

Bob White, Bob White: The Sport of Quail Hunting In Early Twentieth Century South Georgia and North Florida

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, northern sportsmen and sportswomen discovered the healthful pinelands of south Georgia and north Florida. They began purchasing small parcels of farm land and forests, consolidating them into thousands of acres of hunting plantations - larger than any of the antebellum cotton plantations. These part-time residents became instrumental in the economy and ecology of northern Leon County, Florida. Their concern for the dwindling quail population, and its affect on their ability to hunt, prompted Udo Fleischmann, Lewis Steenrold Thompson, and others to fund and support H.L. Stoddard's seminal work in the Cooperative Quail Investigation and the Cooperative Quail Study Association. Quail require a habitat and food sources that are destroyed through the natural growth of fields and woods. Stoddard found that the quail would propagate through habitat control; the optimal habitat would be maintained through controlled burning. This pioneering research led to the fire ecology studies conducted at the Tall Timbers

Research Station, a quail plantation converted to the study of fire and its beneficial effects on flora and fauna.

A two-year research project to identify the historically significant buildings, structure, and sites for the Florida Master Site File and to prepare thematic nominations for the National Register of Historic Places yielded a rich social and ecological history of the quail plantations, in addition to architectural history. This paper focuses on the quail hunting culture in South Georgia and north Florida as it developed at the turn of the century, the interconnectedness of the owners, their relationship with the tenant farmers who maintained a unique landscape for a three-months-of-the-year leisure activity, the development and continuation of the Georgia-Florida Field Trial Club to improve the breed of hunting dogs. The sources used include oral history interviews, on-site investigations, and primary and secondary records.

This paper focuses upon questions such as; Why did northern sportsmen and sportswomen chose this area in which to hunt? How did they fit in with the local hunters? What impact did their large plantations make on local hunters' access to game lands? What impact did the quail hunting plantations have on tenant farmers in terms of farming restrictions and seasonal employment? And, How did the quail hunting plantations fit into the economy of the region?

Quail hunting is a seasonal recreation sport for a small cadre of enthusiasts with business and family connections tied together through the sport. This little-known sport requires vast acreages to support the game birds, its practitioners developed a plan for habitat control which fostered an understanding of fire ecology that affects forests worldwide, and protects thousands of acres of fields and woodlands from commercial development - ramifications far beyond the impact of one person with a dog and gun shooting birds for sport and lunch.