

A Peer Review Plan for  
the Lesser Prairie-  
Chicken  
Species Status Assessment draft Report

Arlington Ecological Services Field Office  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2

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***About the Document:***

The format of this peer review plan reflects the necessary items enumerated in the 2004 Office of Management and Budget memorandum M-05-03 entitled “Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review” (p. 29 i-x; [https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/memoranda\\_fy2005\\_m05-03](https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/memoranda_fy2005_m05-03)). Further, in accordance with the Service’s 2016 memorandum entitled “Peer Review Process” ([https://www.fws.gov/endangered/improving\\_ESA/peer\\_review\\_process.html](https://www.fws.gov/endangered/improving_ESA/peer_review_process.html)) an independent office, otherwise not associated with the dissemination, will select peer reviewers and coordinate the process.

**Subject and purpose.** The Service’s Arlington Ecological Services Field Office (and others) is drafting a Species Status Assessment (SSA) report to inform an evaluation of the status of the lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). The SSA report is a comprehensive evaluation of the biological status of the lesser prairie-chicken and its viability as a species. The SSA report considers the ecological needs as well as current and forecasted future conditions for the species. The SSA report will be used to inform a decision (to later be published in a 12-month finding) to classify the lesser prairie-chicken as threatened, endangered or “not warranted” under the Act. Public inquiries may be directed to the agency contact listed below.

**Importance of the “dissemination”.** The SSA report will disseminate likely “influential scientific information” and provide the scientific foundation to inform any subsequent listing determination and/or recovery plan under the Act.

***About the Peer Review Process:***

**Timing of the review:** The peer review will take place between August and October 2017.

**Type of review:** The Service is contracting the solicitation and coordination of the independent scientific review. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure that the best biological and scientific data are being used in the SSA, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the SSA. Peer reviewers were asked to consider, but not limit their responses, to the following questions and provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or ideas:

***Available Data***

1. Please identify any oversights or omissions of data or information, and their relevance to the assessment. Are there others sources of information or studies that were not included that are relevant to assessing the viability of this species and not repetitive of other information or studies already included? What are they are how are they relevant?

2. Provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document. Have the authors been explicit about assumptions and limitations of, and concerns regarding, the data, and are these appropriately qualified or explained? Are there concerns that the Service did not identify, and if so, how relevant are these concerns to the assessment of viability of the lesser prairie-chicken? Are there any inconsistencies in how the data are presented or assessed?

### ***Analysis of Available Data***

3. Have the assumptions and methods used in the SSA report been clearly and logically stated in light of the best available information? If not, please identify the specific assumptions and methods that are unclear or illogical.
4. Are there demonstrable errors of fact or interpretation? Have the authors of the SSA report provided reasonable and scientifically sound interpretations and syntheses from the scientific information presented in the report? Are there instances in the SSA report where a different but equally reasonable and sound interpretation might be reached that differs from that provided by the Service? If any instances are found where this is the case, please provide the specifics regarding those particular concerns.
5. Provide feedback on the inclusion and portrayal of uncertainty in the SSA report. Have the scientific uncertainties present given the data and the analyses conducted been clearly identified and has the degree of uncertainty been appropriately characterized? If not, please identify any specific concerns.

**About public participation:** If the SSA report is used to support a classification determination, the public will then have the opportunity to comment on that proposed rule or finding when it is published. The Service will not be providing public comments to the peer reviewers before they conduct their review. The public is invited to submit comments on this peer review plan by sending emails to the agency contact listed below. The Service will summarize in the final decision document, and make publicly available, copies of each individual independent peer review letter.

**Number of reviewers:** The Service will use five (5) individual independent subject matter expert peer reviewers.

**Necessary expertise.** The Service requests that the contractor seeks peer reviewers with expertise in the following topics of scientific investigation including:

- Wildlife Biology/Ecology, Ecology, or Wildlife Management or other related fields.
- Demonstrated experience working with the management of grouse species, especially lesser prairie-chicken, and wildlife population management.
- Expert knowledge of wildlife population dynamics, and/or wildlife population modeling.
- Expert knowledge of native grasslands ecosystems and effects of climate change within those ecosystems within the US is preferred.

**Scope of the review.** Peer reviewers will be advised that they should not provide advice on policy, including a decision-maker's tolerances for risk and uncertainty.

**Selection of peer reviewers.** The contractor will be responsible for assigning an experienced, senior

and well-qualified manager to lead this review and for the selection of 5 well-qualified, independent reviewers.

The independent peer reviewers shall be experienced senior-level ecologists, grouse biologists, population modelers, native grasslands habitat specialists and/or regional climate scientists who have previously conducted similar reviews or regularly authored or provided reviews of research and conservation articles for the scientific literature. Reviewers must be well-versed in the demographic management of grouse-species, preferably lesser prairie-chickens. While expertise is the primary consideration, reviewers should also be selected to represent a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the subject.

The expertise of qualified reviewers shall include at least 2 reviewers who meet criteria 1, 2 and 3 below, and at least one reviewer who meets criteria 4.

The Contractor shall ensure the peer review process complies with the Service's July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. For example, potential conflicts of interest should be avoided, if possible and disclosed if not possible. Potential conflicts of interest would likely include: employment or affiliation with the Service, the five range States, the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Species Status Assessment Contributors Working Group, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Western Governors Association; peer reviewers who have offered a public opinion or a statement either for or against listing the lesser prairie-chicken; and peer reviewers directly or indirectly employed by or associated in any way with any organization that has either litigated the federal government concerning lesser prairie-chicken or taken a position on one side or the other about recovery and listing of the lesser prairie-chicken. Finally, the reviewers should have no financial or other conflicts of interest with the outcome or implications of the report.

Each reviewer will submit a conflict of interest disclosure that will be posted along with the peer review plan on the Service's Science Excellence website (<https://www.fws.gov/science>) and made publicly available.

**Agency contact:** Caitlin Snyder, Unified Listing Team, 703-358-2673 or [caitlin\\_snyder@fws.gov](mailto:caitlin_snyder@fws.gov)