

Small Game & Wild Turkey Committee

Meeting Agenda



**Wednesday, February 26, 2020
10:30 – 11:45 am**

**Commission Room
Centennial Campus, Raleigh**

Welcome/Open Meeting

- Game Lands Quail Mgmt. Area Update
- Private Lands Quail Mgmt. Area Update
- Wildlife Conservation Lands Program
- Pisgah/Nantahala Forest Plan Revision Update

John Stone

Chris Jordan
Brad Howard
Brad Howard
Chris Kreh

Additional Topics

John Stone

Adjourn

GAME LAND QUALITY QUAIL MANAGEMENT AREA



Chris Jordan
Game Lands and Forest Resources Manager



Goal

- To increase abundance of bobwhite quail on a Game Land to provide high-quality hunting opportunities



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Objective

- Quail population density of 1 quail/acre



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High-Quality Quail Hunting

- 1 quail/acre
 - Hunter satisfaction –“Excellent”
 - Hunters can expect to find a covey every 1 – 1.5 hours
- **This is achievable with intensive habitat management in rural landscape in eastern North Carolina**



Next Steps (from October meeting)

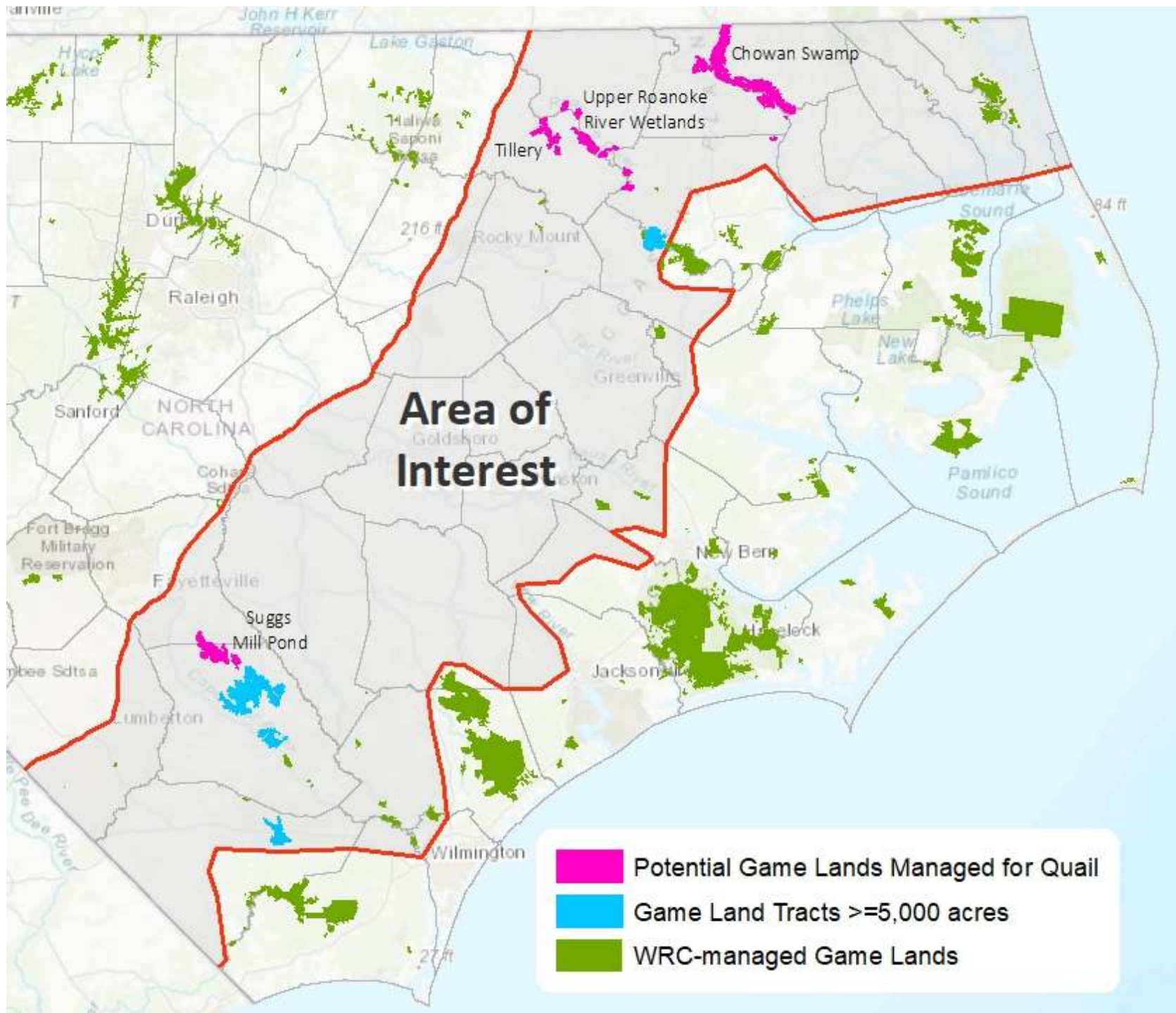
- At Select Game Lands
 - Evaluate Current Management
 - Evaluate Manageable Acres
- Provide Options in February





