrolling field borders and pivot corner acreage.
  - NBCI staff met repeatedly with Conservation and Environmental Programs Division, FSA, in Washington, DC to discuss technical aspects and opportunities to improve implementation of CRP mid-contract management. FSA requested that NBCI develop and submit a proposal for conducting a series of mid-contract management training workshops for USDA staff. FSA has not made a decision on the proposal.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service:

- NBCI obtained agreement from the NRCS Deputy Chief for Operations to appoint an employee to serve as liaison to NBCI to provide technical guidance to USDA staff and landowners about how to promote use of native vegetation for USDA conservation practices.
- NBCI staff are engaging NRCS pollinator program leaders to highlight common interests and technical potential to merge bobwhite and pollinator habitat goals.
- Met with NRCS top leadership repeatedly to explain the importance of effectively monitoring habitat and wildlife populations in NRCS programs.
- Met with NRCS wildlife, research, grazing lands, easements and forestry program leaders, and FSA CRP program leaders to brief them on NBCI objectives and to solicit their cooperation and support for various NBCI priorities such as *Natives First* and pine savannah management.
- WLFW 2.0 – “Bobwhite Quail Southern Pine Savanna Restoration” – NBCI provided national coordination support and technical input, in close collaboration with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, into development of a regional “Bobwhite Quail Southern Pine Savanna Restoration” proposal for the Working Lands for Wildlife 2.0 practice, in response to a request for proposals from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The six-state project was approved by NRCS in November 2016.
  - NBCI provided consultation for an NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife Program workshop in Knoxville, TN in December 2017, “Research decision-making for WLFW 2.0 quail-grassland/pine-savannah projects.”
  - NBCI staff in conjunction with the University of Georgia will be providing technical workshops to natural resource professionals – foresters and wildlife biologists, as well as NRCS and FSA employees- across the WLFW 2.0 Bobwhites in Pine Savanna states. These workshops are made possible by grants from NRCS in cooperation with Quail Forever. There will be one coordination meeting with agency partners to be followed up by workshops in each state.
- WLFW 2.0 – “Bobwhite in Grasslands” (BIG) – NBCI provided national leadership, coordination and technical input into development of a multi-partner regional “Bobwhite in Grasslands” project in response to the NRCS request for proposals for Working Lands for Wildlife 2.0. The project goals are conversion of fescue pasture to native forages, followed by prescribed grazing regimens that are mutually beneficial for livestock production and grassland bird habitat. NRCS announced approval of the project in November 2016, initially covering eight states.
  - NBCI has been coordinating closely with NRCS for many months to promote implementation of the new BIG practice.

- The BIG project states have since expanded from the original 8 to 10: AR, IL, IN, KY, MD\*, MO, NC, OH, TN\*, and VA (\* denotes new states).
  - NBCI led the development of the Bobwhite in Grasslands Coordination Team (BIG CT), made up of NRCS, state partner staff and NBCI Grasslands Coordinator to help coordinate and standardize WLFW 2.0 processes.
  - NBCI led the development of creating draft documents for reference or to be used as templates, specific to grazing and bobwhite habitat, for use by BIG states.
    - Draft Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide
    - Draft State Ranking Criteria
    - Draft Seeding Guidance
    - Draft scenario template for converting endophyte infected tall fescue to native warm-season forage.
  - NBCI established a Google Drive folder as a repository for the draft BIG documents and to post sample documents from states having already developed their own. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BwQ4E7dnQKSTbHRGRjlrWS15bm8>
  - NBCI in conjunction with the Center for Native Grasslands Management through a grant provided by NRCS through Quail Forever secured funding to conduct up to 8 in-service technical transfer workshops over the next 3 years for NRCS, partner and University Extension staff, providing training about integrating grazing native warm-season forages and bobwhite habitat.
    - NBCI has scheduled and is coordinating workshops for MO, KY, TN and IN and is working with the other BIG states to schedule additional workshops.
  - NBCI, with the BIG CT is collaborating with NRCS for the development of a public affairs story board document promoting WLFW BIG.
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program:
    - NBCI staff are engaging the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) national grazing lands staff, to discuss improvements to EQIP technical ranking criteria for native vegetation. Upon NRCS's request, NBCI proposed improved EQIP ranking criteria for native, warm-season grasses.
  - Natives First – NBCI continues providing the national leadership for NBCI's *Natives First* initiative, to increase USDA's institutional reliance on native vegetation for habitat, production, and conservation:
    - NBCI staff have met repeatedly and are in communication with NRCS leadership about *Natives First* and creating a greater emphasis on native vegetation in NRCS practices.
      - At the request of NRCS, NBCI has surveyed State Quail Coordinators about problematic plant species, state planting recommendations/mixes, practice standards and state technical committee engagement. We have completed that survey, summarized the results and submitted to NRCS. They are reviewing and we are awaiting a follow-up meeting.
    - NBCI created a *Natives First* Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/natives1st/> in support of the coordination and information needs to educate a coalition of partners.
    - Building *Natives First* Coalition
      - Met with North American Butterfly Association
      - Met with North American Grouse Partnership
      - Recruited Quality Deer Management Association and North American Grouse Partnership, the first major conservation groups to join coalition.

