



# THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

## TENNESSEE CHAPTER

### **Position statement on timber harvest for increased quail habitat**

The northern bobwhite is an important wildlife species in Tennessee, both culturally as the Tennessee State Gamebird and biologically as this species represents many less recognizable nongame species experiencing population decline. The dramatic decline of quail across most of the eastern and midwestern United States has been well-documented. However, examples of successful wild quail management efforts exist where intentional and intensive habitat management for the species has been implemented at the appropriate scale. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has identified lands for long-term quail management and designated five Quail Focal Areas (QFA) with an “anchor” Wildlife Management Area (WMA) at the center of each where wild quail persist and can continue to populate the larger and surrounding QFA.

One of the quail management areas is Bridgestone-Firestone WMA, which includes 10,000 acres with about 700 acres of quail habitat that currently supports approximately 10 coveys of wild bobwhite. There is opportunity to increase the bobwhite population at Bridgestone-Firestone by expanding bobwhite habitat, primarily by harvesting loblolly pine, which is not native to this area of the Cumberland Plateau, but was planted in the 1990s and early 2000s because of its fast growth and fiber production potential. TWRA has cleared areas previously planted to loblolly and restored these areas to early successional plant communities that may provide habitat for bobwhite and many other species. However, these areas are not immediately adjacent to the existing quail habitat on the WMA and thus unable to become occupied by wild bobwhite.

TWRA recently proposed a timber harvest that would clear approximately 250 acres and provide connectivity between the existing quail habitat and one of the recently cleared areas of loblolly pine. The proposed harvest would effectively double habitat for quail and many other species that require early successional plant communities. The proposed harvest was halted because of concerns related to cutting trees by various political entities who do not understand that many wildlife species do not occupy forests and cannot persist without open areas comprised of early successional plant communities. Wildlife diversity is increased with enhanced diversity of ecological seral stages and plant communities. Forested areas simply lack the food and cover requirements of many wildlife species. A recent statistic shared by the Tennessee Forestry Association indicates forests in Tennessee are increasing at approximately a 70 percent greater rate than they are being harvested. This trend does not portend an encouraging future for bobwhite and the plethora of other species that depend on open landscapes for habitat.

Science has identified timber harvesting and prescribed burning as the two most effective practices to increase quail habitat and quail populations. If managers are unable to take advantage of these practices, long term success of quail management is doomed. Without specific action to create and maintain areas of good-quality, long-term quail habitat, we will lose this iconic and highly valued species across the state.

The Tennessee Chapter of the Wildlife Society fully supports the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency in their efforts to increase northern bobwhite populations through habitat expansion and improvement, including deforestation where appropriate. Not only will this effort lead to increased and more robust populations of bobwhite, but it also will lead to increased and stronger populations of nongame species that occupy and require the same seral stages and plant communities.