Area of Interest

Durham
John H Kerr Reservoir
Lake Gaston
Hico Lake
Halwa Saponi Sdtsa
Durham
216 ft
Rocky Mount
Raleigh
Sanford
NORTH CAROLINA
Cohasset Sdtsa
Fort Bragg Military Reservation
Fayetteville
Lumbee Sdtsa
Lumberton
Wilmington
27 ft
ALABAMA
Pamlico Sound
84 ft
Phelps Lake
New Lake
Pamlico Sound
New Bern
Croatan National Forest
Havelock
Jacksonville



<u>Game Land</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Managed Acres</u>
Chowan Swamp	22,738	6,434
Upper Roanoke River	10,252	2,058
Suggs Mill Pond	11,059	2,866
Tillery	5,216	4,274



Current Management

- Early Successional Habitat



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Current Management

- Early Successional Habitat
- Longleaf and Loblolly Pine
 - Thin Pine Stands (when merchantable)
 - Spray for shade-tolerant hardwoods
 - Burn: 4-year rotation
 - Convert Loblolly to LL
 - Establish native ground
 - Treat 25% of stands/yr
 - Quail abundance 1 bird/15 acres



Plantation Quail Management



- Production of 1 bird/15 acres can be increased:
 - Convert forests to grass/shrub
 - Intensive logging and site prep. needed
 - 95% less trees per acre
 - Establishment of native grass to carry fire

Management Limitations

Operability of Soils

- 3-6 month window
- No management in very wet years



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Management Limitations

- Grass/Shrub
(OpenField)
Development
Restrictions
 - Dedicated areas
 - Longleaf restoration
 - Cost and manpower



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High-Quality Quail Hunting

- 1 quail/acre
 - Hunter satisfaction - “Excellent”
- 1 quail / 2 acres
 - Hunter satisfaction – “Good”
- 1 quail / 5 acres
 - Hunter satisfaction – “Poor to Fair”
- 1 quail / 10 acres
 - Very little quail hunting occurs



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Options

1. Manage in a Forested Landscape

- 1 quail / 15 acres

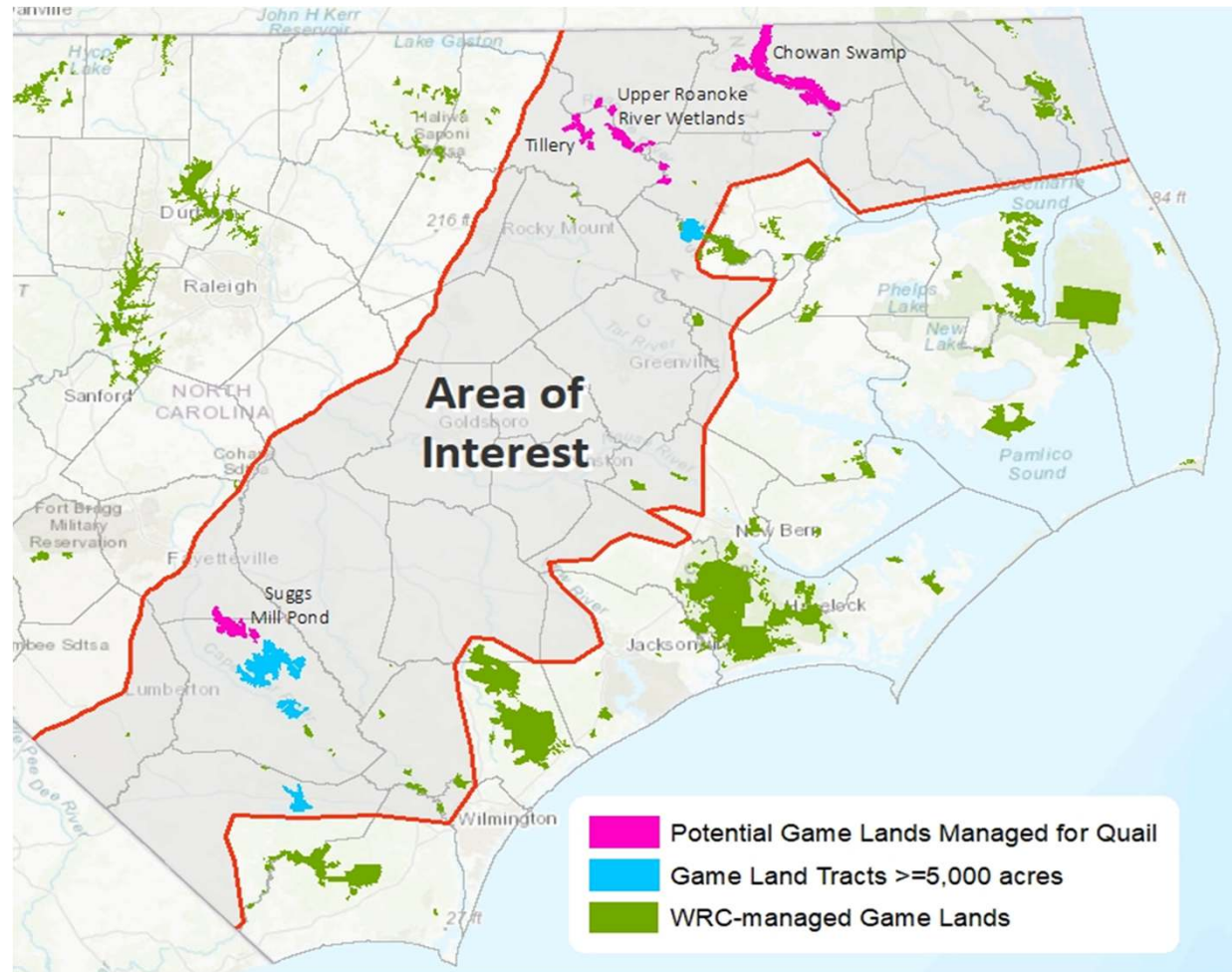
2. Identify and Pursue New Property



Option #2

Pursue New Property

- 5,000 acres
- \$5,000/acre
- \$25 million



Questions



Wildlife Conservation Land Program



Back to the Beginning, Spring 2000

Spring 2000 / Volume 5, Issue 1

Published by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission



the Upland GAZETTE

◆ North Carolina Small Game Notes ◆

What's Inside...