- Made presentations about *Natives First* to:
  - NBCI presented an introduction to NBCI and NBCI’s grazing and forage strategy to the American Forage and Grassland Council Board of Directors. This represents the first, of our knowledge, entry by any wildlife interest into the core of the forage production livestock industry. As a result of this meeting tentatively scheduled a bobwhite and grazing symposium to be held at the 2019 annual meeting of the AFGC.
  - Southeastern Outdoor Press Association, native vegetation and *Natives First*.
  - The “Forgotten Southern Rangelands Symposium” at the annual meeting of the Society for Range Management in support of an effort to have USDA recognize “Rangeland” as an official classification in the southeastern US.
- NBCI staff met with BLM to discuss ways to cooperatively support *Natives First* and potential to support building the *Natives First Coalition*.
- NBCI staff designed and developed an infographic about NBCI, *Natives First*, the *Natives First Coalition* and the advantages of native vegetation over introduced species: <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Native-Grasses-Infographic-bluestem-illustration.pdf>

#### USDA Forest Service

- NBCI continues working with the USFS and the states on bobwhite habitat restoration with focal areas in progress on four National Forests in the Southern Region
  - Sumter National Forest (Enoree District) – South Carolina
  - Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (Oconee District) – Georgia
  - Kisatchie National Forest – Louisiana
  - Conecuh National Forest – Alabama (Completing spring bird counts in 2018)
- Exploratory meetings and discussions concerning the creation of a NBCI Focal Area also are being held with the:
  - Frances-Marion National Forest in South Carolina
  - De Soto National Forest in Mississippi.
- Forestry organizations – NBCI continues engaging key forestry conservation organizations at national and regional levels, with information about declining grassland birds and the urgent need for more active habitat management, including the Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF), National Association of State Foresters (NASF), the Society of American Foresters (SAF), the American Forest Foundation (American Tree Farm System), the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and the Longleaf Partnership Council:
- Webinars
  - NBCI sponsored a webinar May 31, 2018 titled “Understory Herbicides for Bobwhites and Other Wildlife.” NBCI partnered with the Longleaf Alliance who assisted and presented the webinar information. There were 225 participants in this webinar. It is available online at <http://www.forestrywebinars.net/webinars/understory-herbicides-for-bobwhites-and-other-wildlife-1> for on-demand viewing.

