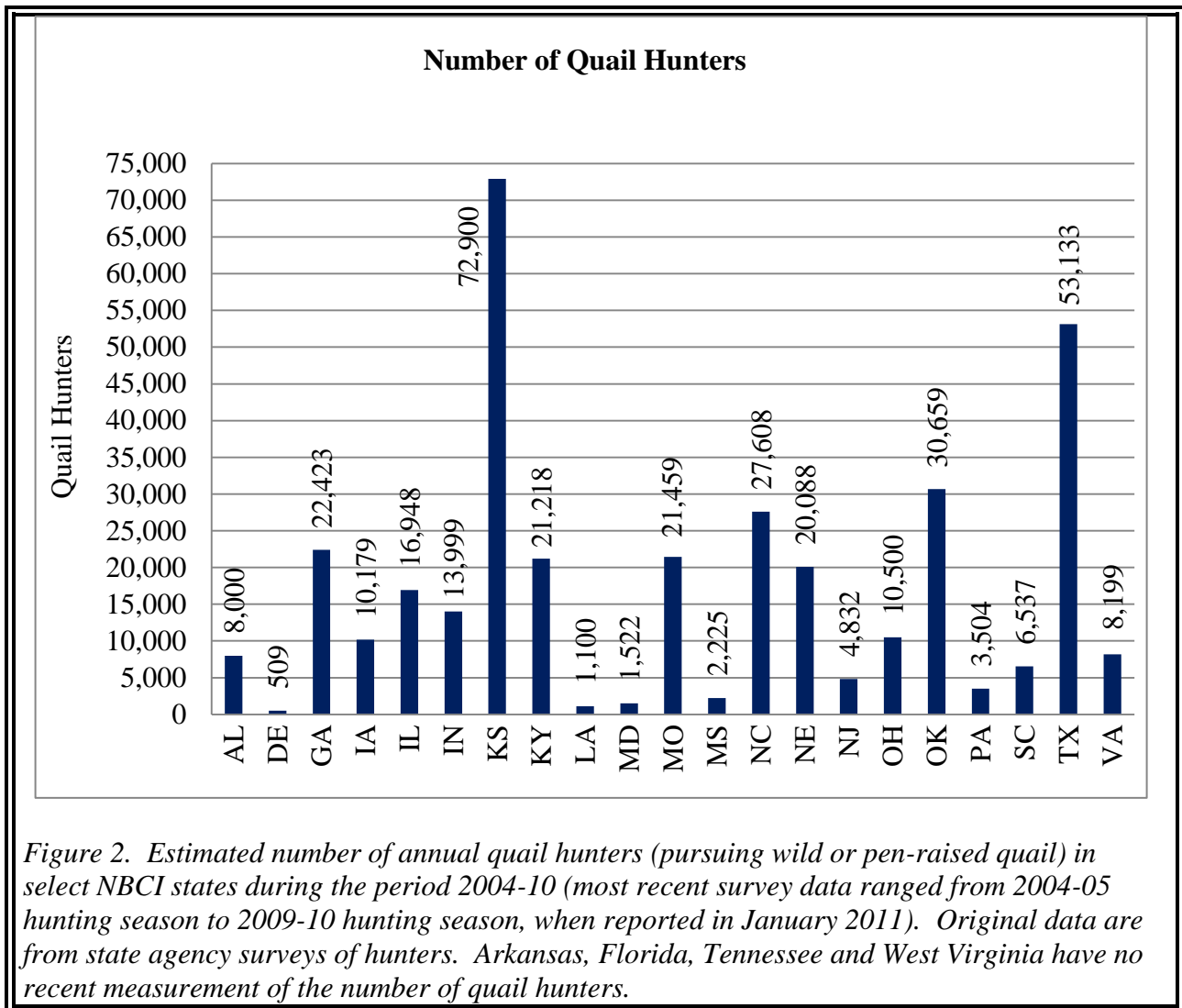


For this report, BBS data are used to illustrate historical trends on a large scale. Unfortunately, there are relatively few BBS routes in each state, precluding definitive conclusions about bobwhite abundance below the statewide level. Similar to state agency quail surveys, BBS trends are an accurate barometer of the big picture, but cannot be related specifically to bobwhite hunting in specific locales, or to bobwhite population recovery at smaller scales. Because of these limitations, NBCI and states are pursuing new bobwhite monitoring approaches, and thus the BBS survey will not be a regular part of NBCI reporting.

