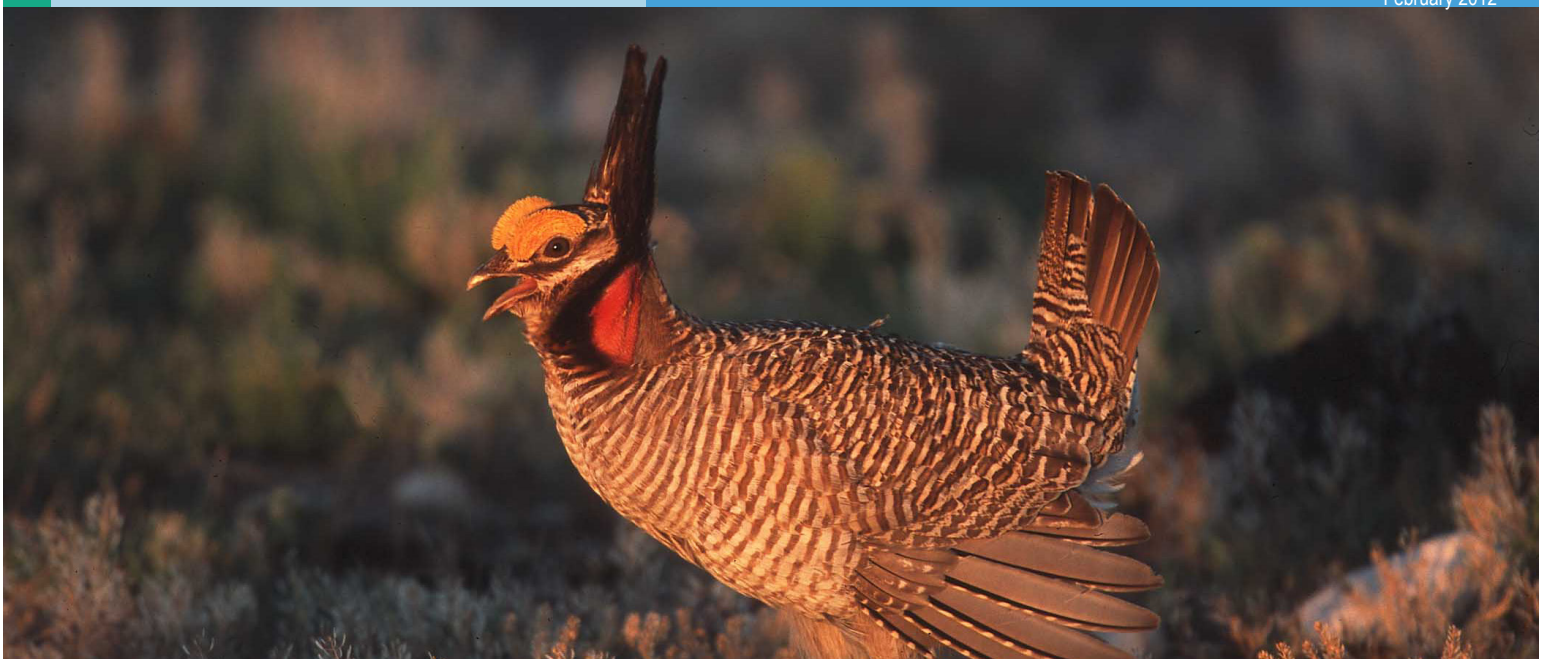
USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Beyond Boundaries

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative Fact Sheet

February 2012



Good grazing management not only benefits the ranch but the Lesser Prairie-chicken as well.

Background/Purpose

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) works with landowners to improve the effectiveness of voluntary conservation practices to expand Lesser prairie-chicken habitat and benefit the long-term sustainability of producers' agricultural operations. The initiative area includes high priority habitat areas in the current range with a contiguous 10 mile buffer in the states of Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Once widely distributed, the Lesser prairie-chicken has experienced more than a 90 percent reduction in population since European settlement. The bird is ground-nesting and native to the rangelands of the south central plains. It is best known for its unique courtship displays and "gobbling" sounds.

Together the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and NRCS finalized conservation practices to be used in LPCI released in a June 2011 Conference Report. These practices will benefit the Lesser prairie-chicken population and cause no harm to other listed and candidate species that share habitat with the Lesser prairie-chicken. Additionally, the Conference Report provides certainty that the conservation practices and measures used by landowners of the LPCI will be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act while the Lesser prairie-chicken is a candidate species.

Goals/Objectives Achieved

LPCI is designed to increase the abundance and distribution of the Lesser prairie-chicken and its habitat while promoting the overall health of grazing lands and the long-term sustainability of ranching operations. Measureable outcomes for LPCI include management and enhancement of the current habitat, decreased threats to the species from agricultural activities, and educating the public about species' needs. NRCS will monitor responses of habitat to implementation of conservation practices, while states are monitoring and tracking lek* sites and conducting Lesser prairie-chicken population counts.