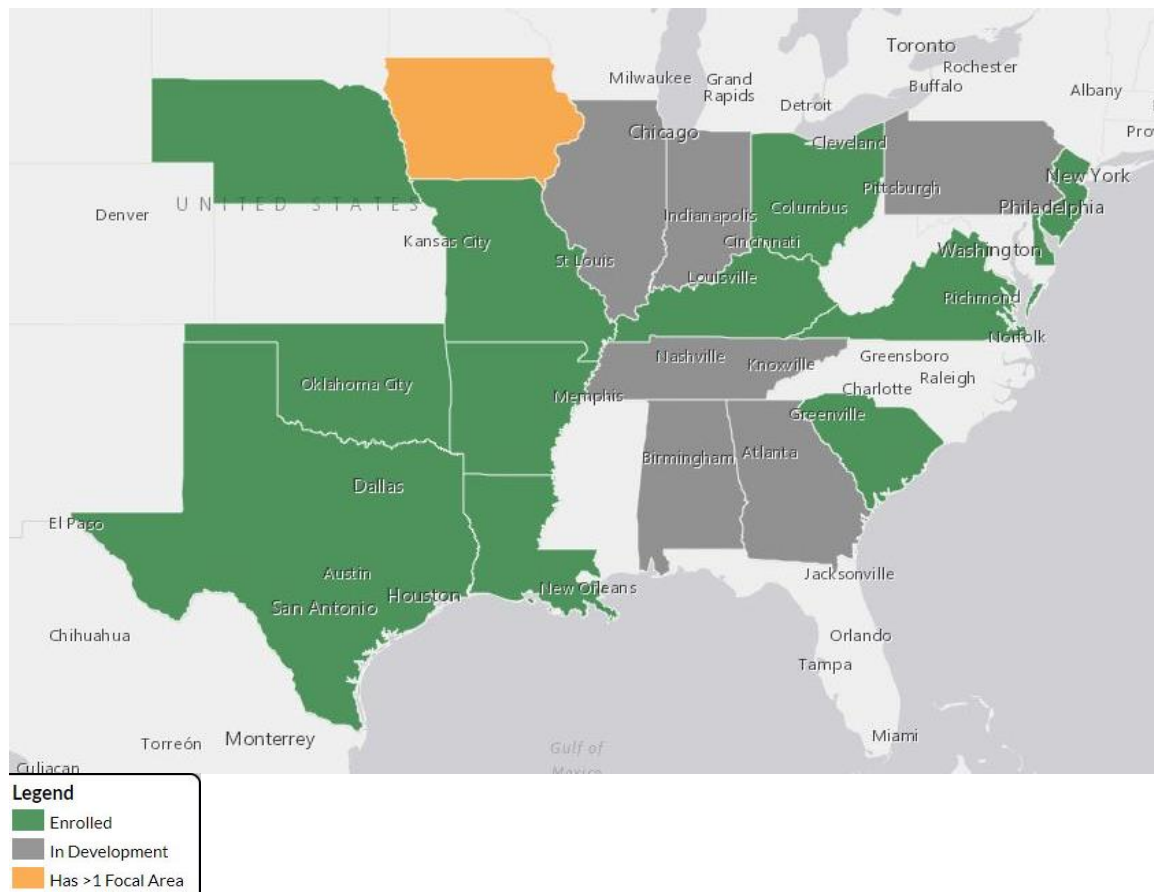


- NBCI presented a webinar, March 1, 2018 on the value of native vegetation, “Native Vegetation Investments Pay Conservation Dividends” to an audience of nearly 100. The webinar is available on demand at: <http://www.forestrywebinars.net/webinars/native-vegetation-investments-pay-conservation-dividends>
- In response to a request from the Acting Director of the USFWS, NBCI developed and submitted in early 2018 a brief concept for how the agency could participate in and add value to the growing bobwhite/grassland bird conservation movement. Constructive follow-up discussions are underway.
- NBCI worked with the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture (CHJV) to develop and propose a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) for bobwhites, Henslow’s sparrow and eastern meadowlark. States electing to participate in the proposal include KY, TN and IN. NBCI data and previously developed ideas from WLFW Bobwhite Priority Areas and NBCI Focal Areas were incorporated into the RCPP proposal. The CHJV proposal was accepted by NRCS and is in the early stage of implementation. NBCI provided WLFW draft documents as reference (habitat evaluation, ranking criteria and screening tools) and comments for adaptation for RCPP supporting documents.
- The NBCI Grassland Coordinator reviewed Ozark and St. Francis National Forests grazing Allotment Management Plan and Annual Operating Instructions documents and made recommendations for clarification of language and management metrics for better grassland bird/wildlife habitat.
- The Grasslands Coordinator provided pre-production review and comment on *Native Grass Establishment 101* (<http://nativegrasses.utk.edu/curricula.htm>) video of the new Native Grass College established by the Center for Native Grasslands Management.
- The NBCI science staff are providing consultation at request of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for development of bobwhite population goals for NFWF’s Longleaf Stewardship Fund.
- Videos
  - NBCI produced and released a video, June 7, 2018, “An Integrated Approach to Sericea Lespedeza Management”, posted on the NBCI YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jttBd6b4Ap8> with over 800 views as of 6/18/2018, reaching more than 2000 people. The video and has been promoted via the NBTC Listserv, NBCI and Natives First Facebook pages and by a press release.
  - NBCI released a video entitled “Southeast Pine Savanna Restoration and Management for Northern Bobwhites” in July 2018, [www.bringbackbobwhites.org](http://www.bringbackbobwhites.org), providing an in-depth explanation of managing southern yellow pine timber for grassland bird habitat.
- The Grassland Coordinator is continuing work on the Grazing Strategies for Northern Bobwhites publications. At the request of the Grassland and Grazing Lands Subcommittee, there are two versions being developed. A western version which will be producer oriented and an eastern version which will be more technically oriented to technical assistance providers.

