



## LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLAN

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See the full wildlife management plan template at:

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/huntwild/forms/index.phtml>

PWD 1046-W7000 (12/06)

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) provides free technical assistance to landowners and land managers interested in wildlife management through the private lands enhancement program. Local biologists work with landowners to develop and then meet the wildlife management goals and objectives for all species of landowner interest on a given property. A wildlife management plan (WMP) can provide numerous benefits for landowners. Once implemented it improves habitat, potentially increases wildlife numbers, and can improve grazing resources. Additionally, use of a WMP promotes aesthetic value, and therefore can raise property value.

The lesser prairie-chicken is a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. This particular WMP (specific to protecting and improving lesser prairie-chicken habitat) will fulfill the requirements for entering into a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA). A CCAA agreement, which encompasses the WMP and a Certificate of Inclusion (CI) issued to the landowner from TPWD for the enrolled properties, will protect the landowner from future land use restrictions that would be imposed -if and when the species is listed. For more information see the CCAA Fact Sheet.

The lesser prairie chicken WMP is designed as a template. Please contact your local biologist to arrange a site visit if you have an interest in developing a WMP for your property. This contact information for biologist by county can be found on the CCAA Fact Sheet, or on our website at:

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/technical\\_guidance/biologists/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/).

These WMPs many times can also be utilized by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), and other partners when working with their programs.



# LANDOWNER INFORMATION

<b>Tract Name:</b> _____	<b>Primary County:</b> _____
<b>Landowner:</b> _____	<b>Agent/Manager:</b> _____
<b>Address:</b> _____	<b>Address:</b> _____
_____	_____
<b>Business Phone:</b> _____	<b>Business Phone:</b> _____
<b>Mobile Phone:</b> _____	<b>Mobile Phone:</b> _____
<b>Email:</b> _____	<b>Email:</b> _____

1. Location of Property (Distance from nearest town and roads):
2. Legal Description of Property (Survey, Block, Section Numbers):
3. Conservation Reserve Program (acres, plant community, & highlight on map):
4. Acres covered in the plan:

## SECTION 1

1. **Describe current status of property** (e.g. presence of house, barns, roads, fences, windmills, oil/gas, etc)  
The property contains approximately 10 acres containing a homestead site with house, barns, trees, and fences. Normal ranching practices regularly take place throughout the property as well as ongoing maintenance of existing and new infrastructure including but not limited to fences, roads, power lines, buildings, pens, traps, windmills, water facilities, and equipment. An oil/gas well also exists on the property which also requires ongoing operation and maintenance by the operating company.
2. **Describe historic habitat types** (e.g. sagebrush mid-grass), plant composition, and land use:
3. **Describe current plant composition, land use, and any recent habitat manipulation:**
4. **List approximate acreage of exotic/introduced vegetation by species** (e.g. Bermuda, Weeping Lovegrass, Old World Bluestem, Salt Cedar):
5. **List any exotic animals present by species** (e.g. feral hogs):
6. **Habitat Management:**

CURRENT HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES and COST SHARE PROGRAMS:

Prescribed grazing		Ground disturbance (fallow disking, aeration)	
Prescribed burning		Native grass restoration	
Brush management/reduction		Pasture reseeding (over seeding)	
Fencing		Water Development	
Federal Cost Share Programs (EQIP, WHIP, Partners in Wildlife, etc.)		State or Other Cost Share Programs (LIP, etc.)	

**7. Livestock Management – current system:**

Livestock and rangeland management go hand in hand. To provide healthy rangeland, livestock numbers must be balanced with forage production. To accomplish this balance a forage inventory is needed. This inventory provides information on pounds of available forage under current conditions. With forage production information proper livestock numbers can be determined and from this a grazing scheme can be planned.

**POTENTIAL GRAZING SCHEMES:**

**Rotational** – herd(s) are moved from pasture to pasture, in a timely manner that allows sufficient periods of rest, provides needed flexibility to meet landowners objectives, livestock needs and accounts for growing season conditions.

**Seasonal deferment** – livestock are completely absent for certain times of year. Deferment is based on resource needs, type of livestock (cow/calf or stocker) and landowners operations.

**Flex-grazing** – a blend of cow/calf and stocker operations which provides the flexibility to reduce the stocking rate during stress periods by removing a percentage of the stockers as needed.

**Patch-grazing** – a fire-driven system in which the herd(s) move themselves to areas of the pastures which have been burned most recently.

**Continuous** – herd(s) have continuous access to all pastures at all times.

\*Duration and intensity of grazing must be balanced to increase or maintain good nesting and brood-rearing habitats, in addition to creating planned patterns of patchiness on the landscape. Light to moderate grazing (40 to 60% of growth remaining) provides needed nesting and brood rearing habitat. Diverse grazing pressure is desirable to create the needed patchwork of different vegetative heights, composition, interspersions and increased food plant production.

