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Boots on the Ground: *New Initiatives to Save the Bobwhite*

July 2022

By Jon Kohler, JD Broker / Partner – from “The Kohler Chronicles”

Quail Forever! It's what most of us want. It's impossible to imagine our area, known for its quail plantations and traditions, without that iconic little game bird. While many of us may have quail, most places do not. Groups like Tall Timbers and Quail Forever help protect habitat throughout the entire range of the bobwhite quail, yet the quail population has still been in decline since the early 1970s. In areas that aren't properly managed, the population has dropped 80 percent during the past fifty years.

The good news is that we know how to bring quail back. It takes fire, effort, and help from organizations with the expertise and manpower to make a difference.

Our own Jon Kohler sits on the National Board of Directors for Quail Forever, along with other industry leaders such as John Thames of Covey Rise, whose mission is to conserve quail and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and advocacy.

Quail Forever is a newer organization founded in 2005, but the concept driving its work is an old one. In 1982, a group of hunters in the Midwest noticed the connection between upland habitat loss and declining pheasant populations. From that awareness, Pheasants Forever was formed and today is seen as a national leader in wildlife habitat projects and conservation, having created or enhanced 15.8 million acres of wildlife habitat across North America. Its 138,000 members are a national workforce for habitat. Later, in response to the continued decline in quail populations and suitable habitats, Pheasants Forever formed Quail Forever. Today, it's combined staff of over 400 employees makes a national imprint working locally on many different landscapes to benefit upland wildlife.

Quail Forever is growing fast with 17,000 members, more than 190 local chapters, and biologists located in every Southeastern state. The organization has improved habitat quality on over 1 million acres and, through its “No Child Left Indoors” initiative, engaged over 25,000 youth and young adults.

Quail Forever operates with a model unique among national nonprofits. Local chapters of Quail Forever retain 100 percent decision-making control over locally raised funds. This is unique in the conservation world. That means the Red Hills Quail Forever in our hometown of Tallahassee, FL uses local funds to develop habitat projects and youth conservation events that directly meet local needs. Chapters also support regional



programs that assist with focused habitat efforts to benefit quail. As an example, chapters in the Red Hills region have donated over \$200,000 to Tall Timbers Research Station in the past six years.

Andy Edwards, Quail Forever's new Program Manager, is heavily involved with the growth and expansion of QF's footprint throughout the Southeast. As a regional representative for QF, Edwards has helped volunteers start more

than 50 local chapters over the last 15 years. His new role includes identifying and nurturing new partners in the corporate and private sectors.

“Partnerships coupled with boots-on-the-ground projects and our education efforts emphasizing habitat education, conservation leadership, and an appreciation for hunting heritage make Quail Forever special among conservation organizations,” says Edwards. “We are looking to Southern landowners for partners, not just to improve habitat and quail populations, but to also preserve a way of life unique to the Southeast.”

Quail Forever is engaged in a national collaborative effort called R3 – Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation. This effort seeks to engage youth and young adults in the sport of hunting, love for the outdoors, and appreciation of land stewardship. As evidenced by hunting license sales, participation in hunting has been in a general decline since the 1980s. This not only impacts funds available for wildlife conservation and habitat restoration but also jeopardizes hunting culture and traditions – and a general interest in land ownership.

Jon believes land values are directly tied to the quality of and amount of natural habitat within a property. It is a factor he has witnessed again and again during his 30 years as a land broker. He also believes that societal pressures and distractive entertainment options are reducing younger generations' interest in hunting and other outdoor sports. This is something you may have witnessed in your own experiences. If this trend were to continue, demand for sporting properties could decline, putting supply and demand out of balance and impacting land values.

“You and your family, at this moment, enjoy the beauty and recreation of your land. You may not be thinking of value retention for selling in the future. But, when it is time for you – or your inheritors – to sell, you will want a pool of interested buyers. Preserving a societal interest in hunting and land ownership is crucial to maintaining land value into the future.”

– Jon Kohler.