- The first draft of the western version of Grazing Strategies for Northern Bobwhite has been sent out for review and comment. The document is currently under revision. Design and layout are yet to be completed.
- For the eastern version, literature search and review, information gathering from ranchers and researchers is wrapping up. Compilation and organization of information and the early stages of writing are underway. Expected completion date is late 2018.

**Objective 3. Developing and expanding *focal areas* to ensure enhanced formal implementation of habitat treatments, using select BMP forestry and agriculture practices to increase the quantity and quality of quail habitat and populations.**

- Coordinated Implementation Program (CIP) – NBCI continues investing heavily in promoting and supporting implementation of CIP focal areas, that include some 47 focal and reference areas across 22 CIP projects and more than 1,000 monitoring points, and covering roughly 184,000 acres of land in managed focal areas and 124,000 acres in reference areas across 19 states. An overview of CIP can be found on <https://www.quailcount.org/monitoring/overview.html>.
- As of summer 2018, 14 CIP focal areas were officially operational in 13 states:
  - Arkansas Game & Fish Commission / Pea Ridge National Military Park;
  - Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife;
  - Iowa Department of Natural Resources (two CIPs);
  - Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources;
  - Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries / USDA Forest Service;
  - Missouri Department of Conservation;
  - Nebraska Game & Parks Commission;
  - New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife;
  - Ohio Division of Wildlife;
  - Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation / Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture;
  - South Carolina Department of Natural Resources / USDA Forest Service;
  - Texas Parks & Wildlife Department / Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture; and
  - Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries.
- As of summer 2018, an additional 11 CIPs are in development (wide variation in status) in an additional 6 states:
  - Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries / USDA Forest Service;
  - Georgia Department of Natural Resources (potentially two);
  - Illinois Department of Natural Resources / Southern Illinois University
  - Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency;
  - Indiana Department of Natural Resources;
  - Missouri Department of Conservation (2<sup>nd</sup> CIP);
  - Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation / National Park Service (2<sup>nd</sup> CIP);
  - Pennsylvania Game Commission / Letterkenny Army Depot;
  - Pennsylvania Game Commission (2<sup>nd</sup> CIP);
  - Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries / National Park Service (2<sup>nd</sup> CIP).



- CIP technical support – NBCI science staff provided requested technical guidance for current and potential CIP focal area projects, by various means, including individual in-person consultation, group workshops, and personal long-distance support, as well as online technical information and training tools available at QCorg.
  - Assistance provided by NBCI to initiate CIP projects for Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Illinois Department of Natural Resources/Southern Illinois University, Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife, Missouri Department of Conservation, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency/University of Tennessee, and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries/National Park Service. Extra consultation was provided to Tennessee for ArcGIS and to Pennsylvania for bobwhite translocation and habitat management.
  - Numerous CIP video training products have been posted to the NBCI Facebook page and are accessible through QCorg: <https://www.quailcount.org/monitoring/fallcovey.html> ;
  - NBCI coordinated CIP training in August 2017 at Manassas National Battlefield, VA to organize CIP focal area habitat assessment training for NPS and state wildlife agency staff. Staff from all 25 NBCI states were invited to participate;
  - NBCI provided January 2018 training for states and CIPs participating in the USDA Farm Services Agency project;
  - August 2018 training is scheduled for all states and CIPs in conjunction with the annual NBTC meeting in Albany Georgia in August 2018.

- At the Boggy Hollow CIP on the Conecuh National Forest, the NBCI Forestry coordinator:
  - provided assistance with creating monitoring points for spring breeding bird and fall covey counts;
  - coordinated a partners meeting to facilitate further progress, with the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, Quail Forever, East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture (EGCPJV), Conecuh Ranger District, the University of West Florida and the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Project (GCPEP).
  
