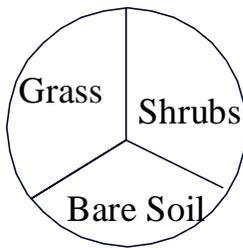




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 19 Issue 1 Spring 2020

This newsletter is aimed at cooperators and sportspeople in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Missouri Extension. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list, go to http://mdc.mo.gov/user_mailman_register to unsubscribe. If you have suggestions for future articles, please contact jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use **shrubs** as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a **diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground** with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to** the shrubby area.

Missouri Prescribed Burn Associations: Putting Fire on the Ground and Improving Wildlife Habitat on Private Land

If you are a landowner looking to manage natural communities and improve wildlife habitat on your property, prescribed fire is an effective tool you can use to meet your management goals. It can help control woody plant growth, stimulate desirable plants, suppress undesirable vegetation, remove excess plant litter to reduce wildfire risk, and more. While prescribed burning is an excellent tool you can use to manage habitat for quail and other wildlife, one thing to keep in mind is it requires several sets of hands to assist with a safe and well-controlled burn. It can be difficult to find enough skilled people or proper equipment to conduct a prescribed burn, but there is a solution – Prescribed Burn Associations!

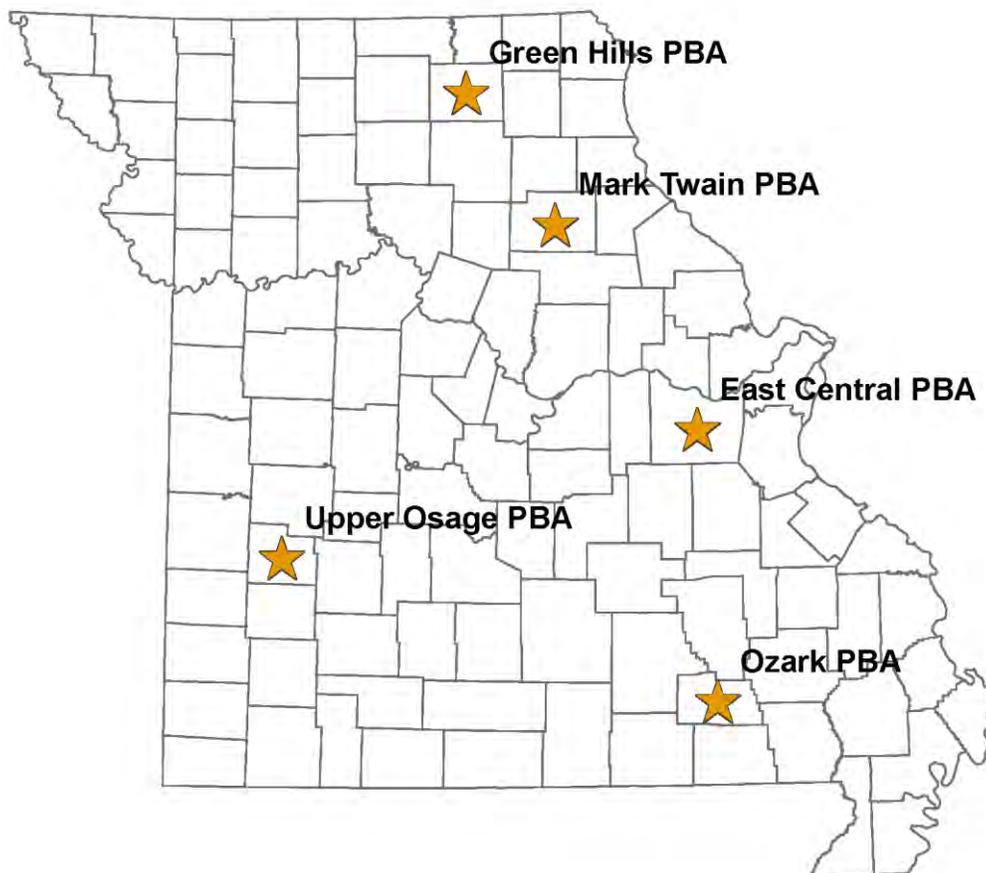
A Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) is a group of landowners and other proactive citizens that form a partnership working toward a common goal: to conduct safe prescribed burns and enhance habitat on private land. Association members pool their knowledge, manpower, and equipment to help other members conduct prescribed burns. Many PBAs have trailers that hold necessary equipment and are available to members. Trailers typically include safety equipment, hand tools, blowers, drip torches, water tanks, etc. Through the work of PBAs, enhancements are made to lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), woodlands, grasslands, grazing systems, and so much more.

