The Status of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken in Oklahoma

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Who is helping ODWC to work on the issue?

**Federal Agencies**
- United States Department of Agriculture
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service

**Energy industry**
- OG&E
- American Wind Energy Association

**Non-Government Associations**
- The Nature Conservancy
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- National Audubon Society
- Playa Lakes Joint Venture
- Western Governor’s Association
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association

**State Agencies**
- Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts
- Commissioners of Land Office
- Oklahoma State University
- University of Oklahoma: Sutton Avian Research Center
- Panhandle State University
- Office of the Secretary of Environment
Partner Contributions
Secretary of Environment

- Assistance with Oklahoma Lesser Prairie Chicken Spatial Planning Tool
  - Crucial in bringing Wind Industry to table
- Commitment to finding additional funding and support for LEPC management efforts
Partner Contributions
OG&E

• Voluntary Offset Contributions
  – $3.75 M  OU Spirit Wind Project
  – $4.9 M  Keenan Phase II Wind Project

• Assistance with development of Oklahoma Lesser Prairie Chicken Spatial Planning Tool
Partner Contributions
Sutton Avian Research Center

• Assistance with development of OLEPCSPT
• Comprehensive land-based LEPC lek surveys
• Fence marking and removal
  – $86,663
Partner Contributions
Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association

• Assistance with development and implementation of Reasonable and Prudent practices for responsible O/G development in LEPC range

• Signed MOU agreeing to work together to implement LEPC conservation with production
Partner Contributions
USDA

- WHIP
- EQIP
- Lesser Prairie Chicken Conservation Initiative
- Lesser Prairie Chicken Implementation / Outreach Technician (50% funding)
Partner Contributions
Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

• Development of Wildlife Credits Program
  – $412,000 through Conservation Innovation Grant
  – Match for $300,000 available funding

• Implementation / Awarding of Wildlife Credit incentives to landowners who manage habitat for LEPC
Partner Contributions
US Fish and Wildlife Service

- Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
  - LEPC management Agreements
  - $40,000 for Land Management
    - Packsaddle WMA Expansion
- State Wildlife Grants
  - $2,450,000 for Land Acquisition
    - Cimarron Hills WMA and Cimarron Bluff WMA
- Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration
  - $2,520,000 for Land Acquisition
    - Packsaddle WMA Expansion
- Section 6 / ESA
  - $1,080,000 for Lesser Prairie Chicken / Whooping Crane HCP for Wind Industry
Each spring biologists with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation conduct flush counts and lek counts to monitor prairie chicken populations.

Additionally, biologists with the G.M. Sutton Avian Research Center and volunteers from the Oklahoma City Zoo performed lek surveys this past spring, to help ODWC complete a comprehensive land-based survey of Lesser Prairie Chicken leks across their entire occupied range in Oklahoma.
Oklahoma Population Trend

- Aerial Survey Monitoring
  - Range Wide Effort
  - Oklahoma’s Effort
SEC. 4. [16 U.S.C. 1533] (a) GENERAL.—(1) The Secretary shall by regulation promulgated in accordance with subsection (b) determine whether any species is an endangered species or a threatened species because of any of the following factors:

A. the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range;
B. overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
C. disease or predation;
D. the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; or
E. other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

*Threats from the 2008/2010 CNOR*
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

- Conversion of native range to introduced forages or cropland
- Loss of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land
- Cumulative habitat degradation due to overgrazing
- Woody plant invasion and shinnery oak control
- Energy development
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

Habitat Protection

• Land Acquisitions
  – Cimarron Hills – 3,770 acres $2,639,000
  – Cimarron Bluff – 3,430 acres $2,718,435
  – Packsaddle Addition – 4,589 acres $4,007,078
  – Beaver River Addition – 9,200 acres $4,371,606
  – Total Acres – 20,989 acres
  – Total Cost - $13,736,119
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat
Conversion of Native Range

- Wildlife Management Areas – 90 acres
- Lesser Prairie Chicken Habitat Conservation Program (LEPCHCP) – 120 acres
- WHIP and EQIP – 12,259 acres (since 2000)
- Partners – 500 acres
- LPCI – 19.3 acres
- Total Acres – 12,988.3 acres
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

CRP Status

- Current Acres by County
  - Beaver – 112,810
  - Cimarron – 128,228
  - Ellis – 62,671
  - Harper – 55,858
  - Roger Mills – 16,613
  - Texas – 199,374
  - Woods – 23,156
  - Woodward – 17,353

- Total – 616,063 acres

- Change since 2008
  - -15,645
  - -26,963
  - -1,881
  - -6,116
  - -1,626
  - -9,282
  - -3,554
  - -678

- Total – 65,745 acres
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

CRP Status

- CRP – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement
  - 2008 a proposal was approved for 15,100 acres with LEPC and other species of special concern
  - As of Nov. 2011- 6,817 acres have been allocated
    - Beaver – 910 acres
    - Harper – 4,718 acres
    - Ellis 1,116 acres
    - Beckham – 73 acres
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

