

CONSERVATION

Texas chapters quit Quail Unlimited

New group will focus on research, habitat, education at home

By Thomas Phillips

LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

All 11 Texas chapters of Quail Unlimited recently cut ties with the parent organization in December and formed a new group, with the goal of keeping more money in the state and continuing quail research.

"We just felt like the amount of money that they took for national administrative overhead and national programs was too high as a percentage of our total, and our members were telling us they wanted to keep more money local," said Joe Crafton, a leader with the new Quail Coalition, which is still in its formative stages.

Quail Unlimited has been mired in financial troubles for several months. President Bill Bowles said on QU's Web site the group will not file for bankruptcy, though it recently put its staff on furlough for two weeks and is said to have a large unpaid debt.

Bowles did not respond to a request for comment left on his cell phone.

With Quail Coalition, Texas hunters will see all of their money return to conservation efforts, Crafton said. The organization will have no paid staff or board members, and most of the work required for operating the parent organization will be performed by volunteers, he said.

The Quail Coalition will also support research on the birds, which have been in decline for decades. Quail Unlimited is moving away from research, Crafton said, and moving toward increasing education.

"We don't share the belief of QU that everything that needs to be known is known," Crafton said.

Individual chapters will decide how



QUAIL AID: Texas members of Quail Unlimited disagreed with the national organization on how money should be used, causing the groups to split recently. Photo by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

money they raise will be spent, said Crafton, who is on the board of the Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch in Roby. RPQRR has been one of the Texas QU chapters' biggest benefactors.

In addition to continuing research, Quail Coalition money will go toward education about quail management and habitat improvement. The organization will not allow chapters to spend money on perks for board members or to do anything inconsistent with the organization's bylaws, Crafton said.

Texas hunters who were members of Quail Unlimited through local chapters have a free membership in the Quail Coalition until the new organization's chapters hold their annual banquets. Then, they may attend the banquet and join the new group.

Crafton expects the 11 former QU chapters to join the new group, and he is hopeful the Quail Coalition will have 3,000 members when the organization is officially

formed this winter.

"We feel like they will feel well-connected to this Quail Coalition," he said.

Quail Unlimited is experiencing "major financial challenges," a former board member from Texas said. In addition to furloughing employees for two weeks this fall, QU put its 88-acre South Carolina headquarters up for sale.

"It's got some major financial challenges, and I wouldn't attribute all the challenges to the economy," said the board member, Tim Connolly of Wichita Falls. "I think it's not symptomatic of what we see in the economy (as much) as a series of bad decisions has led to the situation they're in today."

Revenue from advertising sales and banquet auctions was down this year, Connolly said, and several debts weighed on the nonprofit. Financial burdens weighing on QU include commitments to employee retirement plans, loans for holding national events over the last four or five years and the mortgage on the headquarters.