

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: Environmental Preservation Committee

BILL: SB 1804

INTRODUCER: Senator Peaden

SUBJECT: Quail Habitat

DATE: March 29, 2006

REVISED: 4/3/06

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

Please see last section for Summary of Amendments

- Technical amendments were recommended
- Amendments were recommended
- Significant amendments were recommended

I. Summary:

The bill directs the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) to undertake certain activities to encourage participation in a voluntary federal program to protect quail habitat. The bill provides for powers and rulemaking by the FWCC. Additionally, the bill directs the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida to conduct research regarding quails.

The bill appropriates \$20,000 for the fiscal year 2006-2007 from the General Revenue Fund for the purposes of implementing the act. \$10,000 will be appropriated to the FWCC and the same amount is to be appropriated to the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida.

This bill creates an undesignated section in Florida law which would take effect on July 1, 2006.

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 59 million birds in 1980 to about 20 million in 1999. 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. From this high point after early settlement, populations declined but still remained abundant until the 1950's and 60's. However, by the late 1970's, populations had begun to exhibit an even more pronounced down turn. Based on the North American Breeding Bird Survey, quail populations in Florida declined over 70% from 1980 until 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 80's.

A lack of nesting and brood rearing habitat is a limiting factor over much of the range of the northern bobwhite. This is a result of replacing native grasses with exotic grasses and by completely 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 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.

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.

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 to urban development and human population growth.²

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill would create an act relating to the protection of quail habitat. Specific provisions include:

- Providing for the definitions of the Commission, quail habitat and quail initiative.
- Requiring the Commission 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 may undertake the following activities:
 - Encourage eligible persons to participate through education, marketing and other promotional efforts.
 - Negotiate 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, in consultation with the Commission, to conduct research and report to the Legislature on the best ways to increase the population of quail in the state.

The bill appropriates \$20,000 for the fiscal year 2006-2007 from the General Revenue Fund for the purposes of implementing the act. \$10,000 will be appropriated to the FWCC and the same amount is to be appropriated to the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida.

If enacted, the bill would take effect on July 1, 2006.

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

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:

C. Government Sector Impact:

There will be a loss of \$20,000 for the fiscal year 2006-2007 to the General Revenue Fund for the purpose of implementing the act. \$10,000 will be appropriated to the FWCC and the same amount is to be appropriated to the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

Barcode 655136 by Environmental Preservation:

The amendment adopted by the Committee clarifies certain language and adds provisions within the bill (WITH TITLE AMENDMENT) including:

- Clarifying that the bill applies to the “northern bobwhite” quail habitat and initiative.
- Adding the Division of Forestry as an entity that will share responsibilities with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for implementing the initiative.
- Clarifying that easements which are acquired by gift include those which are deeded to the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund.
- Clarifying that the reports are to be submitted to the chairs of the Senate Environmental Preservation Committee and the House Water and Natural Resources Committee.
- Increasing from \$20,000 to \$60,000 the amount of money appropriated for the fiscal year 2006-2007 from the General Revenue Fund for the purposes of implementing the act.

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