

Quail rule changes expanded to additional DNR-owned properties in 2010

The long-term decline of bobwhite quail populations prompted the Department of Natural Resources to adjust the season dates, hunting hours and bag limits at seven state fish and wildlife areas (FWAs). These rule adjustments will remain unchanged for the 2010 hunting season.

In northwest Indiana, quail hunting will be allowed at Jasper-Pulaski, Willow Slough and Winamac FWAs from Nov. 5 through Nov. 28, with a daily bag limit of two birds. All other areas north of SR 26 will be open from Nov. 5 to Dec. 20, with a bag limit of five birds.

In southwest Indiana, the quail season dates at Blue Grass, Chinook, Fairbanks Landing, Glendale, Goose Pond, Hillenbrand, Minnehaha, and Sugar Ridge FWAs, and Green Valley Public Fishing Area will remain Nov. 5 through Jan. 15, but hunting hours at these areas will be restricted to 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST from Dec. 15 through Jan. 15. The daily bag limit at all of these areas will be limited to four birds. All other areas south of SR 26 will be open from Nov. 5 to Jan. 15, with a bag limit of eight birds.

Harsh winter storms in the late 1970s took a brutal toll on Indiana's quail population, and a widespread lack of suitable habitat hampered the bird's ability to rebound. Even so, quail numbers in Indiana already were declining prior to 1978 for the same reason-lack of habitat.

This habitat loss and harsh weather have created small, isolated bobwhite quail populations that, in many cases, have trouble sustaining themselves under normal ecological limiting factors.

"The concept here is to relieve some of the pressure on these small, isolated quail populations so we can provide a sustainable harvest," said Mitch Marcus, wildlife section chief for the DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife. "The belief is this will allow the quail numbers to rebound quicker and be less susceptible to other factors like severe weather."

DNR biologists recently completed fall covey counts to estimate current quail populations at state FWAs. The baseline data will be combined with future research in an ongoing process to determine if additional restrictions on season dates and bag limits will be necessary to reach sustainable harvest goals.