- ◆ Grouse Research Underway 3
- ◆ Native Warm Season Grasses 3
- ◆ Bean Dips 4

The Economic Battle for the Bobwhite

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOME U.S. Forest Service land, military bases, and a few state-owned game lands, all of the quail habitat in North Carolina is provided by private landowners. Quail habitat on private land occurs in one of two forms: habitat associated with

provide recommendations for habitat installation and management on both privately owned farmland and forestland. However, because the land is privately owned, biologists do not dictate to the owners how they manage their property. Actually, because the landowners own

Economics or, more specifically, maximizing income has also affected quail habitat on forestlands. For example, some current practices applied with intensive production forestry result in limited quail habitat when compared to earlier harvest and planting methods. Again, these management choices



Back to the Beginning, Spring 2000



- Property Tax Laws created a disincentive to manage for wildlife habitat.
- David Sawyer dubbed this the “quail tax”
- We even had a landowner kicked out of the PUV program for participating in CURE!



A Decade of Trying!

- Tried to simply get Wildlife into Present Use Value (PUV), didn't happen.
- Tried to write a bill that would allow a tax credit to offset the cost to counties, didn't happen.
- Finally in 2008!



Success!!

Legislation, signed into law in 2008 that:

- recognizes wildlife conservation land as a special class of property that must be assessed at a reduced value
- Is administered by NCWRC
 - Incorporates priorities from the NC Wildlife Action Plan



Program Structure



- Modeled after the Present Use Value programs, but NOT one of them
- Tax evaluation at agricultural PUV rate
- Carries the same penalties as PUV programs



Ownership

- Property ownership of ≥ 5 yrs prior to WCLP application
- Property must be owned by individual, family business, or family trust
 - No publicly traded corporations
- WCLP transfers with property if new owner files application with county within 60 days of land transfer



Acreage & Management



- Qualifying acreage 20-100 contiguous acres
 - 100 max in a county
- Land managed for WCLP purposes for ≥ 3 yrs prior to application or it must be enrolled in one of the PUV programs
- Signed agreement and map.



Original Qualification Criteria

1. Protect a Priority Species (i.e. endangered, threatened or special concern)
2. Conserve a Priority Habitat
 - Early Successional
 - Stream & Riparian
 - Rock Outcrop
 - Longleaf Pine
 - Small Wetland Community
 - Bat Caves

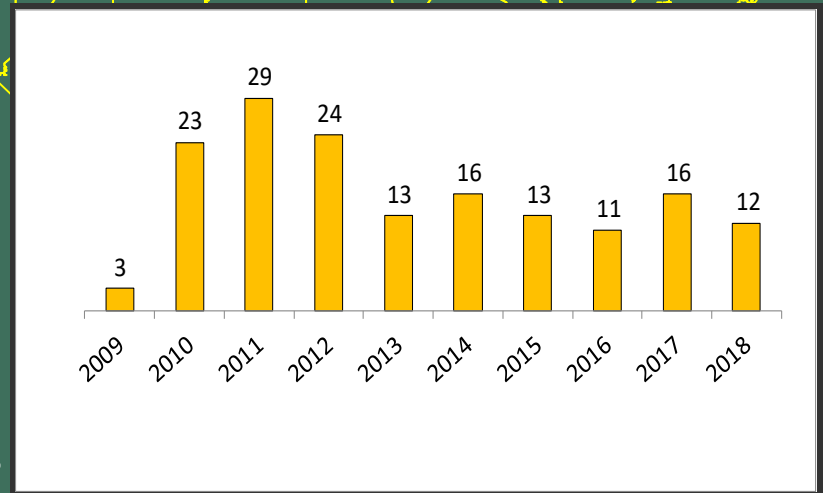


Wildlife Conservation Land Program Signed WHCAs by County through 2018



2009 – 2018

- 160 Signed Agreements
- 7962 Total Qualifying Acres
- 42.6% of total Parcel Acres



2019, a new option!

- 3. Create and actively and regularly use as a reserve for hunting, fishing, shooting, wildlife observation, or wildlife activities, provided that the land is inspected by a certified wildlife biologist at least quintennially to ensure that at least three of the seven activities listed in this sub-sub-subdivision are maintained to propagate a sustaining breeding, migrating, or wintering population of indigenous wild animals for human use, including food, medicine, or recreation. The Commission shall adopt rules needed to administer the inspection requirements of and activities mandated by this sub-sub-subdivision.
 - I. Supplemental food.
 - II. Supplemental water.
 - III. Supplemental shelter.
 - IV. Habitat control.
 - V. Erosion control.
 - VI. Predator control.
 - VII. Census of animal population on the land.

