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MET Easement in Garrett County

Northern Bobwhite Quail: A Guide to Habitat Management

Populations of northern bobwhite (also known as bobwhite quail or quail) have experienced the largest declines of any bird in Maryland over the last 50 years. Although that alone is an important reason to work for their conservation, northern bobwhite are considered an “umbrella” species, meaning that by creating and improving habitat for quail, many other species in their same ecological community will benefit (Crosby et al., 2015). In fact, the North American Breeding Bird Survey reveals that 83% of grassland birds and 57% of shrubland birds have experienced significant declines, highlighting the importance of this habitat type for a suite of birds, as well as for pollinators and other wildlife species.

Northern bobwhite require a specific type of habitat, known as “early successional” habitat. The term early successional comes from the concept of ecological succession, which is a natural process by which plant communities, when not disturbed, mature over time from open grassland and wildflower areas into shrublands, young forests, and finally mature forests (Fig. 2). Early successional habitats are those habitats found in the early years following a major disturbance, and include a diversity of habitat types such as wildflower fields, grasslands, meadows, shrublands, and young regenerating forests. Bobwhite quail require the following three habitat components in a 20–80-acre area to thrive:



- diverse mix of “forbs” (broadleaf plants) and wildflowers,
- interspersed native bunchgrasses for nesting, and
- shrubby cover, for thermal cover during the winter and to escape from predators.

(continued page 3)

Northern bobwhite by Rachel Rahm

Trusting Technology

The stewardship team at Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) strives to meet the highest standards when it comes to protecting and conserving the land under its care. Over the past 50+ years of acquiring conservation easements, MET has had to adapt to use a variety of technical skills in response to technology transforming the scope of operations. Communication, monitoring, reporting, and supporting the improvement of an ever-growing list of conservation easements is now a digital masterpiece of recordkeeping. Documents that were maintained using pencil and paper and file cabinets now float in Clouds and are stored in databases on both local and mobile devices.

Although the essence of this work has remained committed to the same mission, rapidly growing technology forced the stewardship team to grow as well. Over the past few years, MET, with extensive talent from the state's Department of Information Technology, has been developing a tool that provides methods for conveniently monitoring properties, seamlessly processing information, and storing vast amounts of data.

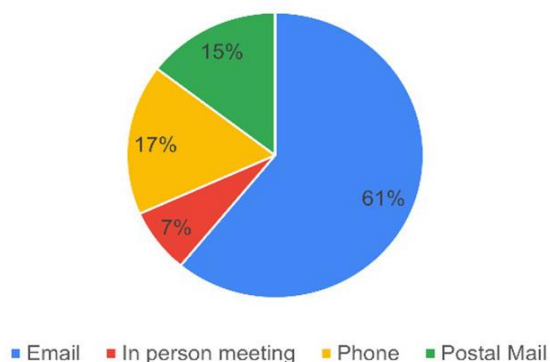
The new reporting capabilities the stewardship team has at their fingertips is a game changer to say the least. Beginning with monitoring in the field, using ESRI's Workforce and Survey123 programs allows data on each property to be collected and sent to the cloud for storage. Back in the office, a quick review and submission sends all the information recorded in the field to the database hosted by Salesforce's Locate program. In addition to this seamless process, there are different applications for editing and finalizing full and complete reports for MET's master file. These technologies handle the administrative digitizing and organization of files so that staff can spend more time on the meaningful, qualitative tasks of serving the public and its protected properties.

Survey Says

Over the summer MET's Conservation and Climate Corps Member, Justyn Pinkney, sent out a randomized survey to easement landowners to help MET staff understand their communication preferences. After more than 50 years of service, MET has seen wide shifts in communication mediums; and with an ever-growing, state-wide portfolio of protected land (more than 1,300 easement interests), staying up to date with and serving all its landowners well can be a challenging task. Surveys were sent using three different means of communication: email, postal mail, and phone calls. Many people contacted were willing to respond to our questions, which surprised and humbled us considering how much spam is received these days. We greatly appreciate the responses and are using them to improve our methodology. We know that no organization can improve without feedback from those they serve.

