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CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE

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JOB DESCRIPTION FOR A QUAIL HUNTING PLANTATION MANAGER

A quail hunting plantation manager must have a broad knowledge of agriculture, timber management and forestry, wildlife management, how to train hunting dogs (both pointing and retrieving), and horsemanship. They must be skilled at direction and supervision of other plantation personnel, know how to be a gracious host to plantation guests, and understand budgeting, accounting, and money management.

During the course of a year, a quail hunting plantation manager will do the following things:

Spring

Conduct prescribed burning. Plan and implement a program for planting various crops. Begin training young hunting dogs. Plan and implement timber sales. Guide spring turkey hunts. Implement flat chopping on "problem" hardwood areas, and conduct general spring cleaning and maintenance.

Summer

Cut grass and maintain lawns. Repair and maintain roads. Continue to monitor agricultural plantings. Plant food patches for quail and turkeys. Maintain and repair buildings. Continue training young dogs. Maintain and manage livestock pastures.

Fall

Harvest agricultural crops. Plant winter crops and plantings. Continue dog training. Get horses and mules in "working shape" for the winter hunting season. Continue yard work and lawn maintenance. Start chopping hunting lanes and "blocks" in the woods. Guide dove hunts.

Winter

Quail, dove, duck and deer seasons are in full swing. This is the busy time of the year. The list of duties and responsibilities for this job goes on and on. I think I should get a raise!

A MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

The job description outlined above is just a rough outline of the major events in a typical yearly cycle of duties for a quail plantation manager. I made this out-

line because I want people to understand the wide range of duties that managers must perform. The "training" for such a job happened from both spending time in the plantation environment, and from attending school. The successful managers are ones who continue to learn from seminars, publications, and their peers.

Quail plantation managers have to develop a set of plans for an entire year. They must be able to keep spending within a budget. Of course, it also goes without saying that they must also be able to please the landowner(s) for whom they work! Today a manager has to follow many more rules and regulations than they had to in the past. For example, today, we have to be concerned with smoke management from prescribed fires, protecting wetlands, regulations that govern use of pesticides, the endangered species act, and many other environmental issues. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has taken more than 116,000 acres out of "production" for quail in Thomas County, GA. Add the rest of the land that has been planted to other crops and trees, and you will see that the land base available for quail management has decreased greatly in our area.

Money is a much bigger issue today than it was in the past. Also, in the past, the forests were more open around areas planted to agriculture, and there were fewer pine trees. The old "Soil Bank" program was ideal for producing quail, unlike the CRP, which has not been very good for quail.

Cattle used to roam on many parts of the quail plantation woods. They added fertilizer to the soil. Wild hogs roamed freely and applied a natural source of "disking" around plum trees, dogwoods, and grape vines, which in turn, kept them from burning.

A lot of changes have taken place in the past 40 years. Some of these changes have been great. Unfortunately, some land use changes have been detrimental to quail populations. Two of the best things for quail are a box of matches and a harrow. This was how quail management used to be accomplished.

With all the land management and quail research during the past 5 years, we have learned that quail feed patches may not be necessary to produce wild birds for hunting. However, after a slow day when not many birds were found, the first thing the landowner says is, "Where's the feed?"

I believe there is more pressure to use more of the plantation land today than there was in the past. As managers, we want the owners to enjoy and be satis-

fied with their property, and to have great quail hunting. Since the cost of living has increased, the number of staff on a quail plantation has to be reduced to meet budget constraints. Along with cost of living, is the increased costs of things like insurance, which has skyrocketed. All this leads to fewer dollars that are directly available for producing birds to hunt. These economic changes mean that quail plantation managers are responsible for a "bottom line" and sometimes we, like most anyone else, just have to "do without."

On quail plantations, people need to be out of the woods by June 1st to let the quail nest and hatch. Today, unfortunately, we are in the woods all summer, either working, as in the case of plantation staff, or riding through to study and observe things, as in the case of researchers.

While we understand that work has to be done, and that research on quail and other wildlife is fine, we also need to understand that every new turn around on the side of a plantation road could tear up a nest, which is basically the loss of an entire covey of birds. When people tell me that driving through the woods and turning around does not tear up quail nests, I refer them to that song "*Here's Your Sign!*"

In my opinion, there is nothing new in quail research. We are just rediscovering, and taking a subject

that we studied in the past a little farther, or perhaps in a different direction. What we face today is not a dilemma with managers *or* researchers, but *between* managers and researchers. Managers have to run a plantation, and are paid to run a plantation, not find out answers to every issue.

As managers, we understand that the cost of running a quail hunting plantation is high. However, if we would focus on what type of plantation we wanted, then the cost might not be as high, and the end product would be greater. For example, if an owner wants a quail plantation, then the manager needs to focus on quail. If an owner wants a pine plantation, then the manager needs to focus on pines, with quail as a minor, secondary objective. As long as we are trying to manage for both quail and timber, then neither type of plantation will get the greatest output of either birds or planted pines.

Managers are proud of the plantations where they work. Overall, they try to put their utmost into the plantation. Any time a group of plantation managers get together, they inevitably end up comparing plantations, because each manager wants their place to be the best. Then, the stories get deep, and they start talking about how many birds they found. No matter how the conversation started, every story ends up with how many birds "Old Joe" found today.