

existing woodlands

An often neglected habitat component on farms is existing woodlands in the form of woodlots, fencerows or hedgerows. Many of these wooded habitats have grown to the point where little sunlight reaches the ground underneath. Reducing tree density in these areas and developing a grassy ground cover can greatly improve their value to quail and other grassland species. Thinning dense pine woods is an excellent way to create grassland habitat while improving the economic value of the timber (thin to basal area of 60 or less if possible). It may be necessary to treat these stands with a selective herbicide if hardwood sprouts are abundant in the understory or midstory. Prescribed fire or light disking and managing basal area are essential to maintaining grassland plant communities within woodlands.



cost-share programs

Most of the practices mentioned in this brochure can be cost-shared through USDA Conservation Programs under the Farm Bill. For example, CP33-Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds is a new practice available under Continuous CRP that can provide cost-share and incentive payments for creation of grass buffers around eligible crop lands. Contact your local USDA Farm Services Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on these programs.

need information?

A written wildlife habitat management plan can greatly improve your chances of achieving your wildlife management objectives. A wildlife biologist can provide valuable assistance with planning and implementing these practices for wildlife habitat.

Natural Resources Conservation Service
(contact information for your local NRCS field office can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov.)

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A complete list of other eligible technical assistance providers can be found at techreg.usda.gov



Photos by Wes Burger, Marco Nicovich, USDA NRCS

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Farm-level habitat management for Bobwhite Quail and other Farm Wildlife



Forest and Wildlife Research Center,
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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

agricultural producers

With forethought and planning, agricultural producers can increase wildlife populations on their farms. There are a number of management practices that producers can use to increase and improve wildlife habitat on their farm. The amount of habitat established will likely affect whether you will be able to see noticeable quail population changes. By developing new and existing habitat on 5–10 percent of your farm acreage, you could greatly improve wildlife habitat while sacrificing only minimal amounts of land for agricultural production. Keep in mind that some wildlife species such as quail are not highly mobile, and farms located within landscapes containing large amounts of open land (e.g. many fields) may see responses to habitat management at smaller scales than farms located within landscapes containing sparse amounts of open land (e.g. dominated by closed-canopy forests).



row crops

One of the most cost-effective farm habitat practices is creation of 30-ft wide or greater (wider is better) vegetated buffers along crop field edges, drains, or through interiors of large fields. Field edges (especially adjacent to woods) are often low crop yield areas, and converting these edges to buffers may actually increase whole farm profitability, especially if buffers can be developed through a conservation incentives program. Field corners, dry portions of irrigated fields, and other odd areas can also be fallowed for wildlife habitat. Your wildlife objectives will ultimately determine what types of vegetation are appropriate for buffers and other habitats on your land. If you desire quail and other grassland wildlife, you should favor native grasses (e.g. broomsedge) and forbs (e.g. partridge pea) with some shrubby cover (plum thickets are excellent cover) mixed in. Periodically treat spots in buffers and other fallowed habitats with herbicide where undesirable vegetation such as bermudagrass becomes dominant. Periodic soil disturbance with light disking or prescribed fire every 2–3 years is essential to maintain good grassland wildlife habitat.

pastures & hay fields

Pastures and hay fields can also be managed for grassland habitat. First, conversion of introduced forage grasses such as bermudagrass and fescue to native grasses can greatly enhance wildlife value. The structure and composition of native grass stands are much better for wildlife than introduced grasses. Incorporation of native warm season grass forage in a rotational grazing system generally produces better livestock weight gains compared to introduced grasses, and it makes excellent hay. Native grasses cannot be grazed as intensely as introduced grasses, so careful management will have to be used. Another technique is to create habitat buffers by fencing out portions of pastures or leaving margins of hay fields unmowed. If your fences need replacement, a good way to produce wildlife habitat is to move the new fences inward 30 ft or more (wider is better). You can also fence out corners, drains, and other odd areas to create habitat buffers. Treat habitat buffers with herbicide to eradicate fescue, bermudagrass, or bahiagrass to release native grasses and forbs. Periodic soil disturbance with disking or prescribed fire every 2–3 years will enhance wildlife habitat value.

