



# News Release

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**Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)** [www.fws.gov/southwest/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)

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## **Service Announces a 6-Month Extension of the Final Listing Determination for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken**

*Agency seeks additional information from public, scientific community*

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced a 6-month extension of the final determination of whether to provide protection under the Endangered Species Act for the lesser prairie-chicken. The Service is taking this action in order to solicit additional scientific information and public comment before making a final listing determination. Publication of this announcement will reopen the comment period on the proposed rule to list the species for 30 days.

On December 11, 2012, the Service proposed to list the lesser prairie-chicken as a threatened species primarily due to habitat loss and fragmentation from the conversion of grasslands to agricultural uses; encroachment by invasive woody plants; wind energy development; petroleum production; and the presence of roads and manmade vertical structures. During the initial public comment period, the Service held four public meetings/hearings in Woodward, OK; Garden City, KS; Lubbock, TX; and Roswell, NM. On May 6, 2013, the Service reopened the public comment period to gather additional public comments on the December 11, 2012, listing proposal; a proposed 4(d) special rule; and the draft rangewide conservation plan as it relates to the Service's listing determination for the lesser prairie-chicken. The second comment period closed on June 20, 2013.

Section 4(b)(6) of the Act requires that the Service takes one of three actions within one year of a proposed listing: (1) Finalize the proposed listing; (2) withdraw the proposed listing; or (3) extend the final determination by not more than 6 months, if there is substantial disagreement regarding the sufficiency or accuracy of the available data relevant to the determination, for the purposes of soliciting additional data.

Public comments received by the Service since the publication of the proposed rule have expressed concerns regarding the sufficiency and accuracy of the data related to the listing proposal for the lesser prairie-chicken. Therefore, in consideration of these disagreements the Service is extending the final determination for 6 months in order to solicit scientific information that will help to clarify these issues. The Service will make a final listing determination for the lesser prairie-chicken no later than March 30, 2014.

The 30-day comment period will begin with the publication of this announcement in the *Federal Register* to ensure the public has full access to, and an opportunity to comment on, all the available information we have received since the second comment period closed. The Service is soliciting input from concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party.

If you previously submitted comments or information on the proposed rule, please do not resubmit them. The Service has incorporated them into the public record, and will fully consider them in the preparation of the final determination. The Service will consider all additional information, comments and recommendations received from all interested parties with the intention that any final action resulting from this proposal be as accurate as possible and based on the best available scientific and commercial data.

Written comments must be received by close of business on August 8, 2013. For further information on how and where to submit comments, and to review and/or download these documents visit the Service's Southwest Region's website, <http://southwest.fws.gov/>.

The Service continues to work with the five range states to encourage voluntary conservation of the species and its habitat. Conservation agreements are currently in place in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. Additional partnerships between federal agencies and private landowners are contributing to restoring, reconnecting and conserving habitat for the lesser prairie-chicken. Most significantly, the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative has provided funding and technical assistance to private landowners seeking to improve habitat for the prairie-chicken.

More information on the species, its habitat, the voluntary conservation agreements and the benefits they provide for landowners can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/LPC.html>.

The Service's priority is to work with stakeholders and local communities to make ESA implementation less complex, less contentious and more effective. We seek to accelerate recovery of threatened and endangered species across the nation, while making it easier for people to coexist with these species.

*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 [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.*

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