Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative Council Public Meeting  
Vail, Colorado  

July 9, 2017 10:00-12:00 noon

Chair: Alexandra Sandoval, Director, New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish

- Call to Order  

- Welcome

- Introductions

- SSA/Listing decision update-Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, USFWS  
  Dr. Tuggle gave an overview of the upcoming SSA report timeline with the report to be complete in late August. The partner review will be 60 days from that point (the review has been changed to 45 days since this meeting). The listing decision will probably be late 2017 or early 2018.

- Conservation Update-Jim Pitman  
  Attached is Jim’s conservation report.

- Industry Update-Sean Kyle  
  Attached is Sean’s industry report.

- Aerial Survey Results-Roger Wolfe  
  Roger gave a report on the draft numbers from the 2017 aerial survey. Estimated population numbers are 33,269. This is an increase from around 25,000 birds in 2016. There were questions about whether the survey could provide information about the impacts of the fires in the range this spring. The survey probably would not give anything with that detail.

- LPC Inter-State Working Group Update-Grant Beauprez  
  The Inter-State Working Group met on Saturday (July 8) and Grant gave an overview of what was discussed at that meeting. His presentation is attached.

- North American Grouse Partnership Report-Steve Belinda
Steve gave a presentation (attached) about the draft LPC conservation report that NAGP has put together and has requested WAFWA to review.

• Election of LPCIC Chair
  J.D. Strong (Oklahoma) was elected as the new chair and Bob Broscheid (Colorado) was elected as the vice-chair. These are two year terms.

• Other topics
  o Dan O’Hair was confirmed to serve a two year term on the LPCAC. There is still one open position for a Conservation Organization on the committee.
  o Tim Griffiths, NRCS, West Regional Coordinator, Working Lands for Wildlife, gave an update on the LPCI program.

• Next Meeting (AFWA, Sept. 2017)
• Adjourn
Lesser Prairie-Chicken Range-wide Plan

Industry Update

WAFWA Summer Meeting, Vail, CO

July 9, 2017

Successes to date

- Since its implementation, the Range-wide Plan has mitigated for 1,143 new development projects, including oil and gas wells, compressor stations, electric distribution and transmission lines, substations, wind turbines and communications towers.
- Mitigated projects are co-located with existing development at a rate of more than twice that recorded before the implementation of the plan.
- The Range-wide Plan has generated more than $63 million in enrollment and mitigation fees since implementation.
- WAFWA has invested industry funding in conservation and currently has a surplus of more than 164,000 credits to offset future development. That total is more than three times the amount to offset all the industry development mitigated from 2014 to present.

Enrollment

- Current total industry enrollment stands at about 7.8 million acres.
- These acres represent the total area where companies have committed to minimize and mitigate for industry activities and new development.
  - Minimization activities include timing restrictions and off-road travel restrictions during the breeding season, reducing noise disturbance, marking fences and burying new electric lines and installing escape ramps in water sources near leks.
- Total enrollment is down about 2% from the 2016 annual report total due to terminations.
- Most of that difference is 12 terminations for non-payment of enrollment fees by oil and gas companies.
• These terminations are the result of a lack of recovery in the oil and gas industry following the downturn that began in 2015.
  o Oil prices are still down nearly 60% from 2014 levels
  o Statewide drilling rig counts remain at less than 50% of 2014 and are significantly lower within the LPC range.
  o Many of the enrolled leases that have be terminated have expired and no new drilling is occurring.
• Enrollment for other industries is stable, but there are no new enrollments since the 2016 annual report.
• WAFWA is actively outreaching to increase industry enrollment and participation.
Mitigation

- Mitigation figures have been strongly impacted by the downturn in the oil and gas industry and related sectors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Projects Mitigated</th>
<th>Mitigation Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>$9,019,854.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>$8,211,549.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>$4,173,967.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2017</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>$472,936.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| *Year to date

- The forecast for industry funding through mitigation is likely lower than estimated in the Range-wide Plan business plan, but this may change depending on market forces and the impending FWS decision on the status of the LPC under ESA.

