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Quail hunters coming to Black Belt for training experience

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (Feb. 20, 2024) – A group of novice hunters will gather this weekend at [Wehle Nature Center](#), a beautiful public piece of property supported by Alabama’s Forever Wild Land Trust and managed by the State Lands Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR).

Located in Bullock County, this weekend will include a three-day “Learn to Hunt Experience” designed to promote quail hunting and teach participants about the crucial role hunting plays in conservation.

The event is facilitated through a partnership between Quail Forever, The State Lands and Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Divisions of ADCNR and the Minority Outdoor Alliance (MOA). The 10 participants, who arrive Friday, Feb. 23, and stay through Sunday, Feb. 25, will learn all aspects of upland hunting, including bird ecology and the basics of hunting with dogs before participating in a live-action bird hunt.

“This initiative is designed to offer nationwide experiences in welcoming environments that foster a diverse and empowered community of enthusiasts who share a love for upland birds, bird dogs, and habitat conservation,” said Durrell Smith, President of MOA and creator of the LTH curriculum.

Ashley Smith, CEO of Minority Outdoor Alliance, emphasized the importance of the Learn To Hunt programs in the organization's engagement model. “Our engagement model is rooted in the understanding that in order to inspire the desire to protect and conserve our natural resources, it is essential that we provide safe spaces for connection to occur,” she said.

The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association (ALBBAA) is also assisting with the program on Friday afternoon.

“Alabama’s Black Belt offers some of the best hunting available anywhere in America, and it’s wonderful that these hunters will receive this vital training while also enjoying the natural beauty here,” ALBBAA

Director Pam Swanner said. “We hope these novice hunters develop a lifelong love for upland hunting and will return to the Black Belt again in the future.”

The Alabama event is one of six around the country, with similar training weekends held in Colorado, Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin and South Carolina. Participants receive both classroom and hands-on training.

Ashley Chance, the Hunting Heritage Program Manager for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, said “hunter numbers have been declining for decades,” leading to a corresponding drop in hunting license sales nationwide. Funding from license sales maintains vital habitat creation and management services necessary to offer recreational hunting opportunities for millions of Americans.

“Fewer hunters means fewer dollars for conservation,” Chance said.

The “Learn to Hunt Experience” is one way Quail Forever and MOA work to recruit new hunters from a variety of backgrounds and cultures to help diversify the sporting community. This, in turn, can build a new set of hunters who purchase hunting licenses, which then funds management activities.

“With bobwhite quail being on the decline for some time now, some of the culture of quail hunting has been lost,” Chance said. “Bringing new people in and exposing them to upland hunting is critical.”

The success of the Learn To Hunt program can be attributed to the strong partnerships formed with various organizations and individuals dedicated to conservation education. MOA extends special thanks to Marilyn Vetter, CEO of Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever; Colby Kerber, Director of Conservation Education Programs; Justin Grider, R3 Coordinator for Alabama DCNR; Conservation Officer for ADCNR, Sergeant Bill Freeman, and the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association for their unwavering support and partnership.

The collaboration between MOA and Quail Forever represents a significant step forward in promoting diversity in outdoor activities and conservation efforts. The Learn To Hunt program not only educates participants about sustainable hunting practices, but also instills a deep appreciation for the natural world and the importance of preserving it for future generations.

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The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association is committed to promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the Black Belt in a manner that provides economic and ecological benefits to the region and its citizens. For information, go to www.alabamablackbeltadventures.org.

The Black Belt includes the following 23 counties: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa and Wilcox.