STATUS OF BOBWHITE HUNTING

Bobwhite and small game hunting were once *the* dominant hunting sports east of the Rocky Mountains, but in the 21st Century bobwhite hunting has been greatly reduced. Although future reports will cover the long-term trends in hunting activity in greater detail, a few states illustrate the decline of this tradition. In the worst-case scenario, this past summer the New Jersey Fish and Game Council suspended statewide wild bobwhite hunting.³



In two prominent bobwhite hunting states, Georgia and Missouri, the numbers of bobwhite hunters have declined 80-90% since peaks of 135,000 and 186,000 hunters, respectively, in the 1960s. Both states now have about 22,000 bobwhite hunters (Figure 2 and see Georgia and Missouri conservation reports). Bobwhite hunting activity, both the number of bobwhite hunters and hunter trips (or days afield), across NBCI states is highly variable, and not all states measure quail hunting activity (Figures 2 and 3). The Plains states of Kansas, Texas and Oklahoma have by far the most quail hunting activity (e.g., 72,900 Kansas quail hunters during the 2009-10 season), and eastern states the least amount (e.g., 1,522 Maryland quail hunters during the 2009-10 season). We conservatively estimate that there were 357,542 bobwhite hunters (including both wild and pen-raised bobwhites) annually over the last decade, and that hunters annually spent 1,996,390 days in the field. These are minimum estimates for various reasons. Of the states that do measure hunting activity, most sample from the pool of people who are required to have hunting permits, leaving various populations—including youth, senior citizens, and military personnel—unaccounted for.

