

Quail Unlimited in financial straits

By Thomas Phillips
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Quail Unlimited is experiencing "major financial challenges" and recently furloughed employees and put its 88-acre South Carolina headquarters up for sale, a board member from Texas said.

"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, in addition to paying the staff of 24 employees, Connolly said.

"Dealing with those is difficult in any business but even more difficult in a 501(c)3," he said.

The staff was relieved of duty for two weeks "in an attempt to bridge or hold expenses until (the board) can determine what direction the organization will take," Connolly said. A board meeting was scheduled for Nov. 13.

The organization is also without leadership on its staff. President Rocky Evans resigned in March, and the interim president, Craig Alderman, was asked to step down in mid-September. Another QU staffer, Donnie Buckland, was offered the president position, but Buckland left to take a job with the National Wild Turkey Federation, which is also based in Edgefield, S.C.

"At this time, the chairman of the board and the board treasurer have been providing leadership on a day-to-day basis," Connolly said.

A split last summer between QU and its Dallas-based Park Cities chapter had no impact on the national organization's bottom line, Connolly said. The chapter was noted for its high fundraising, but most of that money stayed in Texas, he said. The chapter was dissolved, but members formed a new nonprofit, Park Cities Quail, in its place in July.

As for QU's future, Connolly said, the organization might also be dissolved but the work of quail conservation would continue.

"It may just not happen under a Quail Unlimited banner," he said.