



**Lesser Prairie-Chicken Coordination Call Minutes
November 15, 2012**

MODERATOR: Barth Crouch

PARTICIPANTS: David Wolfe, Jason Hartman, Sarah Pope, Seth Gallagher, Stephanie Manes, Bill Vanpelt, Jon Kuba, Clay Nichols, Jason Thomas, Sean Kyle, Ken Brunson, Terri Sage, Mark Witecha, Matt Bain, Michele Witecha, Rod Winkler, Allison Arnold,, Grant Beauprez, Doug Schoeling, Heather Whitlaw, Ken Collins, Chris Berens, Zach Eddy, Kelly Corman, Bob McCready, Barth Crouch,

USFWS Update: Allison Arnold Listing process - The Service is mandated to send the proposed rule to Federal Register by 11/29. Question: when would FR be published? Answer: shortly after it was submitted, so assuming the proposed rule is submitted on the 29th, they probably the week following. However, if it is submitted earlier, it would be published in the Federal Register earlier.

Lesser Prairie Chicken Interstate Working Group (LPCIWG) Update:Sean Kyle

Earlier in the year, the LPCIWG was directed by the 5 state agencies in coordination with other federal agencies, to develop a range-wide management plan for LEPC to address the threats that would potentially lead to listing of the species. In August, the LPCIWG Science Team met in Denver and developed draft population goals based on the four LECP habitat regions. The draft goal is 66,000 birds range-wide which is an approx. 35,000 increase over estimated current population. The LPCIWG Science Team developed guidelines for defining LECP habitat focal areas which collectively would be suitable for managing 75% of population goal. These are areas where conservation action would be targeted and the objective is to maintain 70% high quality habitat in each focal area. The focal area maps will be used to target priority actions in each focal area. LPCIWG has been working on a habitat quality and impacts metric system. This will be reviewed next week by LPCIWG Science Team and then reviewed by the a Voluntary Offset Committee (VOC) in late Nov. Following the VOC meeting, the final draft of the metrics system will be reviewed by a mitigation banking team that will meet the week of December 20th. Some states are organizing public meetings to review the above. KS had three public meetings this week. The 5-state plan draft is going to be completed by March 1st, then sent to the states for review until it is presented to the FWS by March 30. Public meetings will be scheduled in all states. Question: Is the LPCIWG looking at the value impact to LEPC habitat will be? Answer: a draft has been circulated to LPCIWG Science Team, and does include impacts metrics.

EDF's Range-wide Habitat Credit Exchange Program-David Wolfe of EDF

In the spring, David Wolfe had mentioned on a previous LEPC call, that EDF would be developing in launching a LEPC range-wide Credit Trading System. EDF reached out all relevant state and federal agency partners. Presently, a wide variety of stakeholders are interested in moving forward and will be launching meetings in December. Stakeholders include Farm Bureaus, Cattlemen’s Associations, energy companies and the USFWS. In addition, the participants in the WHCR/LEPC HCP process are supportive of the EDF process. EDF’s goal is to work collaboratively with the the LPCIWG and would prefer not to duplicate the similar LPCIWG . If you are interested or have questions, please contact David Wolfe.

Conservation Partners Grants from NFWF - The following four NFWF grants were announced last week. See the spreadsheet below provided by John Curry at NFWF:

Sarah Pope- Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts: The project will be used to hire a new position in the OK Panhandle to work with landowners to provide help getting plans written; implementing state, local and USDA programs; and keeping track of soon to expire CRP contracts with goal of keeping these acres in grass. This position will probably be located in Texas or Beaver county. An additional plug from Sarah: the Ken Burns PBS Dust Bowl documentary is starting this week on Sunday and Monday.

Jason Hartman - Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation The NFWF funded project will place 2 individuals in the western portion of KS, one around Hays and a second in the Red Hills with a focus on habitat projects, prescribed burning and starting prescribed burning associations. The positions will assist with planning, training, basically doing whatever they can to support prescribed fire and other habitat actions. A search for people to fill the positions will begin in the next couple of weeks.

Seth Gallagher- Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory The grant will maintain capacity by providing funding for an existing on the ground private land biologist in SE CO. This funding will extend this position’s funding through mid 2015. The grant also leveraged an additional \$55k for habitat projects.

From Barth: An announcement on NFWF’s Shortgrass Prairie Stewardship Program RFP should be out early next week.

Stephanie Manes -- KS Livestock Association’s Ranchland Trust Across much of the LEPC range, there has been little interest from landowners in donating or even entering into paid easements. There is reason to believe that many producers would benefit from donated or partially donated easements. The goal of grant to provide funding for Cattlemen’s Land Trusts in KS, TX and CO to conduct outreach and education to producers with the goal of increasing the frequency of easements across much of the range of the LEPC. The effort will rely on two existing positions in CO, one in TX, and add one new position in KS to meet the grant deliverables.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation	OK	District 3 (OK)	34888	Counties in Oklahoma with the highest	Lesser Prairie Chicken Ecosystem	Provides technical assistance and
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Districts				population of the lesser prairie chicken. These counties include Roger Mills, Ellis, Woods, Woodward, Harper, Beaver, Texas, and Cimmaron Counties.	Coordination	coordination to and among districts and landowners to increase participation in farm bill programs that directly benefit the habitat of the Lesser Prairie Chicken.
Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation	KS	District 1 (KS)	35077	The project will cover the western third of Kansas in the known and expanding LPC range and within the NRCS LPCI.	Expand the Use of Prescribed Fire in the LPCI Area in Kansas	Place two multi-county fire coordinators to work with prescribed burning associations (PBAs). They would work with existing PBAs and develop new PBAs in the LPCI area to increase prescribed fire use.
Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory	CO	District 4 (CO)	35134	LEPC estimated occupied range in Baca, Prowers, Kiowa and Cheyenne Counties in Colorado	Enhancing Lesser Prairie-chicken (LEPC) habitat in CO	Partner Biologists will reach at least 35 landowners to raise awareness of Lesser Prairie-chickens and to assist with implementation habitat projects to enhance over 20,000 acres on private land in CO

Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust	CO, KS, TX	District 4 (CO); District 1 (KS); District 13 (TX); District 19 (TX)	35278	The effort will focus on the current range of the Lesser Prairie Chicken is found in southeast Colorado, western Kansas and Texas as well as surrounding native shortgrass prairie areas in the region.	Shortgrass Prairie Ranchers Conservation Easement Outreach	Cattlemen's land trusts in Colorado, Kansas and Texas propose directed outreach with ranchers to promote and complete conservation easements and other strategies to protect the shortgrass prairie
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Open Discussion on CRP Haying/Grazing statistics by everyone

There has been interest whether there are statistics available for the emergency grazing and haying that occurred in the late summer. Barth will try to get this data and distribute prior to the next call. Rod Winkler volunteered to contact the FSA Conservation Specialists in the LEPC states. Sean Kyle -- TX averaged 6% hayed and grazed in the 17 LEPC counties while KS had a statewide overall use of 18%.

December Call?

Do we want a call in December as it would be December 20th? Or should we wait until January 17th? Barth is asking folks to send an email if they want a December call and if so, what date would be the best.

Questions:

Question for David Wolfe. Would there be any limitations be for the EDF process. Answer: the FWS allows for different mitigation programs and so an EDF generated process would be supported by FWS if it meets the FWS minimum mitigation requirements.

A question regarding NRCS LCPI LEPC vegetation surveys. Ken Brunson will follow-up with Christian Hagen. This topic, regarding timing guidelines for the vegetation transects on LPCI contracts, can be discussed on the next call. Barth will work with Jon and Christian to have them on the call.