WAFWA Lesser Prairie-Chicken Conservation Update

LPCIC Meeting (07-09-17)

Prepared by: Jim Pitman, WAFWA Conservation Delivery Director

Landowner Interest in the WAFWA Program

Term Contracts

- Currently there are 30 active term applications on file spanning 196,589 acres which far exceeds our current needs.
Permanant Agreements

- WAFWA staff are regularly contacted by landowners and conservation organizations with potential sites (easement and fee title). Additionally, the WAFWA staff are also continually searching for properties that meet our objectives.
- WAFWA staff develop proposals for LPCI consideration when suitable sites are identified.

WAFWA Executed Agreements

General Contract Information

- WAFWA has 1 non-offset agreement in the mixed grass that covers 8,912 acres. These agreements do not generate mitigation credits but provided the landowner with take exemptions through the 4(d) rule while the LPC was federally listed.
- Mitigation credits are being generated from 14 term contracts and 3 permanently conserved sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area</th>
<th>Term Contracts</th>
<th>Permanent Agreements</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acres</td>
<td>CHAT 1 &amp; 2 (%)</td>
<td>Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Grass</td>
<td>75,137</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>1,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Sagebrush</td>
<td>12,683</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>29,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinnery Oak</td>
<td>16,059</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
<td>1,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortgrass</td>
<td>9,513</td>
<td>99.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>113,391</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>32,938</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conservation Practices

- There are 14 rangeland conservation plans and 3 planted grass management plans being implemented. All range plans include the core practice of prescribed grazing and all planted grass plans include at least 1 disturbance practice during the life of the agreement.
- Practice prescriptions follow the NRCS standards identified in the USFWS biological opinion of their LPC initiative with the exception of grazing which is applied more conservatively (33% utilization).
- Restoration practices have been completed on 14,045 acres across 8 different contracts. There are an additional 4,183 acres prescribed for future years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area</th>
<th>Completed Acres of Range Planting</th>
<th>Completed Acres of Brush Management (Mechanical)</th>
<th>Completed Acres of Brush Management (Chemical)</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Grass</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,199</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Sagebrush</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinnery Oak</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>2,836</td>
<td>8,128</td>
<td>11,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortgrass</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>882</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,035</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,128</strong></td>
<td><strong>14,045</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WAFWA Conservation Expenditures**

- WAFWA has expended $4.25 million on term agreements since the inception of the program to cover sign-up incentives, restoration payments, and annual maintenance payments. An additional $14.3 million is obligated to these agreements for the duration of their terms.
- The annual cost to conserve the 3 WAFWA permanent conservation sites is $27.59 per acre per year over the next 25 years. That amount will cover all acquisition and management expenditures. The specific permanent conservation acquisition costs are confidential.

**Progress Towards Primary Goals of the RWP**

**Breeding Population Size**

- The 2017 range-wide breeding population estimate was 33,269 (90% CI: 23,619 – 44,325) which represents an approximate 35% increase from the previous year. The increase was statistically significant at the 80% confidence level.
- Apparent breeding population increases were also estimated in 3 of 4 ecoregions including the Sand Sagebrush Prairie, Mixed Grass Prairie, and Shortgrass Prairie. An apparent annual breeding population decrease was estimated in the Shinnery Oak Prairie. However, only the estimated annual increase in the Shortgrass Prairie Ecoregion (53.8%) was statistically significant at the 80% confidence level. Thus, there is reasonably high likelihood that the other estimated regional population changes could have been due simply to random sampling variation.
- Breeding populations have been generally increasing over the last 4 years following a period of severe drought that occurred from 2011-2013.
- The 10-year moving average population currently sits at 37,501 which is 56.0% of the 67,000 bird goal. The current regional averages all fall below the stated goals too (Mixed Grass = 46.7%, Shortgrass = 83.6%, Shinnery Oak = 41.7%, Sand Sagebrush = 20.7%).
Permanent Conservation
• The RWP goal is to establish at least 1 stronghold in each ecoregion. A stronghold is at least 25,000 acres and includes at least 6 leks, consists of >65% grassland, contains verifiable long-term development protection, all the LPC habitat needs, management certainly, and habitat connectivity.
• WAFWA site in the sand sagebrush meets all the criteria to be considered as a stronghold.
• WAFWA has also conserved 1,563 acres in the shinnery oak ecoregion. There are 12,239 acres on the nearby WMA that are also permanently conserved. This complex of properties does not yet qualify as a stronghold because it does not meet the acreage criteria. 