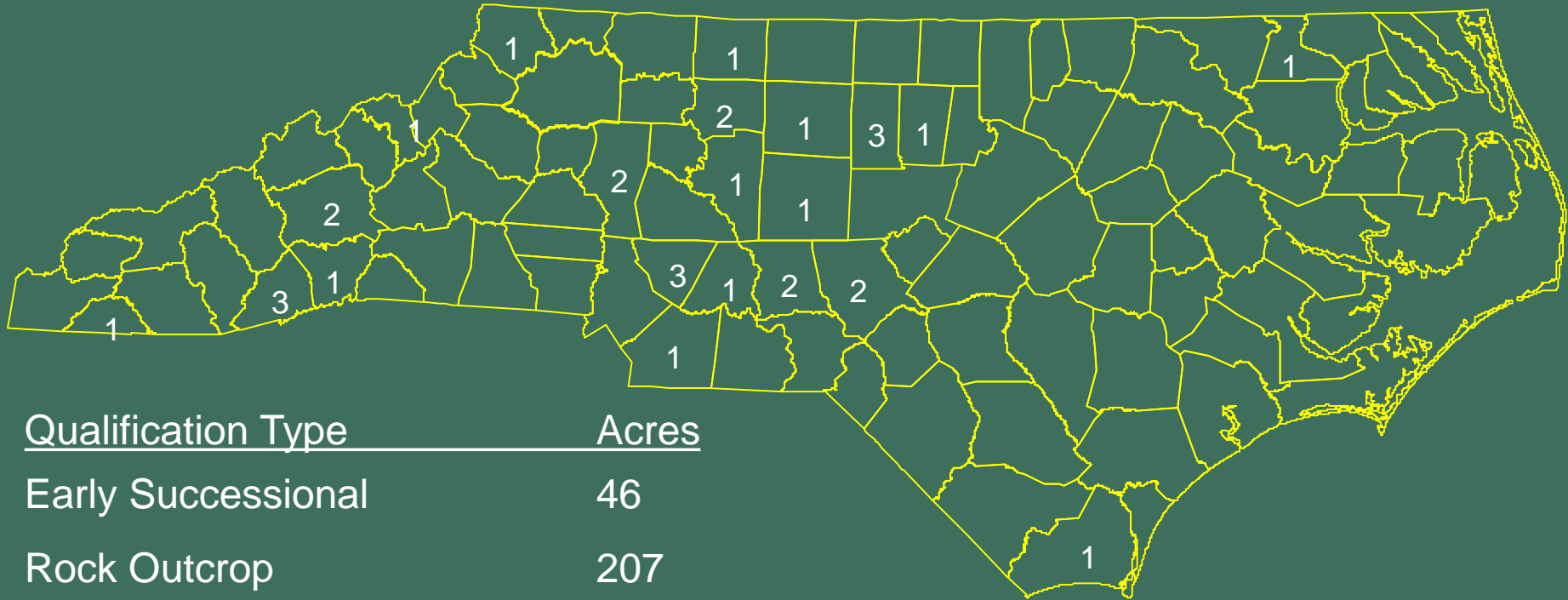


Other Significant Changes

1. Increased the maximum acres to 800 for the new criteria! (total 900, if they include another 100 on or both of the other criteria).
2. Removed the prior use clause for the new criteria.



