



Natural Resources Conservation Service

Northern Bobwhite in Working Grasslands

Status: Declining

The northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) is often referred to as an “edge” species, seeking habitat where crop fields intersect with woodlands, pastures and old fields. Historical land uses favored bobwhites, but urban encroachment and changes in management practices have caused the bird’s numbers to dip by more than 80 percent over the last 60 years.

Bobwhites depend on native grasslands, shrub thickets and pine or oak savannas found in the Southeast and Midwest. These habitats have the native grasses used for nesting, the wildflower seeds and insects that provide food and the brushy cover used for safety. To help reverse bobwhite declines, NRCS is working with private landowners across 26 states to manage for quail habitat.

NRCS and the Northern Bobwhite

The northern bobwhite is a state-identified target species of the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) partnership, a collaborative approach to conserve habitat on working lands. This WLFW project is designed to help bring back the quail that were once an integral part of Virginia’s farming way of life.

Eligible producers can get technical and financial assistance to implement various conservation practices to address habitat loss in much of the bobwhite range while maintaining or improving cattle production on their lands.

Participating states will focus on replacing non-native forage grasses with native forages that benefit bobwhite and grazing livestock.



This program offers a “win-win” for participating producers because they can continue grazing cattle on land with installed wildlife practices.

Actions

- Improve forage and cattle production for grazing operations
- Restore native grasses to the agricultural landscape
- Improve soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat on cattle farms

Priority Landscapes

Virginia offers a **statewide** habitat restoration program with a focus on the following counties: Augusta, Bland, Botetourt, Caroline, Charlotte, Culpeper, Fauquier, Halifax, Hanover, Madison, Orange, Pittsylvania, Rappahannock, Rockingham and Wythe.

Available Practices

- Brush Management
- Conservation Cover
- Fence
- Firebreak
- Livestock Pipeline
- Prescribed Burning
- Prescribed Grazing
- Spring Development
- Forage and Biomass Planting
- Forage Harvest Management
- Herbaceous Weed Control
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
- Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- Watering Facility

Northern Bobwhites in Working Grasslands Priority Counties



Positively impacted grassland birds include the dickcissel, grasshopper sparrow, eastern meadowlark, Henslow's sparrow, eastern kingbird, field sparrow and wild turkey.

How to Apply

Interested landowners should contact their local NRCS service center for more information on working grasslands restoration through the EQIP program. While all Virginia landowners can apply, key offices for our wildlife focal counties are listed below:

Bonsack (Botetourt) – 540-977-2698
Chatham (Pittsylvania) – 434-432-9455
Charlotte Court House (Charlotte) – 434-542-5442x3
Culpeper – 540-317-7732
(Culpeper, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock)
Halifax (Halifax) – 434-476-1931
Hanover (Caroline, Hanover) - 804-537-3008
Harrisonburg (Rockingham) – 540-433-2853
Verona (Augusta) – 540-248-6218
Warrenton (Fauquier) – 540-347-4402
Wytheville (Bland and Wythe) – 276-228-3513

NRCS staff will work with the applicant to develop a conservation plan that will become the basis of an EQIP contract.

Learn more about working with NRCS by visiting www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted.



Research shows that livestock and ground nesting birds can thrive together with moderate grazing pressure.

Outcomes and Impacts

Native grasses produce desirable returns and very inexpensive gain. By converting endophyte-infected tall fescue and other introduced species to native forages, producers can improve or maintain average daily weight gains, enhance soil health and hedge against summer drought with fewer inputs.

Bobwhites and many other grassland birds and pollinator species also benefit when native vegetation is properly used in prescribed grazing systems.