In Missouri, PBAs were first established in 2015 thanks to funds acquired through the Missouri Department of Conservation, National Wild Turkey Federation, and local Quail Forever Chapters. These PBAs rely on the professional guidance of a MDC Private Land Conservationist or Quail Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist. Working side by side with these professionals, landowners quickly become knowledgeable about fire and are more comfortable on the fire line. Soon, seasoned members become mentors to new PBA members, creating a strong network of people conducting safe, effective prescribed burns that result in more acres of high-quality habitat for quail and other wildlife in Missouri.

Currently, there are five PBAs in Missouri that landowners can join. Each PBA is uniquely designed by the founders who outline how their group will function. In general, a committee is formed and meets several times a year to approve burn plans. Training opportunities and financial support are also provided to the PBAs by the Missouri Prescribed Fire Council. The council's annual meeting is a great opportunity for PBA members to connect and for anyone looking to join a PBA to become more informed.

If you are interested in using prescribed fire on your land, you can visit the Missouri Prescribed Fire Council website - <https://moprescribedfire.org/> The website is a great resource for citizens and resource professionals. There are many features including contact information on prescribed burn associations, built-in tool to log prescribed burn acreage to track progress of prescribed fire use, weather tools, and much more.

Missouri Prescribed Burn Associations



A PBA can provide the “missing link” when determining whether managing land with fire is possible. The “landowner helping landowner” design of PBAs not only guarantees enough help and proper equipment on the fire line, but also encourages the sharing of knowledge and camaraderie within the local community. As PBAs come together to put prescribed fire on the ground, they are enhancing many acres of private land and improving habitat for all sorts of wildlife, but especially for quail. Through their cooperative management work, Missouri PBAs are helping to bring back the birds!

Monarch Magic with Landowners Andrew White, Quail Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist III, Chillicothe, MO

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) has never been a program that I had a lot of involvement with, aside from making the occasional visit to review the status of a completed project. Having a high-level of involvement with the most recent CSP signup has provided ample opportunities for me to develop relationships with new landowners, as well as strengthen those relationships formed with landowners having previously worked with.

This past spring was my first interaction with Joe Neptune and there wasn't a whole lot of opportunities available for landowners that fell in line with the management goals he had in place for his properties. His father had previously enrolled numerous acres in CP42 (Pollinator Habitat) within CRP and Joe was wanting to stick close to that to compliment what has already been started. Knowing this goal, I suggested to Joe that the Monarch Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) would be a great fit for his property.

One of my favorite aspects of this job is when I get the opportunity to meet with new landowners and see their property, learn what they have been doing, what they have in mind for the future, and then working together to develop a plan of action to better help them achieve their wildlife conservation goals. For me, the most rewarding part of this is watching these projects evolve from being written on paper to being established on the land.

To initialize the process, Joe invited me out to look at his property, so, together, we could get an idea of the areas he had in mind to potentially install the monarch habitat. While riding along for the tour of his property, I noticed that the mixture of timber, idle land, CRP, and crop was already a haven for upland wildlife, including pollinators. As we continued the tour, Mr. Neptune casually said something that struck a chord with me. "You know, I am doing this because it is the right thing to do. It may not be a complete solution to help monarchs, but I feel it is a step in the right direction."