In 2019 with the new Criteria, 32 WHCA's signed

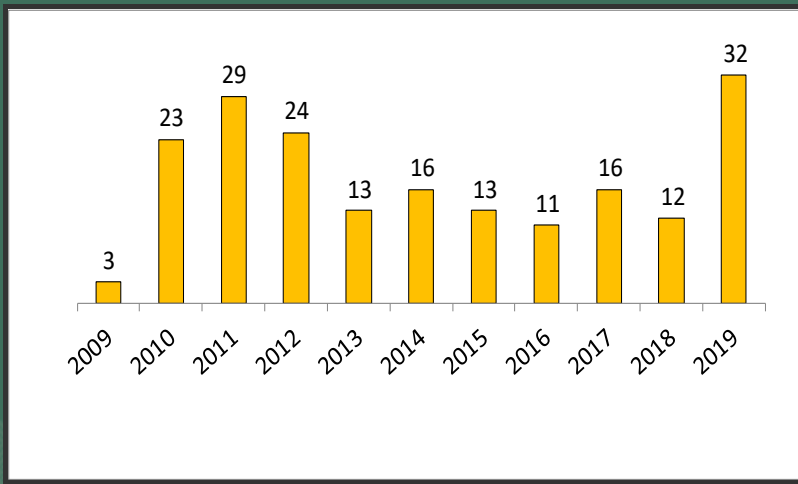
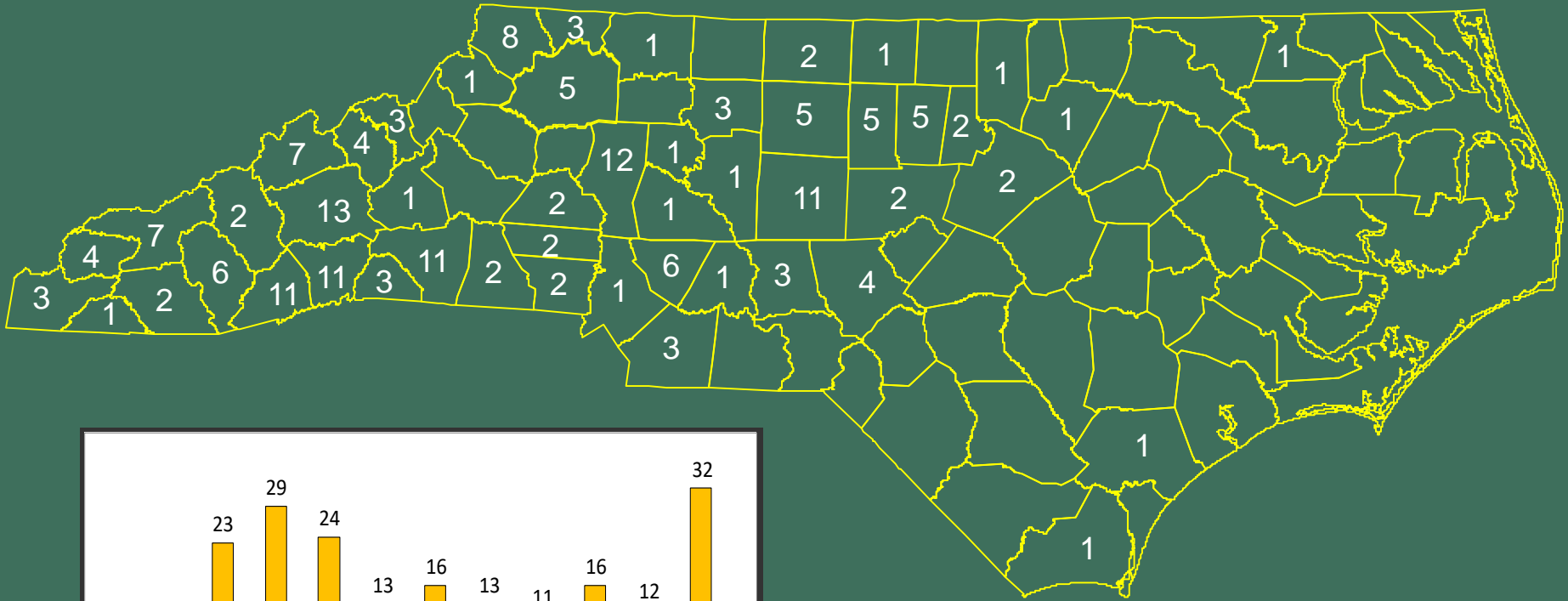


<u>Qualification Type</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Early Successional	46
Rock Outcrop	207
Stream & Riparian Habitat	348
Wildlife Reserve Land	1049

