JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Farm Bill Forester
Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee

Application Deadline: March 3, 2021

Anticipated Start Date: March 2021 (negotiable)

Overview: This position was developed through a partnership among and with support from Quail Forever, The Southeastern Grasslands Initiative (SGI), and The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) with funding provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s (NFWF) Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund. It is a full-time position hosted by Quail Forever. Funding has been secured for 3 years, with intent to renew. The position will be headquartered with permanent office space in the Sparta, Tennessee, NRCS Service Center with frequent travel throughout the Cumberland Plateau region of Tennessee.

Duties:
- Provide verbal, written and on-site technical assistance (forestry with a strong savanna and woodland ecological focus) to interested private landowners.
- Coordinate the implementation and application of select Farm Bill practices in cooperation with the local NRCS District Conservationist, NRCS Area Biologist, TWRA Private Lands Biologist, PF/QF staff, SGI staff, TN Division of Forestry, and others.
- Complete forestry and wildlife conservation plans, contracts, applications, and other required documentation for conservation programs (i.e. EQIP, CSP, CRP, etc.) requiring forestry expertise in cooperation with the listed partners.
- Communicate program requirements, develop technical assistance plans for applicants enrolling in USDA conservation programs or other state and local conservation programs, complete site visits to determine eligibility, develop contracts and assist with implementation of planned practices.
- Coordinate habitat project implementation with private landowners and partner agencies.
- Write and review prescribed burn plans, forest management plans, etc. and coordinate prescribed burn implementation on private lands.
- Conduct landowner and industry outreach to promote conservation program opportunities and training/education on best management practices. Specifically conduct habitat tours, landowner workshops, demonstrations of management techniques, and other educational events. Also work with partners to utilize social media and other virtual platforms for program promotion and technical assistance.
- Perform other related duties as assigned.

Required Knowledge Skills and Abilities:
- Ability to communicate clearly and effectively with landowners and partner agencies.
- Ability to work independently with little supervision and with diverse clientele.
- Knowledge of silviculture, forest management treatments, wildlife ecology, and grassland management, including the ability to utilize various habitat management tools in the development of habitat management plans.
- Knowledge of conservation and wildlife programs provided by Federal (i.e. Farm Bill), state, and local agencies, and NGOs; Also, knowledge of how these programs are implemented in a forested landscape and local timber markets.
- Familiarity with Cumberland Plateau Ecoregion flora, fauna, and overall ecology.
- Excellent verbal/written communication and organizational skills.
- Valid driver’s license and personal vehicle required (mileage reimbursement provided).
- Able to obtain USDA Clearance and NRCS Conservation Planning certification.
Training and Experience Guideline: Any combination of training and/or experience that will enable the applicant to possess the required knowledge, skills and abilities. Minimum qualification for this position is a Bachelor of Science Degree in Forestry, Wildlife Management, or closely related natural resources field and related field/work experience. Proven experience working with USDA Farm Bill programs is a plus. The ideal candidate will exhibit a balance of technical knowledge and interpersonal skills required to implement voluntary conservation programs on private lands. Practical and/or professional experience with prescribed fire and forest management is preferred. The successful applicant must enjoy working with private landowners and producers to achieve their objectives.

Starting Salary Range: $42,000 to $48,000, commensurate with Qualifications and Experience + Benefits.

Application Requirements: Combine your cover letter, resume, and 3 references into a single Word document or PDF file before uploading to our Recruitment website at: www.pheasantsforever.org/jobs

For More Information: Britney Viers, Coordinating Biologist for Quail Forever and Southeastern Grasslands Initiative at bviers@quailforever.org or 731-358-1860.

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Additional Background and Justification: The greatest threat to the terrestrial biodiversity in eastern North America is arguably the loss of southeastern U.S. grasslands (used in broad context that includes savannas, prairies, glades, barrens, open wetlands) and related open grassy woodland ecosystems. Throughout the Southeast, centuries of agricultural conversion, fire suppression, wetland alteration, and development have led to the collapse of savannas, prairies, meadows, glades, barrens, and other naturally open habitats. This loss has resulted in profound declines in key species groups, such as pollinators and birds, many of which depend on grassland flora and habitat structure. The Cumberland Plateau Ecoregion of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee is one of the more notable areas of the southeastern U.S. that once supported extensive pine-oak savannas and open woodlands. Vast fire suppression in the 20th century, combined with extensive depletion of the shortleaf pines of the historical savannas, led to replacement of the once widespread savannas with oak-hickory-hardwood dominated closed-canopy forests by mid-20th century. It is estimated that more than 99 percent of the native savanna of the Plateau has been lost or degraded. Furthermore, a large percentage of the less than one percent that remains is confined to powerline corridors and roadsides. This region has long been considered one of the most important forested regions in North America and is recognized as a center of endemism for plants. In the last 25 years, the only known occurrences of nearly half of the 40 rare sun-loving plant species known from the Tennessee portion of the Plateau surface have become considered historical, and several other species are on the brink of disappearing. The grasslands of the Plateau have largely gone under-appreciated or ignored until recently in favor of recognition of a closed- to semi-closed canopy forest and woodland system. The emphasis on forests, and the corresponding lack of management, places many of the rare species of the Cumberland Plateau (such as pollinators, grassland birds, small mammals, some reptiles, and dozens of plants) at risk of being lost or driven to extinction as the open grassy landscapes they need continues to disappear. New research funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and led by The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee to map the vegetation of the Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee, suggests that 40 percent or 1.9 million acres of the Plateau should exist as shortleaf pine-oak savanna and woodland, lending science-based support to the recognition of the need to restore much more savanna, open woodland, and other grassland habitat.

Fortunately, since the 1990s, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) has been spearheading efforts to restore shortleaf pine savanna at Catoosa Wildlife Management Area and the Bridgestone-Firestone Centennial Wilderness. We seek to continue the momentum gained on public lands on the private landscape especially since the majority of the Cumberland Plateau is in private ownership. With the support from partner agencies and organizations like the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), TWRA, and the Southeastern Grasslands Initiative (SGI), we will achieve shortleaf pine and shortleaf pine-oak savanna/woodland restoration and re-establishment where needed. The Cumberland Plateau Coordinating Forester will focus on education, outreach, conservation technical assistance, and Farm Bill program assistance targeting private landowners. These efforts will be crucial in recruiting landowners to implement the conservation practices needed to bring back the Cumberland Plateau’s imperiled grassland habitats. Landowner workshops will be conducted to encourage Farm Bill program participation, which will provide financial assistance needed to either plant or restore existing shortleaf pine ecosystems. If there is no targeted approach to restore grasslands within the Cumberland Plateau, many species will continue to decline and possibly become...
extirpated from this unique ecoregion. However, with the help of the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund, we have the opportunity to reverse these species declines and make landscape scale improvements.