- Requested CIP technical support has been individually provided by NBCI to many states and partners, including at least:
  - Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources,
  - Arkansas Game and Fish Commission,
  - Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife
  - Georgia Wildlife Resources Division;
  - National Park Service,
  - Illinois Department of Natural Resources,
  - Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife,
  - Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism
  - Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources;
  - Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries,
  - Maryland Department of Natural Resources
  - Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks;
  - Missouri Department of Conservation,
  - Ohio Division of Wildlife;
  - Pennsylvania Game Commission,
  - South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.
  - Southern Illinois University,
  - Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve
  - Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency,
  - USDA Forest Service,
  - Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries,
  - West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.
  
- CIP habitat monitoring database – NBCI launched in 2018 the new database and Habitat Monitoring and Management Data Explorer web mapping application <https://www.quailcount.org/monitoring/habitat.html>. This database marks a significant milestone in data collection and individualized analysis for participating states. Coordinators may submit and classify their spatial habitat data and use it to inform decisions on managing quail habitat on the ground in their focal areas.
  
- Habitat Management Database – NBCI has contracted with UTIA Information Technology Service’s Billy Williams to assist in the design of the Habitat Management Database, an additional CIP spatial database that captures annual habitat management activities on CIP focal areas. NBCI’s Science team has entered Phase One of development of the Habitat Management Database. This phase will involve structuring of the database and writing a Python model to process CIP habitat management spatial data. This phase will be completed by the annual NBTC meeting in August 2018 and NBCI will conduct a training session for CIP coordinators.

- CIP data analysis – NBCI has contracted with University of Georgia to enter CIP’s habitat data and create bird/habitat population models for CIPs with CRP in Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska and Ohio, in 2019, via funding by USDA Farm Services Agency. Potential for CRP to benefit bobwhites is also being assessed for Indiana and Texas CIPs.
- CIP preliminary bird data – NBCI science staff coordinate data entry for breeding bird and fall covey call surveys and interactive analysis for registered CIP coordinators. For 2017, 4,814 birds recorded by 54 observers during 1,447 spring surveys on 685 monitoring points. For fall bobwhite surveys, 759 covey calls were recorded by 127 observers during 378 covey count surveys on 206 monitoring points. Average covey calls heard per survey stayed the same from 2016 to 2017 at 2.0 per survey. Although detailed data visualization is limited to registered CIP coordinators, summaries are shown here <https://www.quailcount.org/FocalAreas/Visualizations>, for 10 CIP projects, and 16 registered users:
- CIP Design Webinar – NBCI Science staff provided training in January 2018 to give an overview of the CIP program to any interested state, public, or private partner. 35 people attended, including existing CIP coordinators, state biologists NBCI has been in contact with in the past regarding the development of CIP focal area, and even some new potential partners.
- NBCI staff met with West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) and Wildlife Resources Division staff in January 2018 to evaluate a proposed site for bobwhite restoration. WVDNR and NBCI staff then met with the Governor to report NBCI recommendations for a long-term effort to restore wild bobwhites to the state. A detailed trip report was submitted by NBCI to WVDNR.
- National Park Service – NBCI continues following up on its new agreement with the National Park Service, by performing key coordination and liaison roles between the NPS and the states, to facilitate consideration and development of new cooperative bobwhite focal areas.
  - Since the joint NBTC/NBCI/NPS meeting in Lincoln, NE in August 2016, the number of NPS units expressing interest in working with NBCI and the states on bobwhite habitat restoration has increased from 20 to more than 40. This rapid growth in interest for native grassland management for bobwhites and grassland birds by NPS personnel and management units provides positive feedback from this unique new relationship with NBCI and the states.
  - However, such rapid increase in interest creates a corresponding increase in demand for training and technical services from NBCI and the states, challenging and straining the capacities of all partners. Consequently, NPS and NBCI are exercising care in pursuing the new opportunities, with careful coordination among all partners.
  - The latest NPS units ready for engagement with state wildlife agencies are in:
    - Oklahoma (Chickasaw National Recreation Area),
    - Ohio (Hopewell Culture National Historical Park),
    - Virginia (Manassas National Battlefield Park),
    - Tennessee (Stones River National Battlefield Park),
    - South Carolina (Kings River National Park),
    - Alabama (Horseshoe Bend National Military Park).