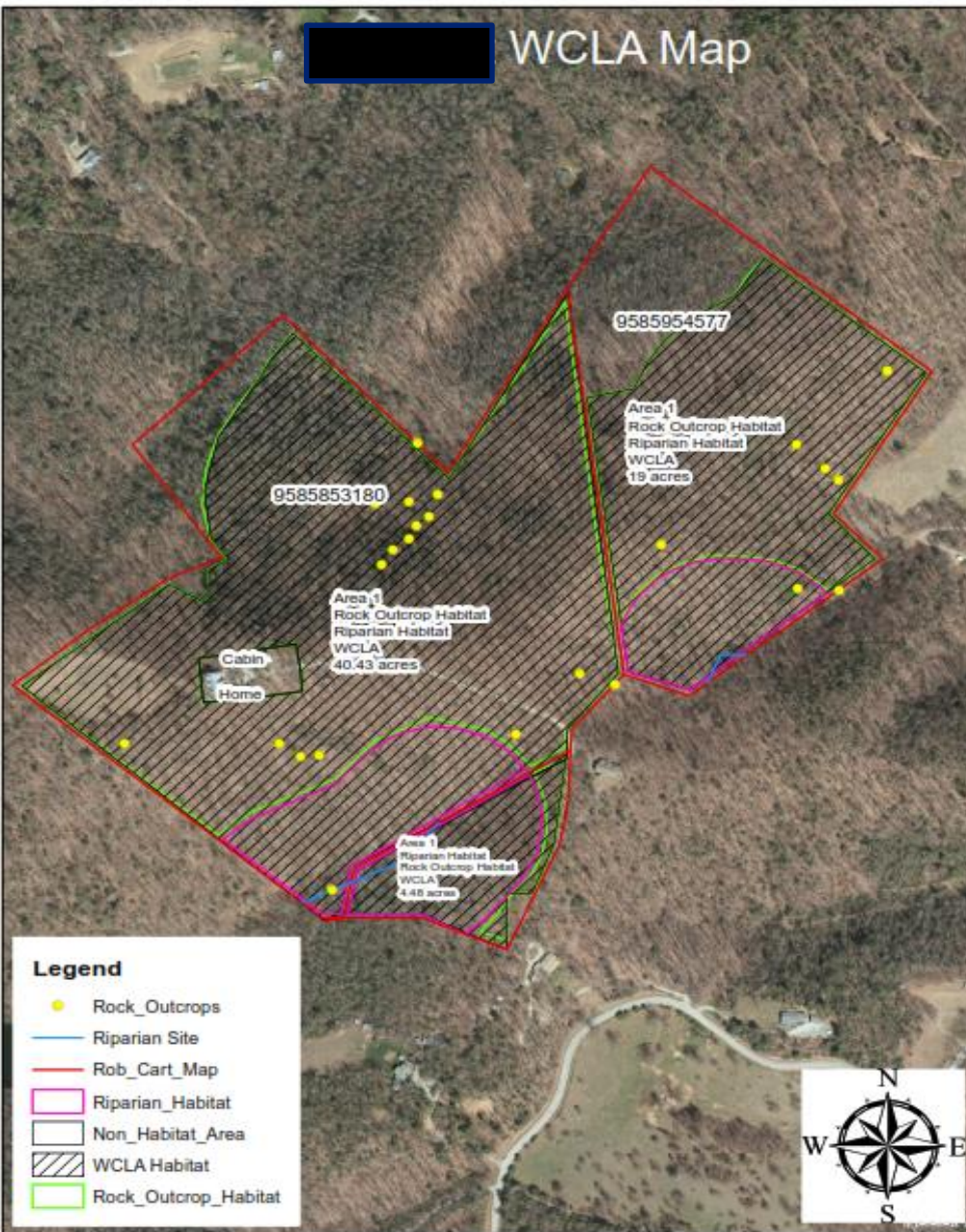
TOTAL = 1649



Wildlife Conservation Land Program Signed WHCAs by County through 2019



WCLA Map

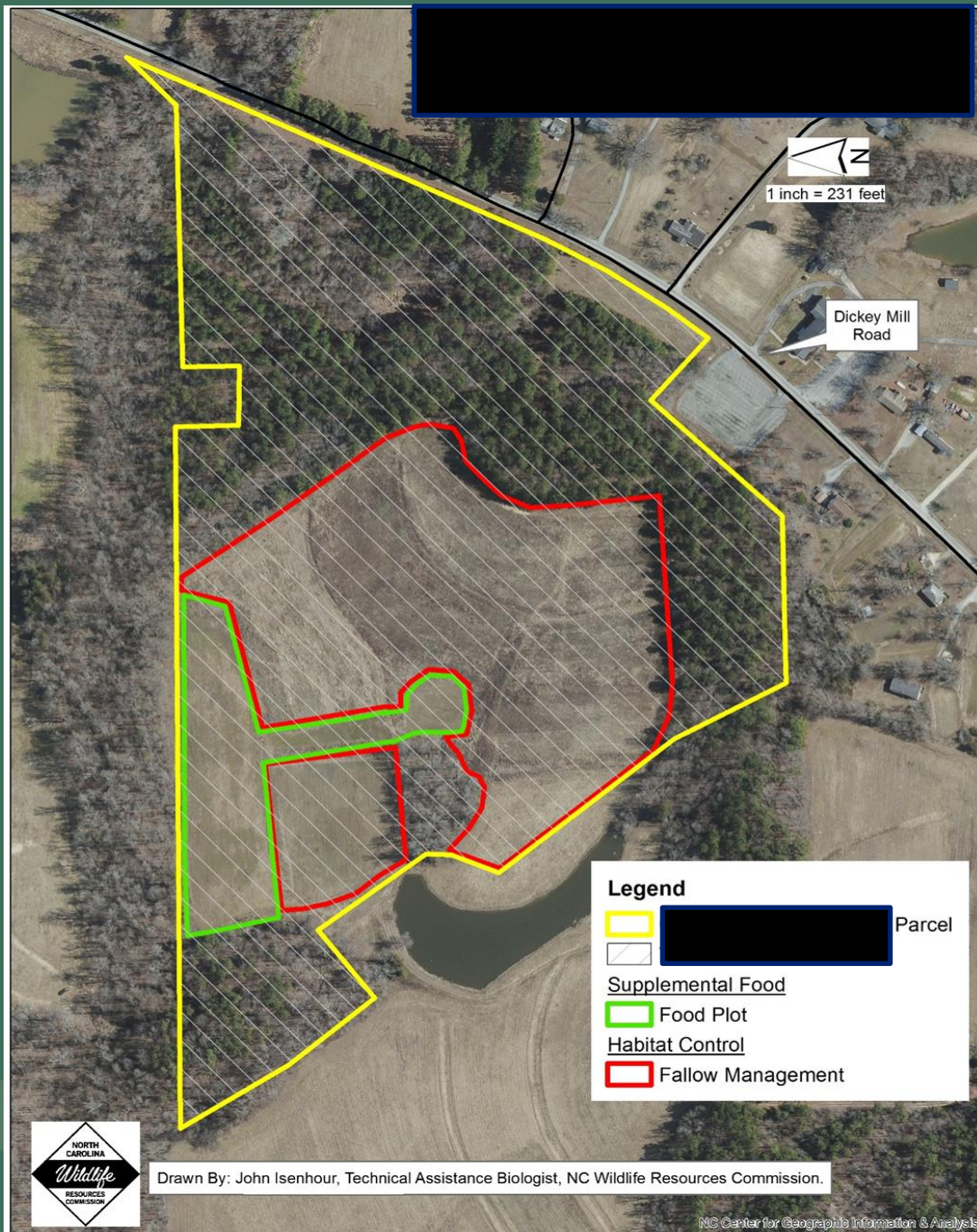


Henderson

63.91 Acres

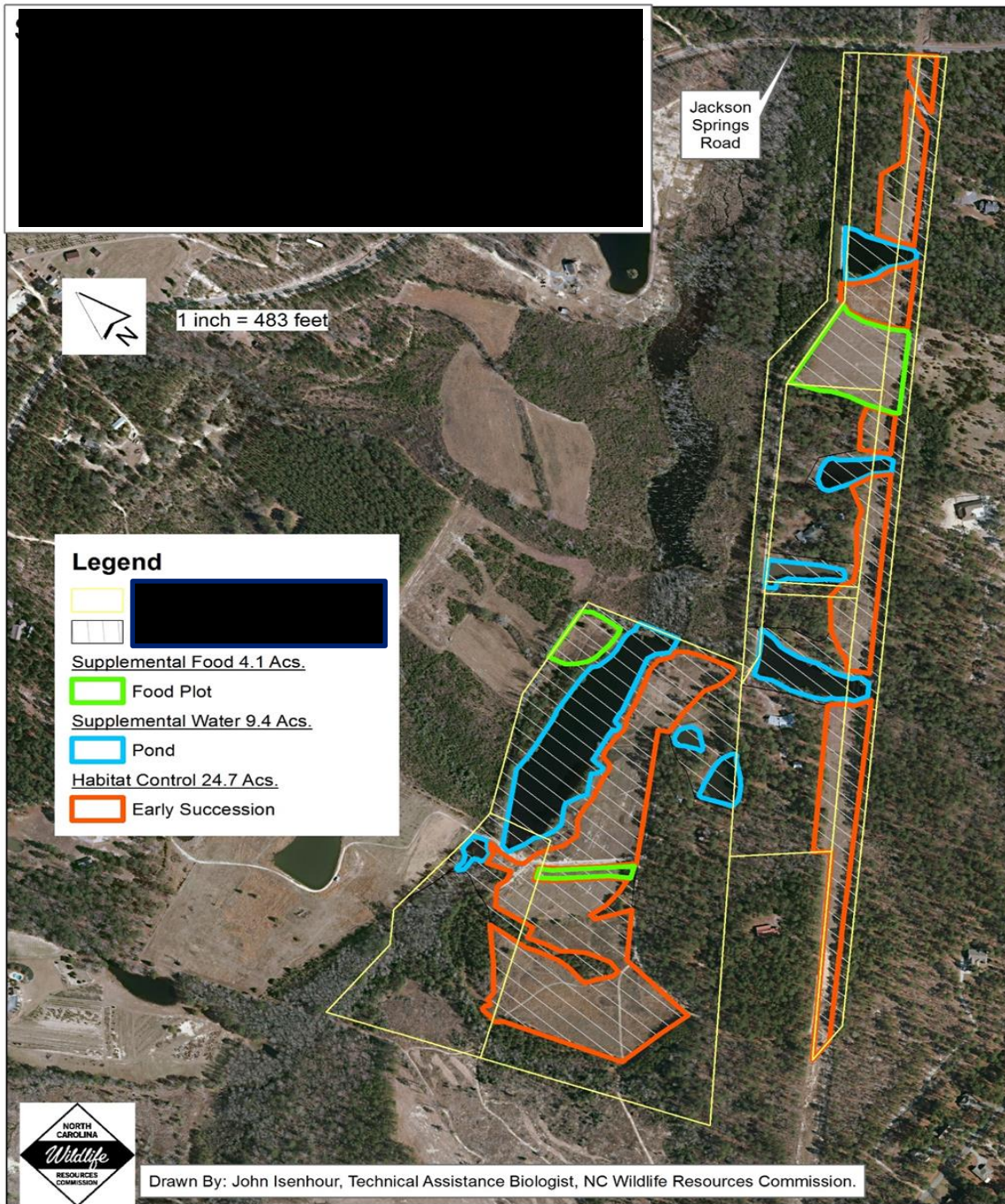
Rock Outcrop Habitat and
Stream & Riparian Habitat





Moore County

52 Acres enrolled
Wildlife Reserve Land



Summary

1. Interest in the Program is high.
2. Excellent opportunity to provide an economic incentive to landowners for managing their property to benefit wildlife.
3. We are interacting with a citizen base across the spectrum (not just traditional constituents).



the Upland GAZETTE



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The Economic Battle for the Bobwhite

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOME U.S. Forest Service land, military bases, and a few state-owned game lands, all of the quail habitat in North Carolina is provided by private landowners. Quail habitat on private land occurs in one of two forms: habitat associated with activities on farmland or habitat resulting from management of woodlands. Quail habitat on farmland is provided as a by-product of farming activities. A partial list would surely include: field edges or borders, ditch banks, fallow fields, standing row crops (corn, soybeans, etc.) and hedgerows between fields. Woodland habitat is usually associated with clear-cuts that provide habitat from five to 10 years depending on the type of trees cut and how the area was treated after harvest (was it sprayed with herbicide, burned, replanted etc. However, woodland habitat can also be created by thinning and burning older stands of loblolly or longleaf pine as well as some oaks.

The Key Players

When requested, biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission will gladly

provide recommendations for habitat installation and management on both privately owned farmland and forestland. However, because the land is privately owned, biologists do not dictate to the owners how they manage their property. Actually, because the landowners own the land and make the decisions that will influence habitat, quail, quail hunters and biologists are all at the mercy of landowners' management choices.

Why Are We Losing Habitat?

