



Natural Resources Conservation Service

Northern Bobwhite in Pine Savannas

Status: Declining

The ecologically rich system of pine savannas supports diverse wildlife ranging from common large game animals to rare and declining species such as the Northern Bobwhite Quail, Field Sparrow, Prairie Warbler, and Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Once a major ecosystem in the Southeast United States, most savannas have been harvested and converted to more intensive loblolly production.

Research shows that closed canopy/unburned pine stands provide poor quality habitat for Bobwhites and other key species. Forest thinning helps keep tree canopies from shading out most ground cover. Frequent prescribed fire prevents woody plants and forest litter from overtaking grasses and forbs.

When appropriately applied, thinning and frequent prescribed fire mimic the ecosystem processes that once occurred naturally across landscapes to create and maintain savanna habitats. Correctly timed applications also reduce hazardous fuels and potential economic loss while improving stand quality and overall forest health.

Commercial loblolly and shortleaf pine plantings can be converted to highly valuable pine savanna habitats with relatively simple changes in management strategies. Virginia forest landowners can get funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help address the inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife in pine systems, a key NRCS resource concern.



Rare and declining species like Bobwhite Quail can thrive in properly managed pine savannas.

NRCS offers technical assistance and incentive payments for planning and installing practices with the potential to drastically increase the amount of pine savanna habitats in Virginia [i.e., thinning (≤ 50 ft²/acre basal area), follow-up spraying of undesirable woody species, and prescribed burning].

Actions

- Restore pine savanna ecosystems to our forested landscapes
- Improve wildlife habitat for rare and declining species
- Promote prescribed burning as a key management tool

Available Practices

- Brush Management
- Early Successional Habitat Management
- Firebreak
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Hedgerow Planting
- Herbaceous Weed Control
- Prescribed Burning
- Tree/Shrub Establishment

Priority Landscapes

Virginia is conducting targeted habitat restoration activities throughout the state with a focus on the following wildlife focal counties in pine-dominated landscapes: Caroline, Charlotte, Dinwiddie, Essex, Greensville, Halifax, Hanover, King & Queen, King William, Pittsylvania, Southampton, and Sussex.

Outcomes and Impacts

EQIP participants can help restore pine savannas to Virginia's rural forested landscapes through the simple process of thinning, spraying and burning. There is no need to plant anything as these systems often naturally recover themselves over a few years of proper management.

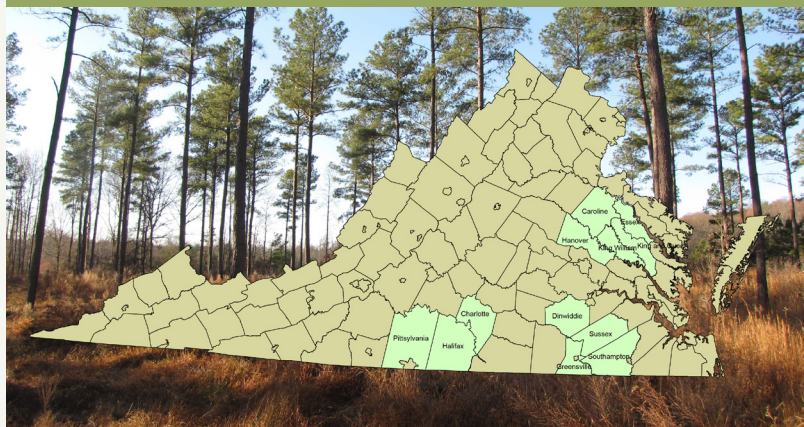
Participants can benefit from the sale of forest products, offset costs of habitat management, and an increase in wildlife viewing opportunities and recreational activities. Meanwhile, the wildlife will positively respond to the newly available habitat, often with increased numbers of species such as the Northern Bobwhite, Brown-Headed Nuthatch, Field Sparrow and Prairie Warbler.

How to Apply

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

Charlotte CH (Charlotte) - 434-542-5442, ext. 3
Chatham (Pittsylvania) - 434-432-3061
Courtland (Southampton) - 757-653-2532, ext. 3
Dinwiddie (Dinwiddie) - 804-469-7297
Emporia (Greensville and Sussex) - 434-634-2115
Halifax (Halifax) - 434-266-3100
Hanover (Caroline and Hanover) - 804-537-3008

Virginia's Pine Savanna WLFW Priority Counties



Tappahannock – 804-466-3188
(Essex, King & Queen, and King William)

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.



Pine savannas are fire-maintained open canopy forests dominated by an understory of native forbs, grasses and shrubs. This stand has been thinned to the prescribed 50 square feet per acre basal area.