Nearby properties will be high priority targets when funds are available.
• WAFWA acquired 1,782 acres of permanent conservation in the mixed grass ecoregion last winter and anticipates completing a deal on an adjacent property later this summer. Additional properties in this vicinity will be high priority targets when funds are available.
• The WAFWA has not yet acquired any permanent conservation in shortgrass ecoregion but funds have been obligated to pending projects in that region. It is anticipated that WAFWA will be able to permanently conserve all those sites later this summer.
• There are also many other potential qualifying acreages that have been conserved by our partners. WAFWA is trying to determine the exact spatial extent of those properties so we can more accurately assess progress towards the stronghold goals.

NAGP Presentation, Steve Belinda

NAGP was formed in 1999 to advocate for the conservation of all 12 NA grouse species. NAGP works on policy and partnerships for grouse conservation. NAGP has been involved with LPC for a long time and endorsed (formally and informally) the RWP when it was being developed.

NAGP goals for LPC are for more birds and achieved through -
1. A recovered LPC populations rangewide with no threat of listing
2. State leadership and control of LPC conservation
3. Continued voluntary conservation efforts and opportunities for all

NAGP undertook this effort to make an objective look at efforts through the lens of how LPC are doing and to follow up on the NAGP endorsement of the RWP. Specifically to –
1. Fulfillment of mission and direction by BOD priorities by assessing the effectiveness (right actions at the right place at the right time for the right price) of LPC conservation programs under the umbrella of the RWP and Identify areas for improvement, tweaks, changes or additions.
2. Provide input into the US FWS SSA and listing determination
3. Provide information to new federal administration on importance of LPC conservation and to keep it a priority at the national level
4. Identify areas for NAGP assistance/participation in efforts
5. Transfer lessons learned from LPC efforts into new efforts for GPC and STG

NAGP undertook the project in the following way –
1. Reviewed the public information available on each LPC program and the status of LPC
2. Conducted interviews with a wide range of stakeholders
3. Used the lens of the “chicken” for assessment
4. Conducted a professional analysis and assessment from NAGP with people familiar and experienced in LPC conservation
5. Developed recommendations that are likely to improve LPC conservation efforts

NAGP specifically looked at programs to determine the following –
1. Effectiveness of Conservation Actions for LPC based on current information/science (consistent application of proven actions to ensure LPC benefit in coordination with other programs at the landscape scale)
2. Efficiency of Conservation Resources applied to conservation actions (ensure the right actions is taken in the right place at the right time for the right price)
3. Accountability of Conservation Programs to Achieve Conservation Outcomes (recover LPC to suitable levels and sustain those levels for perpetuity and ensure funding and resources are being carried out in a way that benefits LPC and is working towards stated goals)

NAGP identified the following key areas where specific recommendations can lead to increased likelihood of successful LPC conservation actions that are more effective and result in recovered LPC populations.
A. Strategic application of LPC actions and limited resources (conservation triage and targeting)
B. Better coordination among all conservation actors and actions
C. Better Communications and Increased transparency (Trust)
D. Consistent application of science and management, with fast inclusion/changes based on new information
E. Increased funding and opportunity for all in LPC conservation

NAGP Next Steps
- Invite WAFWA to review/discuss report/recommendations
- Meet with US FWS to present recommendations
- Finalize report and release to public
- Mobilize NAGP policy efforts based on recommendations
- Coordination with LPC programs for NAGP help
Lesser Prairie Chicken Interstate Working Group Update

- Grant Beaufreze-New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish (chair)
- Brett Cooper-Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation
- Kent Fricke-Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism
- Liza Rossi-Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Brad Simpson-Texas Parks and Wildlife
- Bill VanPeet-WAFWA
IWG Projects

- Range Wide Plan 5 year review
- LEPC translocation in CO and KS
- LEPC Historical Range Analysis
Lesser Prairie Chicken Range Wide Conservation Plan 5 Year Review

• The Interstate Working Group has begun a 5 year review of the RWP as outlined in the Adaptive Management Section of the RWP.

