



# News Release

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## **Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes Special Rule under Endangered Species Act Endorsing Landmark State Conservation Plan for Lesser Prairie-Chicken**

*Would Exempt Agricultural Practices, Other Development Consistent  
with the Plan from Act's Restrictions if Species is Listed as Threatened*

In light of a landmark conservation plan developed by the five range states of the lesser prairie-chicken, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed a special rule that would provide regulatory certainty for landowners by exempting from regulation conservation actions and development undertaken in accordance with the plan, should the bird be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The Service will accept comments for 30 days on the proposed special rule, which would exempt from regulation under the Act any activities that harm or result in take of the prairie-chicken if incidental to carrying out the state-developed range-wide lesser prairie-chicken conservation plan. The proposed special rule would also exempt take incidental to routine agricultural practices on existing cultivated lands and to landowner participation in the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative.

“Regardless of whether the lesser prairie-chicken ultimately warrants the protection of the ESA, we can all agree that continued state leadership in management and recovery of this species, as well as a conservation strategy that is compatible with the economic well-being of ranchers and other private landowners, is what is needed here,” said Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. “The states’ plan, along with this proposed special rule, could provide an unprecedented model for state leadership in conservation of a threatened species.”

The lesser prairie-chicken is a species of prairie grouse commonly recognized for its colorful spring mating display and orange eye combs. For nearly 15 years, the Service has considered the lesser prairie-chicken to be a species in trouble, and the severe drought experienced in recent years in the southern Great Plains has not helped matters.

Once found in abundant numbers across much of Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, the lesser prairie-chickens' historical range of native grasslands and prairies has been reduced by an estimated 84 percent. Taking actions to conserve the species will also restore the health of native grasslands that support local economies and communities in addition to migratory birds and other

wildlife.

On May 6, 2013, the Service proposed a rule that, in the event that the lesser prairie-chicken were to be listed as a threatened species, would encourage voluntary participation in conservation programs benefiting the species. Today's proposed revision more specifically identifies and endorses the five states' range-wide conservation plan as one that, when implemented, addresses the conservation needs of the species.

The Service also reopened the public comment period for the proposed listing of the bird for an additional 30 days. The reopening of the public comment period and the revised 4(d) special rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on December 11, 2013. Comments will be accepted until January 10, 2014. More information on the lesser prairie-chicken is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/LPC.html>.

*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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