To have a landowner, whom I've never worked with previously, say this during an initial site visit left me speechless. This is a landowner who is willing to make managing for monarchs and other pollinators a priority right up there next to deer, turkey and quail. I knew at that moment that this project was going to be a blast. With the conservation plan completed, 30.4 acres of high-quality monarch habitat will be installed over the next four years. Additionally, to further compliment this planting, fruit trees, the treatment of herbaceous invasive species, and cover crops will be planted to further benefit not only the monarch butterfly, but a plethora of other pollinators, as well as other wildlife. I believe this relationship and friendship has been forged thanks to the magic of the monarch. Joe and I are both excited to watch as this project blooms into the coming years.



MRAP expands outdoor recreational opportunities for youth and small game enthusiasts on private land

As we edge closer to warmer weather and spring turkey season, keep in mind the many Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program (MRAP) areas open for public use across the state. There are 57 enrolled MRAP properties statewide, totaling nearly 14,500 acres and counting. MDC recently received an additional \$2.2 million USDA – NRCS Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Improvement Program grant to expand the current program acreage to approximately 30,000.

This new grant will allow the addition of more public access areas, including properties restricted solely to hunters pursuing small game and turkey. These areas, currently totaling over 3,000 acres across 9 locations, are open for hunting quail, turkey, and other designated small game throughout all legal seasons.

In addition to providing opportunities for small game hunters, MRAP also has properties designated for youth only hunting and fishing. These areas offer walk-in hunting and fishing opportunities for kids under the age of 16 with less competition and hunting pressure than other MRAP areas. At present, there are 8 properties enrolled under this access type, totaling over 1,200 acres of land available to youth hunters. So, whether your interest is fishing, turkey hunting, or taking your son or daughter out for their first hunting trip, MRAP has a place for every outdoor enthusiast.

For more information, visit the Missouri Department of Conservation's MRAP webpage at www.mdc.mo.gov/mrap. There you can find maps of enrolled properties, public access options, rules and procedures, and enrollment information for landowners. MDC anticipates expanding outdoor recreation opportunities by adding several new properties to the program this fall. Check out the MRAP webpage in September to find new properties that may be added in your area!

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MDC offers new “Auto-Renewal” for easy online permit renewals

Renewing Missouri hunting, fishing, and trapping permits is now easier and more convenient through the Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) new online Permit Auto-Renewal service. Permit Auto-Renewal allows online permit buyers to automatically renew their permits prior to the start of the next season or permit year so they never have an expired permit when they need it most.

Participation in Auto-Renewal is voluntary, and the service can only be activated by the permit buyer. Enrollment in Auto-Renewal can be done during an online permit purchase or by using the “Manage Your Account” feature. Within the “Manage Your Account” feature, users can also update their Auto-Renewal settings including payment method and enrolled permits and turn off the service. There are no additional fees for the service. Auto-Renewal will automatically charge permit buyers for their enrolled permits.

Permit buyers must have a valid email address and credit card to participate. The Auto-Renewal service will send personalized email updates to participants – including initial enrollment, changes

made by the buyer, 30-day and seven-day reminders of upcoming permit renewals and associated charges, and notifications of successful renewals and associated charges.

Permit buyers can enroll in Auto-Renewal at mdc.mo.gov/buypermits during an online permit purchase or by using the “Manage Your Account” feature. Learn more about Permit Auto-Renewal at huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/permits/permit-auto-renewal.

In addition to buying Missouri hunting, fishing, and trapping permits online at mdc.mo.gov/buypermits and through MDC’s free mobile apps (MO Hunting and MO Fishing), permit buyers can also purchase permits from numerous retail vendors around the state. Auto-Renewal-eligible permits purchased from retail vendors are not able to be enrolled into the service during the purchase process but can be enrolled later using the “Manage Your Account” feature.

Food Plot Establishment Secrets

Many people believe food plots are essential to increase quail numbers. The fact is, quail don’t need food plots to survive and you don’t need to plant food plots to have a lot of quail on your property. What habitat you provide on the rest of your farm will have a greater impact on your quail population than food plots. If you have done a good job of creating shrubby, nesting and brooding cover then food plots may enhance your management efforts. Food plots alone can’t make poor habitat, good habitat.

