

STATE OF COLORADO



LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN **Colorado Parks and Wildlife** May 2012

John W. Hickenlooper
Governor

Mike King
Executive Director

Status Summary:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) will either issue a proposed rule to list the Lesser Prairie-chicken (LEPC) as a threatened or endangered species or determine that they are not warranted for listing by September 30, 2012. At the same time they will propose critical habitat for the bird. Once the species is proposed for listing, a 60-day public comment period will commence. A final listing decision will follow 12 months after the proposed rule is published.

Range:

The LEPC range includes land in five states (Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico). Colorado is on the western edge of the rangewide distribution for LEPC and contains a small portion of the overall range and the overall number of individuals.

Threats:

The FWS has identified habitat loss, modification, degradation, and fragmentation as key threats to LEPC. Contributing activities include energy development and the addition of roads, fences and power lines. The potential impacts of climate change are unknown but of concern.

Land Ownership:

Within Colorado, 90% of the mapped range for LEPC is on private land, of which ~3% is protected by conservation easements. Another 6% is located on federal lands (primarily U.S. Forest Service, Comanche National Grasslands). The State of Colorado manages 4% of the total (State Land Board: 3.5%; CPW: 0.5%).

Roles for Local, State & Federal Agencies:

CPW works closely with several partners to provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners to protect important LEPC habitat in Colorado. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) supports the LEPC Conservation Initiative and directs resources to benefit LEPC using several Farm Bill conservation programs (Wildlife Habitat Improvement (WHIP), Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)). The Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) also provides significant benefits to LEPC by providing consistent suitable cover in core areas of the range. In addition to existing CPW field personnel, two Private Lands Wildlife Biologists and a Range Conservationist are supported by CPW, NRCS, Pheasants Forever, and Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory to provide technical assistance to landowners to benefit LEPC. CPW supports a Habitat Improvement Program to provide additional incentive payments to landowners for enrolling in Farm Bill conservation programs or enhancing lands already enrolled.

The LEPC Interstate Working Group (IWG) is comprised of representatives from each of the five LEPC states. The IWG, in cooperation with the Western Governors' Association, Playa Lakes Joint Venture, and U.S. Geological Survey has developed the Southern Great Plains Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (SGP-CHAT) for LEPC. SGP-CHAT is a web-based decision support system to assist with siting developments to minimize impacts to LEPC and targeting conservation programs to benefit LEPC. The IWG, with funding from the Great Plains Landscape Conservation Cooperative, has developed a rangewide aerial population survey and monitoring protocol for LEPC. Pilot implementation of the survey was completed in 2012 and analyses are pending.

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