- NBCI sponsored and collaborated with the National Park Service and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to organize CIP focal area habitat assessment training for NPS and state wildlife agency staff, July 31 – August 1, 2017. Staff from all 25 NBCI states were invited to participate.
- <https://www.quailcount.org/> website usage between October 1, 2015 and June 18, 2018 included 2,107 unique users, 6,497 unique sessions, and 12,118 page views (new bot/spam filter applied, thus numbers appear decreased or show very small increases compared to last report).

**Objective 4. Developing awareness among target audiences of the imperiled nature of bobwhite quail habitat, population status, restoration needs and recovery initiatives to restore and secure bobwhite populations throughout the eastern United States. This improved awareness will translate into conservation actions and projects on the part of target audiences.**

- NBCI’s annual State of the Bobwhite Almanac – Produced and published the *NBCI Bobwhite Almanac, State of the Bobwhite* (SOTB) report in September 2017. The 2018 SOTB is in production and on schedule as of completion of this report. The SOTB is the largest, most comprehensive compilation, summary and analysis of the nation’s collective bobwhite conservation effort on an annual basis. The SOTB is distributed to all state quail coordinators and administrators, and to myriad current and potential partners. Each of the SOTBs can be viewed and downloaded at [www.bringbackbobwhites.org](http://www.bringbackbobwhites.org).
- Strategic national bobwhite communications campaign:
  - Based on state quail coordinator feedback, NBCI contracted with DJ Case & Associates marketing/communications firm for assistance in developing a public communications and information strategy to increase understanding and public support of early successional habitat.
  - Phase 1 was completed in March 2017. The Phase 1 report is available upon request from NBCI, but was not publicly released.
  - Phase 2 was completed in summer 2017.
  - DJ Case is in the final stages of data collection for Phase 3 of the NBCI strategic national bobwhite communications project. The landowner focus groups (GA-Timber, OK-Range, KY-Agro/Grazing) are complete. Telephone interviews with state quail coordinators and state communicators are complete. DJ Case will be wrapping up the interviews, then analyzing all the data to present final results and recommendations at the NBTC meeting in August 2018.
- Outdoor writers – NBCI continues its long-term effort to engage, inform and secure the increased bobwhite conservation assistance of the community of outdoor communicators:
  - NBCI participated in the October 2017 annual conference of the Southeastern Outdoor Press Association (SEOPA) on native vegetation and *Natives First*.
  - NBCI is scheduled to present a major quail seminar and field trip at the October 2018 SEOPA annual conference, in collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.
- NBCI authors quarterly bobwhite conservation articles (3 NBCI updates and 1 NBCI conservation opinion piece) for the *Upland Almanac* magazine, for the July, October, January and April issues every year.

- *NBCI – The Comprehensive Guide to Creating, Improving and Managing Bobwhite Habitat* has been completed and uploaded to the NBCI website. A compilation of habitat management chapters, originally intended to be a part of NBCI 2.0, the 88-page document provides quail coordinators comprehensive, up-to-date habitat management information that can be printed and left with landowners, or can be printed and used by partners, landowners or others to maximize their bobwhite habitat efforts:  
<http://bringbackbobwhites.org/download/nbci-the-comprehensive-guide-to-creating-improving-managing-bobwhite-habitat-2/> .
- To keep the public better informed of the states’ and NBCI’s progress in bobwhite conservation, the NBCI issues news releases regularly, including (not exhaustive):
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/09/27/national-bobwhite-initiative-turkey-federation-renew-agreement/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/09/27/nbci-fire-bird-conservation-award-recipients-show-bobwhite-support-can-come-from-unexpected-places/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/09/27/nbci-issues-7th-state-of-the-bobwhite-report/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/09/12/nbci-fsa-finalize-cooperative-agreement-on-behalf-of-bobwhites/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/09/11/manassas-national-battlefield-park-next-nps-unit-joining-bobwhitegrassland-restoration-efforts/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/07/21/three-to-be-honored-for-quail-science-achievements-during-eighth-national-quail-symposium-in-knoxville/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/07/11/nbci-fills-vacant-spatial-analyst-position-for-bobwhite-information-network-build-out/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/07/11/ranchers-testify-to-value-of-prescribed-fire-in-nbcis-new-video-fire-up-your-beef-production/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/07/05/nations-top-quail-conservationresearch-talent-converges-on-knoxville-later-this-month/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/07/03/nbcis-forest-management-for-northern-bobwhite-quail-webinar-available-for-free-public-viewing/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/10/20/nbci-to-study-impact-of-conservation-reserve-program-for-fsa/>;
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/09/27/national-bobwhite-initiative-turkey-federation-renew-agreement/>;
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/12/05/third-national-park-joins-nbci-bobwhite-restoration-efforts/>,
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/12/11/national-forests-in-the-south-join-bobwhite-quail-restoration-effort/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2017/12/14/nbci-advocates-on-capitol-hill-for-native-vegetation-standard-in-farm-bill/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2018/05/30/nbci-sponsors-webinar-on-understory-herbicide-use-for-bobwhites-other-wildlife-on-may-31/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2018/06/08/nbci-releases-new-how-to-video-for-sericea-lespedeza-management/>
  - <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/2018/06/14/georgia-names-new-state-quail-biologist/>