**Current System:**

**SECTION 2 - PREDATOR/EXOTIC SPECIES CONTROL**

**1. Exotic Vegetation Control:**

NOTE: Exotic vegetation can be very difficult to control. The timing, approach, intensity, and estimated costs of control measures need to be carefully planned with the assistance of qualified natural resource professionals.

**2. Exotic Animal Control:** animal species that are not native to the habitats where they occur (feral hogs, etc.) Feral hogs can be a detriment to lesser prairie-chicken populations through nest predation. While hogs generally

occur along drainages away from lesser prairie-chicken habitat, control efforts should take place when ever and where ever they are encountered.

**3. Predator Control (if any):**

NOTE: Native predators play functional roles in the systems they inhabit. Intensive predator control can be impractical and expensive at large scales and can have detrimental effects to native habitat by altering prey population densities. This practice should not be undertaken without a complete understanding of lesser prairie chicken and predator population dynamics and a clearly stated objective for the management action.

Grounds nesting birds and their natural predators have co-existed for millennia. There is some debate over the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of predator control to increase populations of ground nesting birds. One common theme to predator research is that intense pressure is required to reduce populations and once the pressure is removed populations bounce back to their original levels or higher. When you consider the time, effort and money necessary to maintain a predator control program, it becomes clear that your resources are better spent on habitat improvement. Quality nesting, brooding, roosting, loafing, escape and screening cover (i.e. good habitat) effectively insulated against depredation.

## **SECTION 3 – PARTICIPATION IN USDA FARM BILL PROGRAMS**

USDA programs can be valuable tools to increase a landowners’ ability to develop and improve lesser prairie chicken habitat by providing technical and financial assistance.

**1. Indicate specific program(s) and practices to be implemented:**

**2. Indicate where practices will be applied, time frame for completion, and expected wildlife benefits:**

**3. Describe how programs will be integrated with management plan (improve grazing system, decrease brush canopy cover, increase water distribution, etc.).**

## **SECTION 4 – UPLAND GAME BIRD MANAGEMENT**

**1. Habitat Management Goals** – all of the practices listed below can be used to increase the amount of space that is usable by lesser prairie-chickens, by evenly distributing (interspersed) the cover types needed by lesser prairie-chickens (nesting, brooding, escape, screening, and loafing cover).

**2. Description of Desired Habitat Condition**

In general, strive to produce a grass dominated landscape with interspersed forbs and low shrubs. Optimum lesser prairie-chicken habitat consists of large blocks of native rangeland in different stages of plant succession that offers native, mid-height grasses, weeds, and scattered low growing shrub cover (20-30%). Varying degrees of grass, weed, and shrub cover are needed across the landscape to meet the diverse habitat requirement of the lesser prairie-chicken. Habitat requirements reflect the specific needs of their breeding, nesting, brood-rearing, and feeding activities.

*Breeding:* Spring booming grounds, or leks, are characterized by low growing vegetation located in relatively open areas and found normally on rangeland hilltops. Breeding habitat can be maintained by continued removal of brush, feeding cattle at lek sites during winter, or mowing.

*Nesting:* Nesting habitat should consist of a high percentage of grass. Habitat management for nesting LPCs should focus on providing patches of dense, tall (knee to thigh), residual grass cover (last year's grass that was not grazed) for April and May nesting attempts. The only way to provide suitable nesting cover in late spring and early summer is to focus on providing residual cover. See "Livestock Recommendations" above. You should try to provide the residual nesting cover within 1-2 miles of active lek sites.

*Brood-rearing:* Good nesting habitat is not necessarily suitable brood-rearing habitat in terms of short shrub and forb cover. The shrubs provide escape cover, overhead concealment, and thermal cover. The smaller amount of grass cover, as compared to suitable nesting cover, means that recently hatched chicks can easily move and feed through the herbaceous vegetation. The increased weed component provides seeds and attracts insects that make up the majority of a chick's diet. Good brood-rearing habitat is generally considered to be suitable winter habitat as well. This is where mechanical treatments can create "weedy" areas throughout good grass cover for nesting.

See the enclosed "Lesser Prairie Chicken Management Leaflet, Number 6" from the NRCS for some additional and excellent information on LPC habitat and food needs.

#### **RECOMMENDED PRACTICES:**

**a) Fallow disking for lesser prairie chicken and other wildlife:** Promotes seed (LPC food) producing plants (forbs), creates ideal brood cover (bugging areas for chicks), and are more cost-effective than food plots. Disking should be located near leks but should not be done during spring. Disking may be done at most times during the dormant season but fall is recommended. Disking should be in a mosaic pattern and no more than 5-15% of the area annually. An area should not be disked again until after at least five years of original treatment in order to maximize species diversity.

