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Improved habitat is goal of new area Quail Forever chapter

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CUTLINE: Pete Berthelsen, senior field coordinator, Pheasants Forever, Inc., and Quail Forever, is pictured with his daily limit of limit of roosters and quail taken in Howard County last hunting season with two chocolate Labrador Retrievers named Lucy and Stella. Courtesy Photo

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BOELUS -- A group of Howard County residents have formed the nation's newest chapter of Quail Forever (QF). The group, called the Central Nebraska Chapter of QF, plans to improve area habitat as they help the local population of bobwhite quail continue its rapid growth.

"Considering the tough times bobwhite quail are having due to habitat losses across much of the U.S., all of us in central Nebraska are pretty fortunate to have the growing quail numbers we've seen in the last decade," said George Burgess, the new chapter's president, a Boelus resident.

He said the chapter wants to make sure bird numbers continue to improve.

"Our chapter is also focused on making sure opportunities continue to exist for young hunters interested in taking up our outdoor traditions," Burgess said.

Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever's Regional Field Representative Scott Smathers said Howard County is "actually surrounded by Pheasants Forever chapters that have spent the last two decades doing tremendous projects for wildlife habitat."

"There was a void in Howard County and these individuals saw the opportunity to join forces with fellow PF folks and help improve the land for quail at the same time," Smathers said.

QF was formed in 2005 by Pheasants Forever to help reverse the rapid decline of quail populations across their U.S. range. QF applies the unique and successful Pheasants Forever model of empowering local chapters with the responsibility to determine how 100 percent of their locally raised conservation funds will be spent. To date, four chapters of QF have joined the state's 60 PF chapters.

"There is no doubt the state's 60 PF chapters have been creating the habitat necessary to help Nebraska's quail," said Burgess. "Our new Central Nebraska QF Chapter's mission is to accelerate those efforts."

The new Central Nebraska Chapter of Quail Forever will hold Howard County's first ever QF banquet on Friday, Nov. 20, at the Boelus Civic Center beginning at 5:30 p.m. The chapter is planning a hog roast for the dinner. Tickets for the event are \$40 and are available by calling Pete Berthelsen at (308) 754-5339, Ryan Lodge at (308) 750-1215, or George Burgess at (308) 390-0583.

As an added feature of the banquet, being auctioned will be a four-member quail management team who visit the

winning bidders property and do a quail habitat improvement project, along with a long-term management plan to increase quail numbers.

Joining Burgess as new chapter officers and committee members are Gale Larson of St. Paul, Pete and Laura Berthelsen of Elba, Pamela Johansen of St. Paul, Ryan Lodge of St. Paul, Virginia Burgess of Boelus, Kraig Beck of Coatsfield, Keith and Christy Brus of Wolbach, and Jerry Woodgate of St. Paul. To learn more about helping the chapter, please contact Burgess at (308) 390-0583 or via e-mail at gwizburgess@gmail.com.

"One additional thing that's really neat about this chapter is the fact that four current and former Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever employees living in Howard County have volunteered their free time to be a part of this chapter," reported Smathers. "I'm truly honored to be servicing this chapter of co-workers who are spending their free time to continue the cause of conservation during their personal time."

According to Pete Berthelsen, the Howard County chapter is the only QF chapter in central Nebraska.

And work on improving quail habitat is already showing big dividends as Berthelsen said this may well be the best quail hunting season in Nebraska in recent memory.

"There are some great quail numbers out there this year across the state," Berthelsen said.

Youth quail and pheasant hunting season will begin the weekend before the regular season opens, Oct. 24-25, for youth 12-17 years of age. The regular season will open Saturday, Oct. 31, at sunrise and will run through Jan. 31. The daily bag limit on quail, both male and female, is six quail with the season limit at 24 birds.

According to quailforever.org, favorable weather conditions have bobwhite populations on the rise. Statewide, the report said that spring whistle counts were up 10 percent, and the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey indicated an increase of 22 percent.

Bobwhite abundance in the southeast, north central, and east central bobwhite management zones increased, with Saline, Richardson, Pawnee, Gage, Johnson, Custer, Howard, Greeley, Boyd and Sherman counties all looking strong.

According to quailforever.org, demand for Nebraska's Upland Birds CRP SAFE has been so strong that the state is in need of an additional allotment to keep adding acres to it's original allotment of 22,900 acres.

While 97 percent of all hunting land in Nebraska is one private property, when purchasing your pheasant and quail hunting license this year, maps are available showing the availability of quail hunting land on both private and public lands that are open to public hunting.

To join a Quail Forever or Pheasants Forever chapter in Nebraska, learn more at www.NebraskaPF.com or call toll free 877-773-2070.

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