**A lek is an area where Lesser prairie-chicken males display during the breeding season to attract females; may also be referred to as a booming ground or strutting ground.*

Conservation Funding/ Practices Applied

LPCI provides financial and technical assistance to landowners and operators for reducing threats to the species, and enhancing and maintaining existing habitats in high priority areas. LPCI objectives will be funded by NRCS through the Conservation Technical Assistance Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program.

The primary focus for LPCI is upland wildlife habitat management. Participants can receive technical and financial assistance to implement supporting conservation practices including brush management, prescribed grazing, range planting, prescribed burning and restoration of rare and declining habitats.

Benefits to Partners

In addition to receiving financial and technical assistance for implementing conservation practices that benefit the Lesser prairie-chicken, participants in LPCI will improve overall range conditions and sustainability of ranching operations. With regard to voluntary conservation and the implementation of LPCI priority conservation systems, what is good for the rancher is good for the Lesser prairie-chicken.

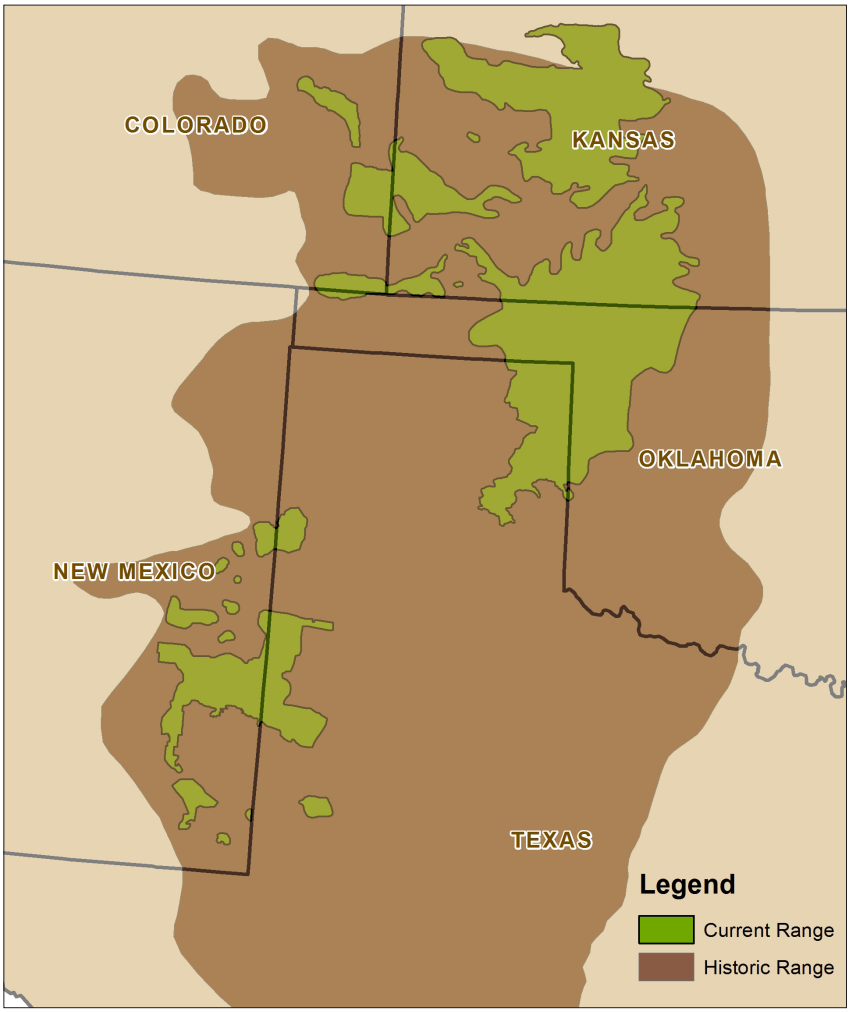
Participation/Partnerships

LPCI partners include:

- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
- Kansas Forest Service
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- LPC Interstate Working Group
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- National Wildlife Foundation Pheasants Forever
- Playa Lakes Joint Venture
- Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory
- The Woods Foundation
- Texas Wildlife Association
- The Nature Conservancy

Benefits to Resources/ Public

The Lesser prairie-chicken has been a treasured plains icon for centuries. Their beauty and distinctive mating rituals provide remarkable wildlife viewing, prompting communities, farmers, ranchers and bed and breakfasts to offer tours and photo opportunities. By improving their habitat, ranchers are working to ensure that future generations of Americans will be able to witness these remarkable birds. Plus, maintaining farming and ranching operations through improved resource conservation associated with the LPCI, increases the sustainability of rural ranching communities throughout the region.



Current and historic range for the Lesser prairie-chicken.

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