**To Date -**

**Agreed to Implement -**

**b) Brush management/manipulation (Sand Sagebrush and Shinnery Oak):** Use of herbicides should be limited on habitat recovery sites -though the reduction of brush is required and a long-term plan of maintenance with the use of prescribed grazing and fire are in place. Any brush management should result in a mosaic of treated and untreated areas distributed over the landscape. Upland trees, including eastern red cedar and windbreaks, should be removed as lesser prairie-chickens strongly avoid them.

**To Date -**

**Agreed to Implement –**

**c) Native Grass Restoration:** A selected mixture adapted to the site of grasses, forbs and if needed shrubs should be used. For example, on a sandy loam site a mixture of switchgrass, little bluestem, sideoats grama, plains bristlegrass, Illinois bundleflower and aromatic sumac should be seeded.

**To Date –**

**Agreed to Implement -**

**d) Prescribed Grazing:** A forage inventory should be developed to obtain a baseline of forage production as a starting point for developing stocking rates. Also an inventory of livestock water is needed. The type of grazing system, forage production, landowner's objectives and water availability will help determine initial stocking rates to achieve goals.

**To Date -**

**Agreed to Implement -**

**e) Prescribed Burning:** Must be planned and applied using an approved burn plan (developed with the assistance of qualified professionals). Late winter/early spring burns are preferred and avoid annual burning of large areas to conserve residual nesting cover. Patch burning that burns less than 35% of total rangeland is preferred. Do not burn dunes (Sand Hill Ecological Sites) due to potential of severe erosion.

**To Date –**

**Agreed to Implement –**

**f) Fencing:** Fencing can be lethal to lesser prairie-chickens in flight. Fencing should only be used to achieve grazing goals. If feasible, barbed-wire fences should be marked to reduce potential collisions.

**To Date –**

**Agreed to Implement –**

**g) Cropland Management:** Minimum tillage farming practices leads to additional supplemental food supplies. Leave grain stubble and waste grain on the soil surface during winter months. Do not burn stubble and delay plowing until at least March 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Including crops such as alfalfa, wheat, grain sorghum, and oats may provide food resources during fall and winter.

**To Date –**

**Agreed to Implement -**

## **SECTION 5 -MONITORING LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN POPULATIONS AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

Monitoring progress toward goals is an important component of any endeavor. TPWD is responsible for annual monitoring of the CCAA through LPC WMPs. Landowners participating in the CCAA and implementing a WMP for LPCs agree to allow TPWD personnel (or an agreed upon designee) access to the enrolled lands for purposes of monitoring LPC populations and evaluation of effectiveness of habitat management practices. Monitoring can easily be completed by the landowner or land manager (or his/her agreed upon designee) after brief training by TPWD personnel or their designee.

Monitoring requirements in the CCAA allow all parties to evaluate progress. The population monitoring form (Appendix A) is intended for your use toward this effort. Due to TPWD staff workloads during the spring lesser prairie-chicken breeding season, it is recommended that the landowner volunteer to conduct population monitoring. If you choose to do so, please complete the form (Appendix A) and return to TPWD biologist by June 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

**a) Does the property contain active leks?**

**b) Does the property contain known historic leks?**

**c) Agreed upon population monitoring technique:** (lek counts or year-round incidental) – Describe how population monitoring is to be conducted.

**d) Agreed upon habitat monitoring:**





**Appendix A: Landowner LPC Monitoring Form**

Landowner: \_\_\_\_\_

Reporting Year: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Did you look/listen/survey historic leks (i.e., used to have birds, but has not had birds in the past 5 years) this spring (15 March-15 May)? YES NO (circle one)
  - a) If yes, did any of these historic lek locations have birds this year? YES NO (circle one)
  - b) If yes, how many historic lek locations now have birds? \_\_\_\_\_ How many birds? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 2) Did you look/listen/survey for new leks this spring (15 March-15 May)? YES NO (circle one)
  - a) If yes, did you find any? YES NO (circle one)
  - b) How many leks? \_\_\_\_\_ How many birds? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3) Did you look/listen/survey known leks this spring (15 March-15 May)? YES NO (circle one)
  - a) If yes, how many TOTAL leks do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) How many TOTAL LPCs? \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Please summarize your lek survey information below
  
- 4) Did you have any incidental LPC sightings outside of leks at anytime during the year? YES NO If yes, please describe below the time of year of your observation, what you saw, and location.

Date	Incidental Sighting Number of LPC	Lek Number	Males	Females	Unknown	Location Description

Please mail a copy of this completed form to your TPWD Wildlife Biologist by June 1<sup>st</sup>