• Bill VanPelt will discuss the specifics of this review.
Translocation

• Goals
  – Increase long-term persistence and distribution of lesser prairie-chickens within the Sand Sagebrush Ecoregion
  – Assess the feasibility of translocations as a management tool for restoring populations

• 2016
  – February: idea proposed
  – April: Cimarron and Comanche site visits
  – June: research meeting
  – September/October: trapping and translocation

• 2017
  – March/April: trapping and translocation
  – May/June: Monitoring

• 2018 and 2019
  – March/April: trapping and translocation
  – Work with KSU
  – Year-round Monitoring
Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands
Fall 2016

- 27 lesser prairie-chickens trapped and translocated
- 13 males released on Cimarron
- 13 males and 1 female released on Comanche
- 19 days of trapping
  - KDW PT
  - CPW
  - WAFWA
Spring 2017

- 83 lesser prairie-chickens trapped and translocated
- 19 females and 16 males released on Cimarron
- 19 females and 29 males released on Comanche
- 23 days of trapping
  - KDWPT
  - CPW
  - WAFWA
CO Results

- Fall 2016 (27 released)
  - 11 known mortalities
- Spring 2017 (83 released)
  - April 29 snow storm
  - 10 hen mortalities
  - 11 male mortalities
- 13 hens nested
  - 8 hatched, 4 depredated, 1 nesting
- 82 chicks hatched in CO
- Tracking a nest in OK
  - CO released hen at a native OK lek (~30 miles from release site). Accompanied by a male from CO release.
KS Results

- 4 lek/concentrations
  - 1 near the native bird lek, 3 established by translocated birds

- 3 documented nests in KS
  - 1 successful, 1 depredated, 1 nesting

Movement across state lines
- CO birds going to KS and joining their leks
- 3 hens from KS came to CO
- 6 CO and 1 KS birds have gone to OK
Future Plans

- Work with Dr. David Haukos at Kansas State University
  - PhD Student
  - Satellite GPS transmitters
  - Continued VHF Monitoring
- Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Funding
- Competitive State Wildlife Grant
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife Funding
- Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Funding
Jonathan Reitz and Liza Rossi, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Kent Fricke and Kraig Schultz, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
Lance Brown, John Linn, and Jeff Stoney, District Rangers, U.S. Forest Service
Mike Welker, Andy Chappell, and Lyndsey Smythe, U.S. Forest Service
Dave Haukos, Unit Leader, Kansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit
Dan Sullins, Post-Doctoral Student, Kansas State University
Roger Wolfe, Jim Pitman, Mike Mitchener, Brad Odle, and Daryl Fisher, Lesser Prairie-chicken Program, WAFWA
Analysis of the Lesser Prairie Chicken Historical Range

• Current historical range estimated at ~182,843 sq. mi.
• Estimated occupied range is ~30,900 sq.mi.
• 83% reduction
While historical range estimates of LEPC have varied, it appears that most—if not all—estimates were based primarily on the locations of observations, rather than the distribution of the habitat on which the LEPC requires. Due to discrepancies in some historical observations and records and the apparent lack of consideration for required habitat for the species, there is reason to question the historical range boundary used in the RWP, as well as other estimates of the historical range.
Our evaluation of the LEPC historical range will include the following:

- A review of historical observations.
  - BISON and WAFWA databases
- A cluster analysis of historical observations.
- An examination of historical vegetation and climate and correlation with LEPC use patterns.
- An examination of topography to predict potential use areas and identification of areas that were likely avoided.
Discussion

- A cursory review of historical LEPC observations indicate that some of the points far outside the expected range, and a few questionable points within the current historical range, should be excluded from analysis.

- Historical vegetation, climate, and topography, indicate that the historical range is likely reduced from previous estimates, particularly in the southeastern portion of the range in Texas.

- As a result of the full analysis of the data, the IWG will propose a new historical range boundary for the LEPC.