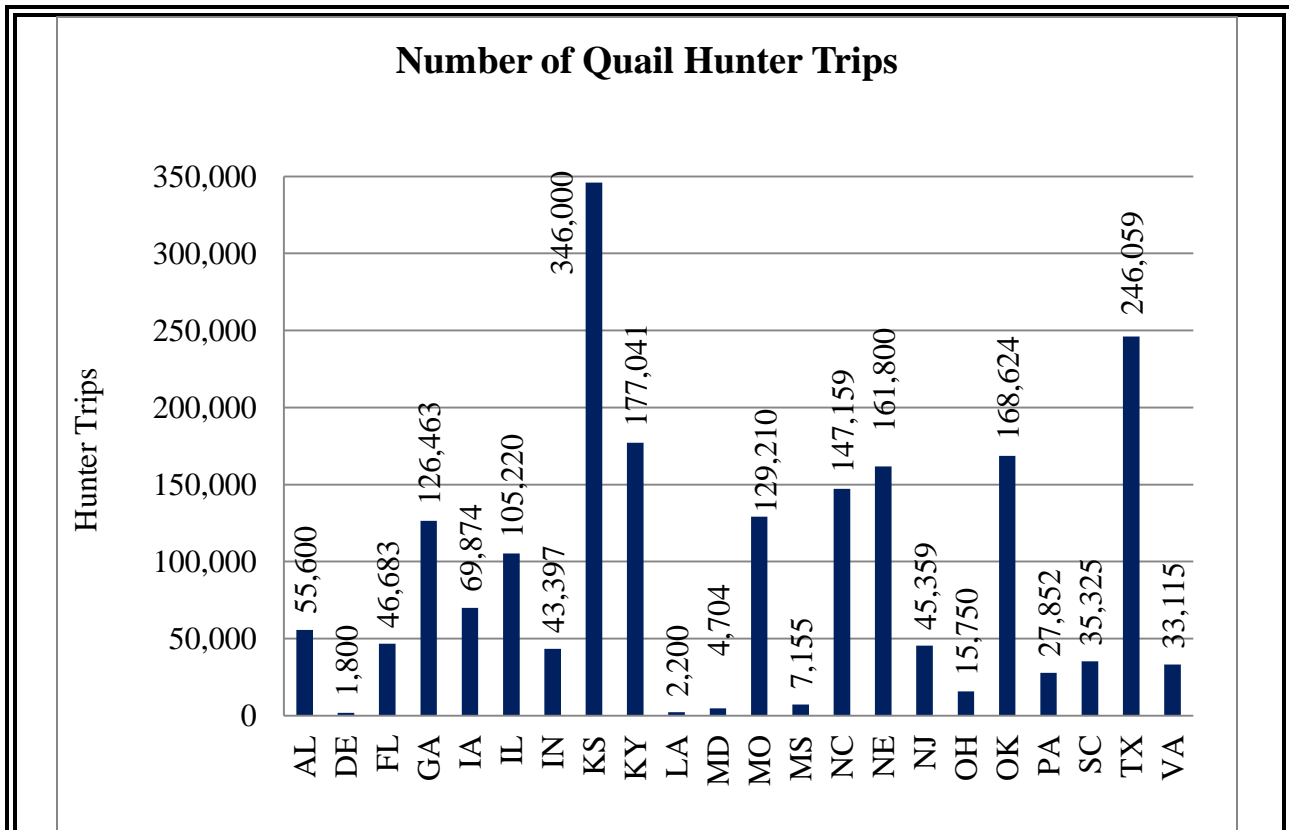


Figure 3. Estimated number of annual quail hunter trips (i.e., days afield) (pursuing wild or pen-raised quail) in select NBCI states during the period 2004-10 (most recent survey data ranged from 2004-05 hunting season to 2009-10 hunting season, when reported in January 2011). Original data are from state agency surveys of hunters, where the sample is drawn from licensed hunters. Because of various license exemptions across states (youth, senior citizens, military personnel, people with disabilities, etc.), not all quail hunters are surveyed, and thus the estimate of quail hunter trips is a minimum figure. Arkansas, Tennessee and West Virginia have no recent measurement of the number of quail hunters.

Although bobwhite hunting has greatly diminished over time, there is still an enormous amount of recreational activity associated with the sport. Considering that quail hunting and field trials typically involve bird dogs, the economic impact of the sport is far-reaching, going well beyond the equipment and travel associated with other forms of hunting. In the most recent published multistate analysis of bobwhite hunting activity, for 11 southeastern states in 1991, there were an estimated 524,157 bobwhite hunters and that they expended nearly \$95 million during 2.6 million hunter-days, resulting in an economic impact of over \$193 million (Burger et al. 1999).⁴ Beyond the economic impact, quail hunting makes large, but unknown, contributions to quality of life. Measuring these positive impacts is a high priority for NBCI, and at the upcoming Seventh National Quail Symposium, expenditures of Texas quail hunters will be reported.

Because interest in quail hunting traditionally responds to abundance of quail, it is widely anticipated that successful implementation of the NBCI 2.0 eventually will stimulate increased hunting activity along with expansion of habitat and quail populations.

Pen-raised Bobwhites

State quail coordinator reports on bobwhite hunting also addressed the rise of released pen-raised bobwhites as quarry. In a recent NBCI blog,⁵ NBTC member/Kentucky biologist Ben Robinson discussed the reality many quail hunters face: the lack of enough wild birds close to home for training dogs or for a quick hunt. But no one can be happy about the virtual replacement of wild quail hunting by pen-raised quail in large parts of some states. The vision of the NBCI is to restore habitat to support improved hunting of increased wild quail populations.

According to Georgia DNR data provided to the NBCI State Agency Inventory Project (Inventory), during the 2008-09 season 22,423 hunters harvested 808,036 quail, of which 97% were pen reared and 3% were wild (see Georgia Report). This upside-down situation is common in many states east of the Mississippi River, according to state quail coordinators. Maryland DNR's most recent quail harvest report estimates the state has almost twice as many people hunting pen-raised quail (1,000) than wild quail (522 hunters) (the two are combined in Figure 2). Further west, the situation is not as bleak, for example the Missouri Department of Conservation estimates that 75% of the reported quail harvest in the 2008-09 season was wild bobwhites. Although some states are documenting hunting activity associated with hunting of wild and pen-raised quail, many are not, leaving uncertain the true nature of bobwhite hunting in the United States.

STATUS OF BOBWHITE CONSERVATION

Unlike migratory bird species, which are under the legal authority of the federal government, bobwhite conservation is the responsibility of the individual states. The NBCI was formed out of the states' desire for improved regional leadership, increased across-the-border collaboration and for participation in regional and national conservation initiatives. This report provides an initial attempt to bring together information about efforts to organize conservationists and citizens toward the goal of recovering wild populations of bobwhites.