



## Use of the WHEG for Conservation Planning under the Lesser-Prairie-Chicken Initiative

### General:

The regionalized Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) for lesser prairie-chicken (LEPC) serves two functions: 1) use as a planning tool to identify limiting factors for LEPC; 2) and will be used to demonstrate what concerns/threats are most limiting range wide and how NRCS has addressed those on our LPCI contracts. The WHEG has been designed with the goal of consistency in mind. That is, someone other than the original planner can revisit the site and understand why management was planned as it was, and gain some idea as to whether or not management is trending in the direction originally planned. It is important to realize the WHEG is not utilized in the ranking/scoring of LPCI applications. The benchmark and planned scores only provide a snapshot of current habitat condition for LEPC and where improvement could be made. There will be occasions where deciding between choices of habitat condition will not clearly be defined due to site specific conditions. In those situations, it is important to document your observations and thoughts as they relate to site specific conditions, and what may or may not need to be accomplished to obtain LEPC habitat on the application acres. Perhaps most importantly these efforts should be coordinated with a range specialist to link those recommendations to the Ecological Site Description (ESD), to better understand what the potential of the site is to produce habitat conditions for LEPC. On large and diverse landscapes more than 1 WHEG may be necessary.

### Section A:

These questions relate to limiting factors over which the applicant likely does not have control. Although the WHEG will not be utilized for ranking this section may be utilized in the future for screening of applications, as those with too much fragmentation will likely not be able to provide sufficient quality habitat to maintain a viable population of LEPC. That is to say LEPCs may be present at times in these areas but the habitat may not be of sufficient quantity/quality to justify an investment.

### Section B:

These questions identify limiting factors that have the potential to be controlled by the applicant, and by addressing them it can make a difference in quality LEPC habitat. Remember when assessing Woody Invasion the question should be considered as it relates to LEPC habitat. Recognize that isolated instances of woody establishment (e.g., shade trees, trees around watering facilities) that are important to a producer may be worked around. Especially, if the long term benefit to LEPC habitat will be significantly upgraded by other planned enhancements.

### Section C D E:

Sections C, D, and E provide an assessment of the vegetation structure and mosaic within and adjoining the application and determine which habitat(s) factors are most limiting LEPC populations. It is important to recognize all application/planning units may be limited in its site potential (see the ESD) to provide nesting habitat, but could produce brood rearing habitat if nesting habitat is available within the evaluation area. It is also important the planner not try to develop management alternatives with the goal of attaining Historical Climax Plant Community (see the ESD) phase and stage for all sites. The needs of the LEPC and goals of the producer need to be weighed with resource maintenance/improvement and identify management alternatives that best fits all needs. Brood rearing cover for example may not be present if all acres are at their highest HCPC. Planners need to recognize we can protect our rangeland resources and provide beneficial LEPC habitat by considering both resources and planning accordingly.