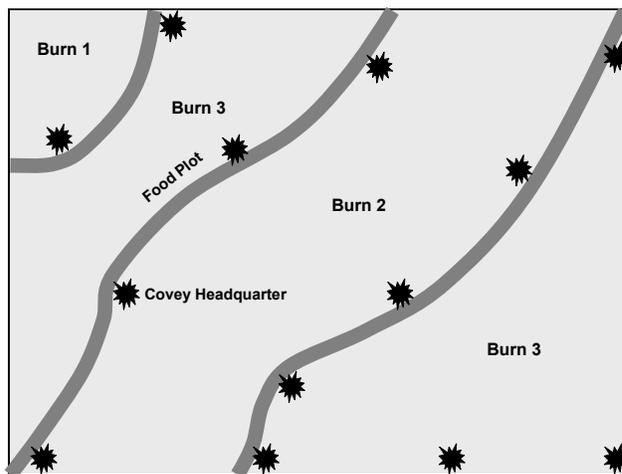
Establishing food plots is a fun activity and they can be beneficial to wildlife. However, food plots should not take the place of good habitat management on the rest of the farm. Only after you have taken the time to create good nesting, brooding and shrubby cover should you start to think about planting food plots. When you establish new food plots, take a little time to plan out the locations so wildlife and you get the maximum benefit from your hard work. Here are some tips to consider when establishing food plots.

Site Selection

- Food plots should be located within 70 feet of shrubby cover for quail.
- Create long linear food plots to divide large fields into smaller management units. Doing so, will help provide a variety of habitat types adjacent to each other. Consider establishing covey headquarters or downed tree structures along the edge of the food plots to provide shrubby cover (see figure). Disk firebreaks around the new covey headquarters before burning.
- Avoid areas where erosion is a concern. Select a level area and always plant on the contour.
- Food plots should be at least 30 feet wide. Wider is better so you can idle half of the plot every year. The idle side of the plot will provide great brooding habitat the following year.

Establishment

- No-till is best. In the spring, spray the plots with glyphosate to burndown any existing vegetation. If needed, mow the plot before planting. The residue left by practicing no-till will harbor insects and other beneficial invertebrates – the stuff baby



In this example, 3 food plots are added to a field to create 4 smaller management units (Rx burn units). Thirteen covey headquarters were also planted to provide additional shrubby cover for quail.

quail eat during the summer. Research has shown that conventional tilled crop fields have significantly fewer insects than fields where no-till is practiced. The same would also apply to food plots. If you disk the plot, don't pulverize the ground. Leave some residual plant material. One or two passes should be enough. If you "clean till" the plot, do not use herbicides on the plot or use selective herbicides.

- Make sure to take a soil test, and lime and fertilize accordingly.
- Trees along the edge of a food plot will significantly reduce production. You should also realize that trees along the south and west side of a food plot will have a greater impact on the plot than those on the north or east side. You can fix this by edge feathering the trees along the edge of the food plot.

Crop Choices

- Forage sorghum and milo make great food plots for small game. Millets are also a good choice, especially for late planted food plots (June – July).
- Corn, sunflowers and soybeans are a good second choice, but raccoons and deer love them all. These food plots should be 1/2 acre or larger if you want any grain to remain for the winter.
- Don't overlook the value of winter wheat as a quail food plot. Not for the green browse or the seed, but for the great brooding cover and stand of ragweed and weeds you will have the next summer.
- Plant only the amount of seed needed. Most people plant food plots way too thick and end up with green growth and very little grain. If the rate says 15 lbs. per acre, use 15 pounds. I'd even consider cutting the rate in half to allow other annual plants to grow.