Here is some of the feedback we received. Overall, about 33% of those who received the survey responded to it. We received more responses from people over the phone than were returned to us by those who received the survey by postal mail or email. Most people expressed a preference to be contacted via email for

How would you prefer to communicate with MET regarding monitoring of the easement and stewardship issues?



monitoring and other stewardship needs. Some preferred multiple forms of contact depending on the situation, which corresponds with our existing methods. When asked to describe MET's communication procedures, most respondents found MET professional, informative, and helpful.

Thanks again to those who responded to our survey. We are utilizing your feedback to improve our efficiency in handling and responding to inquiries.

Northern Bobwhite Quail continued...

(continued from page 1) These habitat components allow for the production of food in the form of diverse weed seeds and vegetation (Masters et al., 2016), cover from predators and thermal protection in winter, the structure for nesting and reproduction, and the ability for bobwhites to move and forage across their environment.

This article is only an excerpt from the publication, *Recovering Northern Bobwhite Quail: A Guide to Habitat Management* by Luke Macaulay. This publication is a part of a collection produced by the University of Maryland Extension within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Macaulay, L., (2024). *Recovering Northern Bobwhite Quail: A Guide to Habitat Management (FS-2023-0683)*. University of Maryland Extension. go.umd.edu/FS-2023-0683

Questions about this article or quail habitat? Contact Luke Macaulay at lukemac@umd.edu. To sign up for Luke's wildlife management newsletter and speaker series visit:

www.wildlife.umd.edu



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Questions?

Stewardship staff are available to assist easement owners with questions about their conservation easement as well as enhancing the environmental and scenic aspects of their properties. MET's website (dnr.maryland.gov/met) contains general information, but please feel free to contact staff with specific easement questions or concerns. Contact information is available on our *Contact Us* page:

dnr.maryland.gov/met/Pages/contact.aspx

Many resources are available to landowners to enhance the unique aspects of their easement properties, and the Stewardship Program can provide a connection between these resources and landowners. To learn more about enhanced stewardship opportunities, visit MET's *Stewardship Resources* webpage:

dnr.maryland.gov/met/Pages/stewardship-LOResources.aspx

Stewardship Corner: You Asked, We Answered

Q: Are large scale commercial solar energy utility projects allowed on conservation easements?

A: MET considers large scale solar energy utility projects to be a commercial use that is not compatible with its conservation easement properties. Utilities are not allowed to be installed on conservation easement properties for the purpose of facilitating development, use, or activities on an adjacent or other property.

Non-commercial solar energy devices may be allowed on a conservation easement property, but MET must first review and approve the request to ensure certain criteria are met. There are multiple criteria that need to be considered before installation.

If you are interested in installing solar panels to power your household or supply energy to other allowed operations on your easement property, please contact MET's stewardship team for more information.



Maryland Environmental Trust
100 Community Place, 3rd Floor
Crownsville, MD 21032

You are receiving this newsletter because your property is protected by a conservation easement with Maryland Environmental Trust.

2025 Board of Trustee Meetings

All matters requiring Board approval are reviewed during the Board Meetings held at 4:00 pm at 100 Community Place, Room 3.218, Crownsville, MD unless noted otherwise. These are public meetings. Please contact MET if you plan to attend at (410) 697-9515 or met.info@maryland.gov.

The Maryland Environmental Trust is governed by a Board of Trustees responsible for reviewing and voting on matters such as landowner requests that result in a significant change or impact to conservation attributes of an easement property. Activities that might require approval or notification include: constructing any new buildings or structures; renovating or enlarging existing structures; conveying property (provide contact information on new owner); subdividing property; recording any other encumbrances on property; entering wetlands mitigation or restoration programs; changing use of property; making a boundary line adjustment; harvesting timber or construction of a new house.

If you plan to make changes to your property and are unsure whether notification or approval is required, contact MET's stewardship staff to help make that determination. It may take a minimum of 30 days for MET to review and approve the proposed activities. Please contact MET's Stewardship Program Manager, Josette Markline, to discuss your plans. All requests should be made in writing at least three weeks prior to the scheduled board meeting. Thank you!



2025 Board Meeting Dates:

- February 3
- May 5
- June 2
- September 8
- November 3