



## PRESS RELEASE

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### For Immediate Release

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### **Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Comment on Draft Range-Wide Lesser Prairie-Chicken Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances**

*Incorporates measures in state-developed range-wide lesser prairie-chicken conservation plan that address impacts from oil and gas activities*

DENVER--Following months of cooperation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the five range states of the lesser prairie-chicken, the agency today continued its support of state efforts to conserve the species and its habitat. The Service is soliciting public comment on a draft lesser prairie-chicken range-wide candidate conservation agreement with assurances for oil and gas activities (LPC CCAA) and draft environmental assessment (EA) that will help implement the Service-endorsed range states' lesser prairie-chicken conservation plan, a conservation strategy for the species that is compatible with the economic well-being of private landowners.

“Working with states, the oil and gas industry and other partners, we have come up with a voluntary agreement that will allow us to achieve the goal of conserving an imperiled species while keeping the energy industry going strong, providing jobs and economic growth in local communities,” said the Service’s Mountain-Prairie Regional Director Noreen Walsh.

The draft LPC CCAA is a voluntary conservation agreement between non-federal landowners and the Service to conserve the prairie-chicken, a species proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies would administer the CCAA and hold the permit, while oil and gas companies would enroll under the permit through certificates of inclusion. In return for volunteering to implement the LPC CCAA, participants would receive assurances that the Service will not impose further commitments or restrictions for the lesser prairie-chicken during the term of the permit, even if the species is listed.

The LPC CCAA incorporates measures within the states’ plan that address impacts from oil and gas activities on enrolled lands. Oil and gas enrollment of lands into the CCAA would generate mitigation

fees, which would provide significant funds for the implementation of conservation actions under the states' plan. The proposed term of the LPC CCAA is 30 years.

On May 6, 2013, the Service proposed a special rule that, in the event the lesser prairie-chicken were to be listed as a threatened species, would encourage voluntary participation in conservation programs benefiting the species. On December 11, 2013, the Service published a revised proposed special rule and reopened the public comment period for the special rule and the listing proposal. The Service will issue its final listing determination no later than March 30, 2014.

The Service will accept comments on the draft LPC CCAA and EA until January 17, 2014. Copies of the LPC CCAA and EA are available on line at <http://www.fws.gov/coloradoes/>.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>*

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