



United States Department of Agriculture

## JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

# Indian Creek Woodland Savanna Restoration Initiative



SOUTH CAROLINA



Restored habitat for Northern Bobwhite quail and other at-risk species. USDA Forest Service photo

The halting, high-pitched trill of a Northern Bobwhite quail is perhaps the most Southern of sounds, yet quail populations have been in decline for decades, due to habitat loss. From 1750 to 1860, many explorers and naturalists saw prairies, savannas and spacious openings in the Carolina piedmont. However, over time, the landscape changed. One primary cause of this loss of habitat is lack of fire. Natural fire burns slowly across healthy quail habitat—pine woodlands and grassy savannas—keeping the forest floor open for native plants to grow and support quail nesting and foraging. Frequent, low-intensity fires also remove fuel, benefiting people and animals by reducing wildfire risks. The distinctive call of the quail has become a rallying cry for efforts to improve this habitat. In 2004, the Indian Creek Woodland Savanna Restoration Initiative brought a multitude of partners together to define joint goals and coordinate restoration on public and private lands. Their efforts have improved the outlook for quail and other important grassland bird species in decline, including the prairie warbler and Bachman's sparrow. The Joint Chiefs' funding accelerated the growth of partnerships, which prioritized goals and collaborative efforts with landowners to improve the health of 21,000 acres of national forest and 19,000 acres of private property. That's nearly 40,000 additional acres that is more resilient to fire and welcoming to wildlife.

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## RESULTS



Northern Bobwhite Quail © Quail Forever

**Reduced wildfire threats:** More than 5,000 acres of Federal land and 1,300 acres of private land were treated with controlled burns, and timber was thinned on 3,800 acres. Partners hosted field days and workshops and distributed newsletters on plant identification, soil health, management practices and prescribed fire. They also held an awards banquet to celebrate the contributions of local landowners and encourage continued participation.



**Enhanced wildlife habitat:** The 3,000-acre Delta Tract was established as a wildlife management area and used to demonstrate effective land management practices, such as selective timber harvesting and pollinator plantings. These practices have enhanced habitat for quail, deer and other small game.

### PROJECT IMPACT

**300**  
Landowners  
improved forest health

Three hundred landowners surrounding the Sumter National Forest have implemented improved forest management practices, from prescribed fires to growing native pollinator plants.

Total awarded through the Joint Chiefs' from 2015-17: \$1.4 million

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

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# INDIAN CREEK WOODLAND SAVANNA RESTORATION INITIATIVE



Andy Edwards, Quail Forever Regional Biologist and Kyle Lunsford, SC Coordinating Wildlife Biologist, Photo by Andy Edwards

## Building a Community for Quail Conservation

“Historically in the Carolinas, learning to quail hunt in sunny open pine savannas was a rite of passage,” said Andy Edwards, a regional biologist with Quail Forever. His organization is working to restore habitat for this iconic species, which also supports local culture and other wildlife.

With hundreds of private landowners around Sumter National Forest, outreach to coordinate prescribed fire, timber thinning and other land management strategies require significant time and commitment. Furthermore, some landowners are wary of collaborating with government agencies. “The Joint Chiefs’ funding helped us develop a cost-share agreement to bring someone on board to serve as a bus driver, helping to facilitate restoration efforts in the community” said Andy. “Our coordinating wildlife biologist focuses on quail and involves other partners. We are helping landowners get over the hump—to show them how they can have timber revenue and quail at the same time.”

Andy saw the growing interest in the technical assistance and cost-share programs available to landowners. “We are able to integrate what they want to do into the big picture. Most landowners are wildlife-conscious, and many are managing for wildlife. We are here to help them get the most out of their efforts,” said Andy.

Investments in this landscape are leaving a lasting impact. Partnership interest is growing for the conservation and restoration of quail habitat. “This was Quail Forever’s first partnership with the Forest Service on a position,” Andy said. “This has helped us have a footprint in a state where we had a small presence, and we are growing now as a result.” The quail population in this area is also growing, and the land management strategies that are critical to future gains will make public and private lands more resilient and more productive in the future.



Monarch butterfly  
USDA Forest Service photo

### Key Partners

Clemson Extension Service  
Clemson University  
Duke Energy  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
Newberry County Soil and  
Water Conservation District  
Quail Forever  
South Carolina Department of  
Natural Resources  
South Carolina Forestry  
Commission