

## Status of Bobwhite Hunting Report: If You Build It, They (Hunters), Will Come

By Tom Dailey | National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative

The 2017 NBCI Hunting Inventory of state agency statewide quail hunting surveys is a one-year update of the 5-year retrospective analysis in the 2016 State of the Bobwhite Report. See that report for background on state surveys and the range-wide, long-term decline in wild quail hunting. Of the 25 NBCI states, Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, and West Virginia seldom collect quail hunting data, and other states collect data less frequently than annually.

The 2017 report is intended to identify the upward trend in quail hunting resulting from a few years of mild weather in the Great Plains and Midwest, providing some understanding of the potential for recovery of quail hunting as a recreational activity. The NBCI continues to report the gross number of quail hunters, disregarding any distinction between wild and pen-raised quail, thus providing an index of the potential interest in wild quail hunting.

### Results

Sixteen states reported on recent annual hunting surveys. Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia reported on the 2015-16 hunting season, and Delaware, Maryland, and Mississippi reported on the 2016-17 season. To this, the NBCI Inventory adds the previously reported data for the 2014-15 season in Georgia, Missouri, and South Carolina.

The estimated number of quail hunters in the NBCI Inventory ranged from 226 in Delaware to 59,882 in Texas (Figure 1). Total number of quail hunters for the 16 states reporting new data was 221,453, and they spent 1,109,165 days in the field. Comparing the 16 states reporting data in 2016 and 2017, large increases in number of hunters in Nebraska (52%), Iowa (49%), Texas (48%), and Kansas (26%) were balanced by continued declines or small

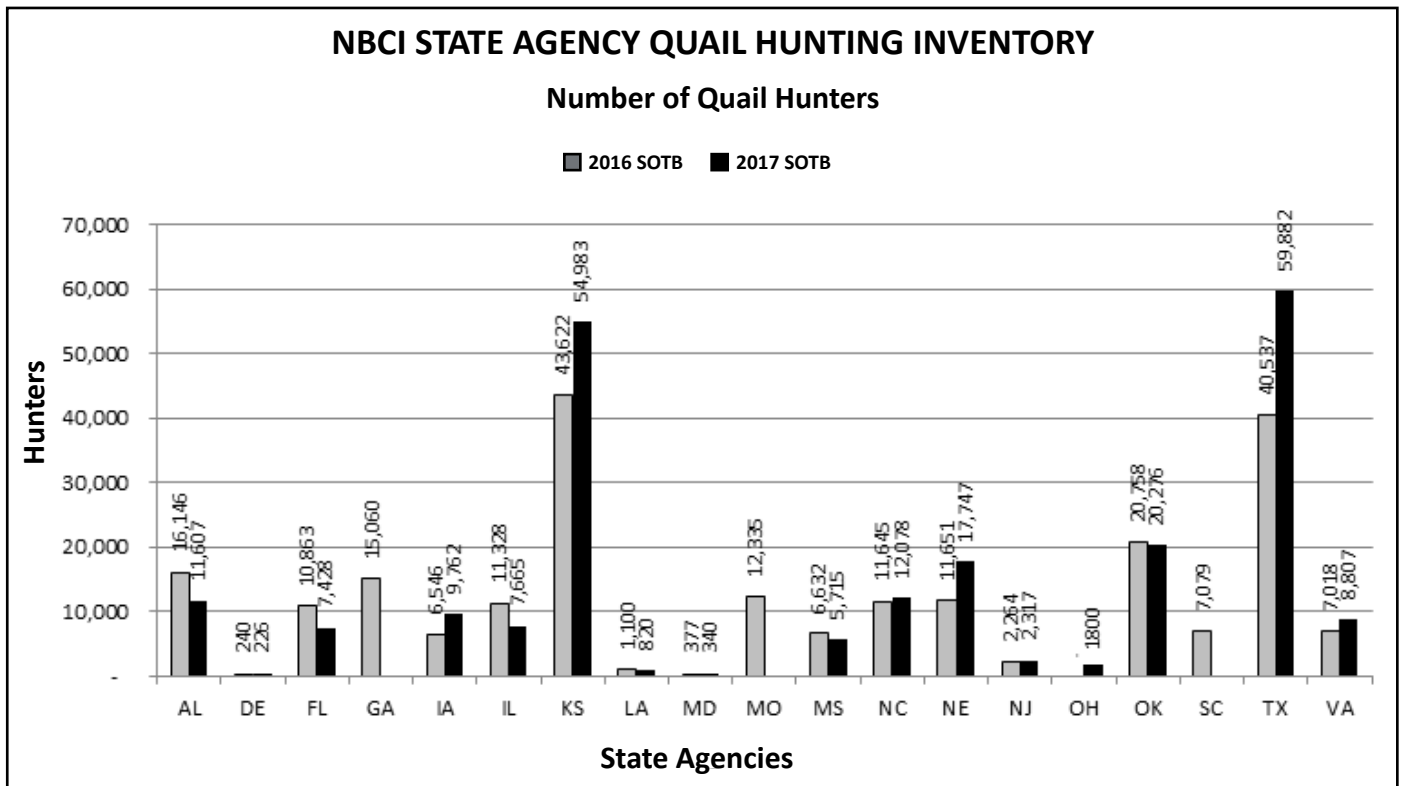


Figure 1. Estimated number of quail hunters (pursuing wild or pen-raised quail) in 19 states reporting for the 2016 and 2017 NBCI Hunting Inventory.



improvements in many other states. Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas combined accounted for 69% of quail hunters and 64% of hunting trips. As noted in previous reports in 2011 and 2016, most of the hunting in these top-performing states is of wild bobwhites.

A common question is “how many quail hunters are there in the 25 NBCI states?” This was estimated as 357,542 in 2011 and 249,846 in 2016. Combining data for states reporting in 2016 and 2017 (Figure 1), NBCI conservatively estimates there are at least 255,927 bobwhite hunters, and that they spend over 1 million days in the field each hunting season. The estimated number of hunters includes many assumptions (e.g., no change in hunting in Georgia, Missouri, and South Carolina over a 2-year period), and the data are not comprehensive (e.g., no data from some states, states with data often do not report on a large part of the hunting community, such as those older than 65, landowners, etc.).

### **Discussion**

The surge in wild bobwhite hunting the past few years in Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas demonstrates the continued importance of this iconic game bird to the culture and economy of many states. This hunting recovery resulted largely from a positive bobwhite population response to the presence of suitable habitat and mild weather, and was predicted by each state agency based on population surveys. This recovery is occurring across a wide variety of hunting properties, including leased and pay-to-hunt ranches in Texas, and state and federal agency public lands and hunting access programs (e.g., in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma). Also, the recovery is aided by extra privileges for youth and by the fact that quail hunters are very mobile, traveling from east to west to take advantage of increased opportunities.

State agency quail coordinators continue to be optimistic about sustained and increased quail hunting based on favorable weather in areas with suitable habitat. Because of the complexity of quail hunting, particularly the reliance on trained bird dogs and highly-developed hunting skills, a lag in hunter response is not surprising. Regardless of the speed of recovery, quail enthusiasts are enjoying good days in the field and demonstrating that a viable and potent quail hunting community still exists.