- NBCI Grasslands Coordinator completed an NBCI-sponsored and -produced video on prescribed fire and grazing in rangelands in June 2017: *Fire Up Your Beef Production – A Rancher’s Perspective of Prescribed Fires for Range Management*.
  - Two forms will be available, a 22-minute long version and a 6-minute short version.
  - Copies are being duplicated on DVD and thumb drives to be distributed to state agencies, grazing lands coalitions and cattlemen’s organizations in the rangeland bobwhite states. Copies will be available to other states upon request.
  - The videos have been posted on NBCI’s YouTube channel and will be promoted soon through NBCI’s regular outlets per a to-be-developed publicity strategy:
    - Short version: <https://youtu.be/N8Utu9ZLBO4>
    - Long version: <https://youtu.be/2OdVVDA-6YQ>
  
- Created a location to store NBCI’s high-quality “b-roll” video which is available and accessible to all state coordinators for their use. All video shot during the making of “Bobwhites on the Brink” has been uploaded there, as well as footage of timber thinning with chainsaws followed by herbicide treatment in Tennessee, and prescribed fires on rangeland in the West. NBCI continues to shoot and store high-quality video footage of various bobwhite management activities here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B1EjeY6UL42PYnRxVDI2Q05OYzQ>
  
- NBCI staff designed and developed in spring 2018 an infographic about NBCI, *Natives First*, the Natives First Coalition and the advantages of native vegetation over introduced species. <https://bringbackbobwhites.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Native-Grasses-Infographic-bluestem-illustration.pdf>
  
- NBCI maintains multiple “public-facing” social media interfaces as a matter of public interest and transparency. One of those is the NBCI Facebook page, which NBCI uses to not only keep followers informed of NBCI activities and progress, but also to share pertinent posts from NBCI states and partners with our audience. NBCI posted 72+ items during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2018, a time period in which page “likes” reached and then exceeded 2,080 people. This has been accomplished with no paid “boosts” or paid Facebook ads.
  
- An additional NBCI digital/social media avenue was added this quarter with the establishment of an NBCI Twitter account to specifically target partner organizations (e.g., Quail Forever, USFWS, USFS, NPS, etc.) and employees of those organizations, but it is open/available to interested landowners and bobwhite enthusiasts. NBCI Twitter has accumulated more than 135 followers. We are primarily using the account to share event details, research updates, photos of projects/workshops, etc., as well as to retweet relevant information from the accounts we follow. Currently, we average seven 7 a week, although our goal is to increase to 21 tweets a week and 500 followers within a year.
  
- NBCI attended the annual conference of the Tennessee Outdoor Writers Association in April 2018, distributing information and having informal discussions of the status of NBCI and the range-wide restoration of bobwhite quail. Expectations are that NBCI will make a formal presentation to the group, in conjunction with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, at the 2019 conference at Natchez Trace State Park.



