

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Restoring Northern Bobwhite to New Jersey

Chatsworth, Burlington County, N.J. – New Jersey Audubon is embarking upon an ambitious effort to restore Northern Bobwhite to New Jersey. According to the data from the Breeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count, the Northern Bobwhite quail has suffered one of the most severe population declines of any North American bird (an approximately 82% decline in the last forty years). This decline, attributed to habitat loss through development, changes in agricultural practices, and predation has also been connected to the significant loss of the young forest habitat, especially in regions with overcrowded pine stands and fire suppression. Young forest (early successional habitat) is essential for nesting, resting, escape cover, and food resources for the Northern Bobwhite quail. States in the southeast, particularly Georgia and Florida, have had success rebuilding quail populations through forest stewardship activities, including thinning pine stands with mechanical and herbicide treatments in conjunction with prescribed burning. This not only provides the critical habitat needs for Northern Bobwhite, but also benefits other young forest species and increases overall forest health. Since 1996, Tall Timbers Research Station in Florida has shown that through forest stewardship the Bobwhite population was increased 10-fold, reaching as high as two bobwhites per acre in the fall.

Recognizing the similarity in habitat between southern pine forests and the New Jersey pinelands, New Jersey Audubon partnered with Pine Island Cranberry Company (a member of the NJ Audubon Corporate Stewardship Council), to coordinate a Northern Bobwhite Quail restoration project utilizing the forest management treatments outlined in Pine Island Cranberry's existing State approved Forest Stewardship Plan.

Pine Island Cranberry's forest stewardship plan emphasizes long-term active forest management on a landscape scale, while enhancing a wide range of forest resources, wildlife habitat, and natural benefits (e.g., improved watershed health).

"The key to this business is water," said Pine Island Cranberry Company CEO, Bill Haines. "The protection of our water supply has protected this business from the beginning. That's how this family [the Haines family] was raised: if you have a resource, it's your responsibility to take care of it."

The Pine Island Cranberry Forest Stewardship Plan, developed by distinguished NJ State Approved Forester Bob Williams (recipient of the 2013 NJ Audubon Richard Kane Conservation Award), utilizes a variety of forestry prescriptions and techniques, including prescribed burning and forest thinning. Both techniques help to promote forest regeneration and native plant and tree re-growth.

With the habitat in place at the Pine Island Cranberry site, as well as a long-term plan for land management, NJ Audubon engaged several additional partners to assist with the project. Project partners include: Pine Island Cranberry, as well as Pine Creek Forestry, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife, the University of Delaware and Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy.

Through the partnership with Tall Timbers, the Pine Island site was selected to be part of a multi-state initiative to evaluate the demographics following quail release (survival, reproduction, and population response). While other study sites will test captive raised quail the NJ site will evaluate released wild Northern Bobwhite. A total of 240 wild Northern Bobwhite quail will be captured over the next three years. The birds will be brought from Georgia, tested for health, radio tagged and translocated to the Pine Island Cranberry site where they will be released for study each year in the early spring. The results of the NJ study will be compared to another test site evaluating “wild parent-rearing”; wild birds act as surrogate parents to hatch and raise chicks under pen conditions. This study site is in Maryland and is a partnership between Tall Timbers and Washington College. No “parent-reared” or other “pen-raised” birds will be released in New Jersey. The NJ portion of this study will also address several additional research objectives which will be evaluated in the context of the overall multi-state project with Tall Timbers. The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife is collecting data on its habitat restoration efforts, intended to benefit quail, in Cumberland County. The results of their efforts will also be compared to habitat characteristics at the release site.

“This project is unique in that it seeks to not only demonstrate the ability of a actively managed Pinelands forest to sustain Northern Bobwhite, but it will also address the role of forest stewardship and management in the creation and enhancement of habitat for a broad suite of species, and show the ability to combine wildlife and habitat objectives with an active agricultural operation,” said John Parke, NJ Audubon Project Stewardship Director. “This approach adds significant value to the outstanding forest management work being performed at Pine Island and fits nicely within the goals and objectives of the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative.”

About Pine Island Cranberry Company Inc.:

The Haines family cranberry farm, Pine Island Cranberry Company, Inc. (PICC), located in Hogwallow, Burlington County, NJ, has been in continuous operation since it was founded in 1890 by Martin L. Haines. The entire property is located within the boundaries of the New Jersey Pinelands and it produces more cranberries than any other grower in the world, and is affiliated with an operation in Chile, South America. For more information please visit <http://www.piccranberry.com/>

About New Jersey Audubon:

New Jersey Audubon is a privately supported, not-for profit, statewide membership organization. Founded in 1897, and one of the oldest independent Audubon societies. New Jersey Audubon fosters environmental awareness and a conservation ethic among New Jersey's citizens; protects New Jersey's birds, mammals, other animals, and plants, especially endangered and threatened species; and promotes preservation of New Jersey's valuable natural habitats. For more information about New Jersey Audubon and the S.A.V.E.™ Birdseed program please visit www.njaudubon.org

About the NJ Audubon Corporate Stewardship Council:

For more information please visit <http://www.njaudubon.org/SectionConservation/StewardshipInAction/CorporateStewardshipCouncil.aspx>

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