Grazing Management

• Wildlife Management Areas –
  – Packsaddle – 13,320 acres
  – Beaver River – 14,094 acres
  – Cooper – 15,511 acres
  – Cimarron Hills and Bluff – 7,200 acres
  – Black Kettle (FS) – 30,273 acres
  – Total Acres – 80,398 acres
LPC Conservation Actions
Factor 1: Habitat
Grazing Management

- LEPCHCP – 16,937 acres
- NRCS LCPI – 48,834 acres
- WHIP and EQIP – 467,363 (since 2000)
- Public Land Acres – 80,398 acres
- Total Acres – 613,532 acres
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

Brush Control

- Wildlife Management Areas (Eastern Red Cedar Removal and Prescribed Fire)
  - Packsaddle – 7,130 acres (burn)
  - Ellis County – 1,820 acres (burn)
  - Cooper – 3,728 acres (burn) 837 acres (cut)
  - Cimarron Hills – 400 acres (burn)
  - Black Kettle – 11,820 acres (burn)
  - Total Acres – 25,735 acres
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat
Brush Control

• LEPCHCP – 1,144 acres
• State WHIP – 883 acres
• Partners – 85,633 acres (since 2001)
• NRCS LPCI – 113,946.2 acres (cut)
  9,137.4 acres (burn)
• WHIP and EQIP – 148,501 acres (cut)
  (Since 2000) 79,381 acres (burn)
• Public Lands- 25,735 acres
• Total Acres – 350,362 acres
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

Brush Control

- Oklahoma Prescribed Fire Council
  - Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Associations
  - 4 Associations in LEPC range
  - 2008 – 2010
    - Burned ~63,000 acres
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

Energy Development
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

Energy Development
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat

Energy Development

Decision Support Tool

A decision support tool is essentially a bridge between science and management. Working with the Western Governors Association and the Playa Lakes Joint Venture we developed and released a range-wide DST for the lesser prairie chicken.

http://www.kars.ku.edu/geodata/maps/sgpchat/
Spatial Planning Tool
A habitat-based model that quantifies the value of every acre within lesser prairie chicken range.

This tool is invaluable to responsible developers and planners as they search for sites where development would least impact Oklahoma’s population of lesser prairie chickens.

- Historic Range
- Current Occupied Range
- Suitable Habitat
- PLJV core habitat patch
- PLJV core buffer habitat patch
- Known buffered leks
- Distance to managed lands
- Distance from avoided structures
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 1: Habitat
Energy Development

• Energy Infrastructure
  – Working with O&G, Wind power, and transmission to address infrastructure concerns

• Voluntary Offset Program
  – $8.65M in voluntary contributions from OG&E for two wind power facilities
  – $2.5M agreement with Chermac for proposed transmission line project
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 2: Overutilization

- Oklahoma closed hunting season on LEPC in 1997.
  - An adaptive harvest framework in place
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 3: Disease or Predation

• Research
  – No evidence currently that these are significant factors for LPC conservation on a range-wide level
LPC Conservation Actions

Factor 4: Regulatory Mechanisms

• Title 29, Oklahoma Statutes, §29-3-103 Functions, powers and duties of the Commission.
  • The Wildlife Conservation Commission shall constitute an advisory, administrative and policymaking board for the protection, restoration, perpetuation, conservation, supervision, maintenance, enhancement, and management of wildlife in this state as provided in the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Code.

• Title 800:25-7-14
  • The following provisions apply to hunting lesser and greater prairie chickens: Closed season. The season shall remain closed until populations have recovered to levels at which sustained hunting is warranted as provided by the July 1997 Adaptive Harvest Management Strategy for Prairie Chickens in Oklahoma report for firearms hunting, and the June 1999 Archery and Falconry Adaptive Harvest management for falconry or archery hunting. The hunting season will be opened at the most liberal level allowed by these Adaptive Harvest Management Strategy reports.
LPC Conservation Actions

*Factor 5: Other Factors*

- Sutton Avian Research Center
  - Removed 129.1 miles of fence
  - Marked 207.7 miles of fence
Other LPC Conservation Actions

• Oklahoma Lesser Prairie Chicken Conservation Action Plan
  – Working with OG&E, and as mandated by the legislative task force, ODWC has recently contracted with Ecosystem Management Research Institute (EMRI) to prepare and help implement a comprehensive Oklahoma LEPC Action Plan for recovery of Lesser Prairie Chickens in Oklahoma. Draft conceptual plan is currently available for review, with plan completion scheduled for June 2012.

• Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA)
  – Agreement with USFWS and Certificates of Inclusion (CI) issued to landowners. Landowners who sign CCAA and are issued a CI agree to specified LEPC management and conservation activities, and are provided assurance that no additional requirements will be placed on them if LEPC becomes listed.
Other LPC Conservation Actions

• Energy Issues Biologist (OG&E Funds)
  – Working with all entities to ensure that wildlife issues are diligently considered as energy development progresses in a responsible manner

• Lesser Prairie Chicken Outreach / Implementation Technician (NRCS Funding)
  – Promoting and delivering all LEPC conservation funding programs and initiatives available to landowners in LEPC range.

• GIS Analyst (Great Plains LCC Funds)
  – Developing in-state and regional planning tools and DSS / DST, analyzing population distribution and trends and assisting with targeted management activities