If loss of habitat is the underlying reason for the decline of bobwhite quail, and the private landowners ultimately determine the amount and distribution of the habitat, why have the landowners made choices that resulted in removal of quail habitat from private forest and farmlands? The answer, without question, is economics. If you are a quail hunter then you have already heard about the changes in farm equipment, crop rotations, removal of hedgerows, availability of fertilizers, etc. All of these changes have come about as improvements to farm systems in an attempt to maximize farm income. The farmers did not consciously remove quail

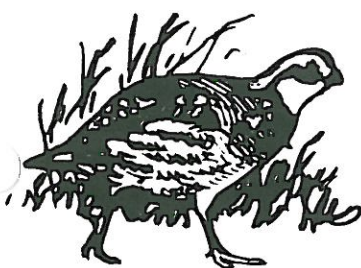
habitat, but they did consciously attempt to increase their efficiency and production.

Economics or, more specifically, maximizing income has also affected quail habitat on forestlands. For example, some current practices applied with intensive production forestry result in limited quail habitat when compared to earlier harvest and planting methods. Again, these management choices are made due to pressures for improvements in efficiency and greater economic returns and not because somebody doesn't care about quail or other wildlife. Finally, we are all aware of the development pressures that are rapidly converting much of rural North Carolina's farm and forestland to urban and suburban landscapes.

Tax Laws and Wildlife

Maintaining and increasing income is also necessary for most private landowners to keep forest and farmland in their families' possession and in its' current rural state. Obviously, maintenance of a rural landscape is a primary requirement for quail and most other wildlife species to survive. In addition to income obtained directly from farming or forestry, there are other economic incentives that influence ownership and management activities on private lands. Several different tax laws have considerable economic implications with regard to continued ownership and management of private lands by current landowners. For quail and other wildlife habitat, these laws have had varied effects. For example, the federal estate tax of the Internal Revenue

continued on page 2



The Economic Battle for the Bobwhite *continued*

Code places economic pressures on traditional farming families, often resulting in changes in land use with damaging consequences for land and wildlife conservation. Bills are currently being considered to phase out this tax over the next 10 years. Moreover, assorted federal natural resource programs have provided cost share payments to landowners as incentives to establish wildlife habitat. However, payments are not what they first seem, as they are taxed as income at the end of the year.

The Real Value of Land

North Carolina's most influential law for maximizing income production and therefore influencing management choices on private lands comes in the form of annual property tax reductions. Through North Carolina's use value assessment program, a landowner may obtain significant reductions in annual property tax if certain requirements are met, and their county of residence participates in the program. This program is rather complicated, but it basically works by enabling county tax departments to consider the present "use value" rather than the "market value" in determining tax assessment. The intent of this law is to give tax relief to farm and forest tracts held by families and to protect these tracts from being sold because of higher taxes caused by appreciating land values and higher market assessments.

How to Qualify

This legislation, enacted in 1973, provided some much needed protection for rural land ownership and has worked to

some degree, evident by scattered farm fields and pastures adjacent to many of North Carolina's city limits. However, the requirements for participation unintentionally provided a financial disincentive for management of wildlife habitats, and the program limits inclusion of land owned and managed solely for wildlife habitat. To be eligible, land must be under sound management for such purposes as agriculture, horticulture or forestry. A sound-management program is defined as a program of production designed to obtain the greatest net return from the land consistent with its conservation and long-term improvement.

The "Quail Tax"

Imagine a biologist, while providing guidance to a farmer, suggesting that the farmer establish and manage quail habitat on 20 acres of pasture or farm fields. In this situation the biologist is asking the landowner not only to forego the income received through livestock or crop production (or the lease of the land for these uses), but also to establish and maintain the habitat at his own cost. Finally, because the 20 acres may not qualify for the reduced tax rate, the landowner must also pay higher county taxes for those acres that he has converted. In essence, the landowner must give up potential income, pay for the cost of establishment and management, and pay what amounts to a "quail tax."

A Green Choice at Tax Time

On the bright side of state tax laws, North Carolina has a Conservation Tax Credit Program. A substantial tax credit may be allowed against individual and corporate income taxes when property is donated for conservation purposes. Donation may include conservation easements given to state and local governments and certain qualified nonprofit organizations. As a secondary benefit, conservation easements often provide economic relief in the form of reduced property taxes. From 1983 through 1999 North Carolina was the only state with

a program of this type. As of Jan. 1, 2000 four additional states are also providing a similar tax credit.

What Can Be Done?

It appears that habitat for quail and many other wildlife species has, for the most part, been incidentally supplied through whatever land use and practice is most profitable and efficient at a particular given time. Therefore, if we expect quail and other wildlife to once again be found in significant numbers on private land, we must find and promote forestry, farming and horticulture practices that provide economic gain through both income and time efficiency and—as a by-product—provide the desired habitat. This is not a new idea and is the reason that practices such as prescribed burning, no-till planting and conversion of fescue to switchgrass (see switchgrass article) have been so intensely promoted by southeastern wildlife agencies. We must also establish and support tax laws that provide financial support for those who maintain rural landscapes and create habitat. Finally, as landowners, we must understand that we provide the habitat for wildlife, and we must be willing to shoulder some of the economic responsibility for establishment and maintenance of habitat.

Dollars and Sense

But we can't really blame landowners for choosing continued or improved income production over maintenance of some type of wildlife habitat. We also can't blame the biologists or the wildlife agency for not being able to convince landowners that wildlife habitat is more important than income. We can't fight an economic battle with free technical advice and bags of seed. If we hope to succeed, we must expand our efforts to include those economic considerations that drive landowner's decisions on land management. I recently paid my annual "quail tax." Have you paid yours? ♦

— David Sawyer
District 7 Wildlife Biologist



Established 1996

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