

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Agriculture Committee

BILL: CS/ SB 1804

INTRODUCER: Agriculture Committee and Senator Peaden

SUBJECT: Protection of Quail Habitat

DATE: April 20, 2006

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Baum	Kiger	EP	Fav/ 1amendment
2.	Albee	Poole	AG	Fav/CS
3.			GA	
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

The committee substitute directs the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) – Division of Forestry to work with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other state and federal agencies to encourage private landowners to take part in voluntary habitat assistance programs aimed at restoring and conserving bobwhite quail habitat. The committee substitute encourages participation by private landowners in the Northern Bobwhite Quail Initiative to restore bobwhite quail populations and habitats. It directs the FWC and the DACS to provide education, marketing, advice, and incentives to encourage participation in the Initiative.

The committee substitute authorizes the FWC to acquire by gift, title to lands, including easements, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund. The FWC and the DACS are permitted to accept or receive grants from other sources for the purposes of improving or providing quail habitat and enhancing participation in the Initiative. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at the University of Florida is instructed to conduct research on the northern bobwhite quail and report its findings to the Legislature in an annual report due no later than January 1 of each year.

The committee substitute also appropriates \$20,000 individually from the General Revenue Fund to the DACS and the FWC for the purposes of administrating the provisions of the bill and to the IFAS for the purposes of conducting research.

This committee substitute creates an undesignated section in the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative is aimed at creating 250,000 acres of habitat for the northern bobwhite quail.

Northern bobwhite quail are a native quail species with an historic range in 35 states. The birds are a valued inhabitant of farm landscapes, an important aspect of rural culture and are important to the heritage of hunting. However, the bobwhite quail population has declined from an estimated 20 million birds in 1980 to approximately 6 million currently. Their habitats are disappearing due to urbanization, increased grassland cultivation, and a transitioning of once grassy fields into woods and forests – a process called succession.

The Initiative introduces a conservation practice intended to create 250,000 acres of early successional grass buffers along agricultural field borders. The Initiative partners FSA with landowners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 32 state fish and wildlife agencies, Quail Unlimited, the Southeast Quail Study Group, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and other conservation groups, including local conservation districts.

FSA estimates that the nesting and brood-rearing cover created by the Initiative will increase bobwhite quail numbers by 750,000 birds annually. Planted buffers will also benefit reptiles, amphibians, aquatic species, and upland birds, many of which are being considered for listing as endangered species. Such bird species include the bell's vireo, orchard oriole, painted bunting, loggerhead shrike, sedge wren, grasshopper sparrow, dickcissel, and henslow's sparrow. In addition, the Initiative will reduce soil erosion and protect water quality by trapping field sediments and nutrients.

Because the Initiative is limited to 250,000 acres, enrollment is targeted to specific geographic areas in 35 states that have the greatest potential to restore bobwhite quail habitat. The acreage that is allocated for Florida is 2,800 acres.¹

The Northern Bobwhite Quail in Florida

Bobwhite quail populations in Florida were at their highest densities during the early part of the 20th century. However, by the late 1970's, populations had begun to exhibit a significant decline. Based on the North American Breeding Bird Survey, quail populations in Florida declined over 70% from 1980 through 2000. Harvest also declined over 75% during the same period. The change in population status appears to be the result of land use changes that began after World War II and accelerated in the 1970's and 1980's.

A lack of nesting and brood rearing habitat is a limiting factor over much of the range of the northern bobwhite quail. This is a result of replacing native grasses with exotic grasses and eliminating nesting in intensively managed cropland and dense pine forests. These changes characterize much of the timber and agriculture lands in North Florida. However, in some of the

¹ United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, Conservation Reserve Program Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative, <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/html/quail04.htm>, August 2004.

rangelands of Peninsular Florida, nesting habitat may be adequate while food resources are lacking. In either case, the habitat degradation is likely the result of the land management activities on the site.

Land use systems that have created habitats unfavorable to bobwhite quail are becoming more common. Additionally, recovery of bobwhite quail numbers in Florida may be made more difficult by the continued loss of the land base due to urban development and human population growth.²

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1. The committee substitute provides for the preservation and restoration of bobwhite quail habitat. Specific provisions include:

- Providing for the definitions of the Commission, the Division, quail habitat and quail initiative.
- Requiring the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) – Division of Forestry to preserve and restore quail habitat and undertake activities to maximize voluntary participation of land owners of the state in the Quail Initiative. In order to accomplish this task, the Commission and the Division may undertake the following activities:
 - Encourage eligible persons to participate through education, marketing and other promotional efforts.
 - Work with potentially eligible landowners as to the terms for participating in the Quail Initiative.
 - Provide incentives for landowners who participate in the Quail Initiative.
 - Provide advice to landowners who participate in the Quail Initiative regarding the management of quail habitat, including the provision of quail management services.
 - Acquire by gift the fee simple title or any lesser interest in quail habitat, including easements, to the extent such acquisition is consistent with the Quail Initiative.
 - Adopt rules as necessary to administer the section.
 - Enter into agreements with any federal, state, or local government agency, or any other entity as necessary to administer the section.
 - Receive or accept grants from any legal source for the purpose of providing or improving quail habitat or maximizing participation in the Quail Initiative in the state.
 - Require the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida (IFAS), in consultation with the FWC, to conduct research and report to the Legislature on the best ways to increase the population of quail in the state. The report must be submitted to the chair of the Senate Committee on Environmental Preservation and the chair of the House of Representatives Committee on Water and Natural Resources no later than January 1 of each year.

² Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Conceptual Plan for Northern Bobwhite Restoration in Florida. July 2004.

Section 2. The committee substitute appropriates \$60,000 for the fiscal year 2006-2007 from the General Revenue Fund for the purposes of implementing the act. The sum of \$20,000 is appropriated individually to the FWC, the DACS and the IFAS.

Section 3. Provides that this act shall take effect July 1, 2006.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Indeterminate

C. Government Sector Impact:

The amount of \$60,000 will be deducted from the General Revenue Fund to be distributed to the IFAS, the FWC and the DACS.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