Management

- Go light on the herbicides in food plots. A weedy plot is better for quail than a clean, weed free food plot. However, sometimes herbicides are needed to guarantee a crop. If possible, try to use a selective herbicide or a reduced herbicide rate to leave some weeds in the plot. For example, in a soybean plot consider using a grass herbicide to control grasses like foxtail. By the end of the year you will have a good stand of beans with lots of ragweed, water hemp and pigweed – all good quail foods.
- "Flip flop your food plot". Make your food plots at least 60 feet wide. Instead of planting the entire plot each year, only plant one half and leave the other half idle. The idle half will provide nesting and brooding cover and great roosting cover in the fall and winter. The next year, plant the idled half and leave the other half idle. If your plots are small, leave the entire plot idle for a year and just rotate among food plots.
- Every 3 or 5 years plant plots to alfalfa or annual lespedeza. Adding a legume to your food plot rotation will help build soil fertility and provide good brooding cover and food. Winter wheat plots can be over seeded in winter with annual lespedeza or alfalfa.

Spring Covey Headquarters Calendar

May

Listen for male whistle calls on clear calm mornings

Quail and other grassland birds begin nesting – do not mow for cosmetic purposes

Seed food plots now for best results

Finish planting covey headquarter shrubs by June 1

June

Complete breeding bird surveys this month.

Quail begin hatching through September.

Seed milo, millet, and forage sorghum food plots by June 30.

Contact MDC or NRCS for burn plan assistance.

Mow newly planted monarch and pollinator plots to a height of 6-8 inches for weed control.

Conduct breeding bird surveys in June –

To get an index of quail that survived the winter and are available for breeding, listen for whistling bobwhite males for 1-2 hours after sunrise during June. Nesting by females is normally at its peak this month, so males are actively calling. Establish permanent listening stations throughout your farm. Establish the stations along ridges or in areas where you can hear a good distance. Whistling quail can be heard about 500 yards away, so listening stations should be spaced 1000 yards apart, or be separated by major chunks of woods or hills. Listen at each station for 3 minutes. Count and record the number of *individuals* you hear in that time span at each station. Be careful not to count the same individuals twice. If you listen every year within the same time frame, you can track how well your birds are surviving winter in relation to your quail management efforts. Along with quail, be sure to listen for Henslow's sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, field sparrow, dickcissel, bobolink, pheasant, and meadowlark as these species respond positively to quail management. Visit the following website to hear audio call examples of several bird species - www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/ident.html



Free Private Land Care DVD

The Missouri Department of Conservation has a limited supply of *Private Land Care* DVD's. This DVD includes information on how to improve wildlife habitat on your land. Topics include light disking/herbicide spraying, how to plant food plots, important plants for quail, quail habitat components, broadcast sprayer/seedler calibration, covey headquarter shrub planting, eradicating fescue and sericea lespedeza, building an ephemeral pool, and edge feathering. If you would like this free DVD, please send an email to publications.staff@mdc.mo.gov



Missouri NRCS announces June 1st cut-off date for Conservation Stewardship Program-Classic

Agricultural producers wanting to enhance current conservation efforts are encouraged to apply for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)-Classic, formerly known as CSP-General.

"Through CSP, agriculture producers receive the opportunity to maintain and expand on existing conservation efforts by selecting conservation practices, enhancements, bundles, and other conservation activities" stated Grover DePriest, Acting State Conservationist.

While applications are accepted on a continuous basis, applications must be submitted by June 1, 2020 to be considered for fiscal year 2020 funding.

Through CSP, agricultural producers and forest landowners earn payments for actively managing, maintaining and expanding conservation activities on all the land they operate. The variety of CSP conservation activities offer producers a lot of freedom to select enhancements, practices, and bundles that help meet producer's management goals. Many of activities assist with establishing quail and monarch habitat.

Producers may submit a signed and dated application via the mail, fax, scan, email, or submit through the agency approved Client-Gateway at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/cgate/>.

You may also submit application requests to your local NRCS office through telephone, email or letter received by the sign-up cut-off date listed above. NRCS will follow-up to obtain applicant signature's prior the application being ranked. If an application is not signed and returned to the local NRCS office prior to ranking the application will be considered invalid.

For more information contact the NRCS office serving your county. NRCS offices can be found in the phone book under "U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture," or online at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

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