- Began building a partnership with the 416-acre Seven Islands State Birding Park, a Tennessee state park near NBCI's headquarters at UT that is emphasizing bobwhite habitat management and uses the bobwhite as an umbrella species in its interpretation for visitors. The park is less than five years old and has already garnered 85,000 annual visitors. In response to the park's interest in building a quail aviary, NBCI arranged a visit for park staff to Kentucky's facility in Frankfort and a briefing on aviary operations. NBCI staff toured the park and conferred with park staff following the winter meeting of the NBTC steering committee. The park is seeking NBCI habitat management suggestions and participation in materials development, and provides a convenient location for NBCI photography and videography, as well as future NBCI training opportunities.
- NBCI has a 90-minute slot at the annual conference of SEOPA in Florence, SC, in October for a national update on the range-wide restoration of bobwhites. NBCI is working with South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to provide a portion of that time for an update on that state's efforts. A field visit to a SCDNR bobwhite focal area is being planned for interested outdoor writers.

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## PART 2

### **Supplemental NBCI Annual Performance Report, FY 2018** (NBCI activities and accomplishments supported by non-federal funds)

- A fundamental goal of NBCI is to achieve improved prioritization, funding, programs and practices by federal conservation agencies that control, manage or influence large acreages of rural lands. Such advancements require regular, intensive engagement with policy makers that administer, legislate or oversee the relevant agencies. The NBCI Agriculture Liaison position – which focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on agencies of the US Department of Agriculture – is funded by non-federal money from state and private sources, primarily donations from the Park Cities Quail chapter of the Quail Coalition in Texas.
- NBCI continues to promote the *Natives First* concept with Congressional agricultural members and staff, advocating for establishing a native vegetation standard across USDA programs. As a result of NBCI's determined leadership, *Natives First* is in a steep growth curve, continuing to gain traction and broader acceptance across the conservation community. More than 50 sportsmen, wildlife conservation, producer, pollinator and environmental groups have endorsed and supported the concept.
  - NBCI has met with several House and Senate members and/or staff to discuss *Natives First*, and to urge support for including a USDA native vegetation standard in the farm bill. Copies of NBCI's native vegetation infographic have been widely distributed. It is not yet clear whether statutory language or report language is more likely to be acceptable or more appropriate for the purpose.
- NBCI obtained support from FSA administrators to include 1-year extensions for existing CP33 contracts under a new Continuous Conservation Reserve Program sign-up.

- NBCI met with innumerable federal agency and legislative staff, conservation and business organizations to explain the causes of the decline of northern bobwhite as well as opportunities for its restoration.
- NBCI organized and sponsored a field tour in Des Moines, Iowa, October 20, 2017 to educate congressional staff, USDA staff and NGOs about the importance of Farm Bill conservation programs to restore native grassland habitats for bobwhites, pollinators and other declining wildlife. NBCI agriculture liaison Tom Franklin, organized and participated in the tour in which we visited several working farms that participate in Farm Bill conservation programs and discussed their benefits to wildlife and water quality. Congressional staff participated in the tour, plus representatives of numerous partnering agencies and organizations in support of native grassland restoration and management. The tour earned positive responses from participants. NBCI is planning another tour that will be held in Texas during 2018.
- NBCI secured support for quail habitat conservation with top administrators of the US Department of Agriculture. High level discussions about how to incorporate preference for native vegetation in USDA conservation programs continue with leaders of the office of the Secretary of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The FSA and NRCS identified staff to serve as liaison officials with NBCI to pursue bobwhite conservation opportunities.
- NBCI briefed the director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) about bobwhite conservation needs. As a result, NBCI was asked to submit a proposal for a FWS bobwhite initiative. The proposal was submitted and is being considered by the Service.
- NBCI briefed US House of Representatives and US Senate agriculture committee staff, other key Hill staff and Members of Congress about NBCI Farm Bill priorities. Background information about legislative opportunities to incorporate quail-friendly policies and practices were explained and legislative language to implement them was recommended. Language and strategies for NBCI's top three priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill were identified:
  - *Natives First*
  - Short-term, rotational CRP
  - Increased forest thinning and prescribed fire.
- NBCI supported federal legislation and policy to:
  - fund effective federal Farm Bill conservation programs;
  - adequately fund fire, forestry and wildlife programs of the Forest Service (legislation passed);
  - reauthorization of the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (passed); and
  - provide additional hunting opportunities on National Wildlife Refuges
- NBCI opposed federal legislation to:
  - cut funding for Farm Bill conservation programs; and
  - sell or transfer federal conservation lands.