

Lesser Prairie-Chicken

2021 Progress Report



An icon of America's grasslands, the lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) is a ground-nesting species of grouse found only in the southern Great Plains. Best known for their dramatic courtship display, lesser prairie-chickens depend on grassland habitats that have evolved under the interaction of fire and large herbivore grazing over the years. Primarily due to large-scale loss and fragmentation of habitat, their range distribution has been reduced by roughly 85 percent. Currently, lesser prairie-chickens inhabit portions of five states — Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas and Colorado.

About 95 percent of the lesser prairie-chicken's habitat is privately owned. With nearly all their habitat under private ownership, voluntary actions by private landowners are pivotal to the bird's success.

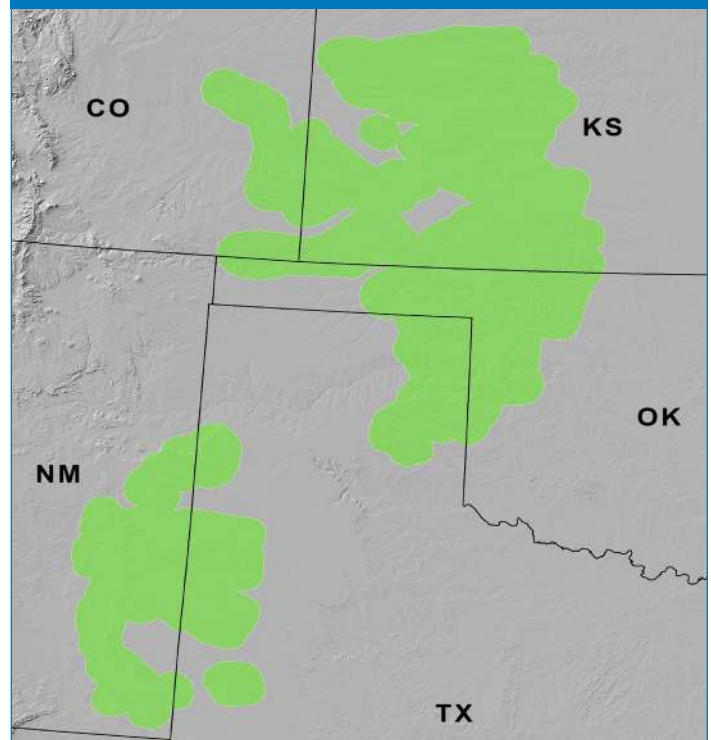
NRCS and the Prairie Chicken

NRCS launched the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) in 2010 to strategically focus conservation efforts and maximize biological benefits to prairie-chicken populations. NRCS' efforts are part of Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), through which NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help ranchers restore and protect habitat for prairie-chickens while also improving sustainability and productivity of associated grazing lands. WLFW also provides participants with regulatory predictability under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which ensures regulatory compliance for ranchers who continue to manage using NRCS-prescribed conservation practices for up to 30 years.

Actions

1. Protect, maintain and restore large tracts of grasslands and prairies.
2. Increase connectivity of grassland habitat.
3. Support sustainable grazing management that provides nesting cover and supports native plants.

FOCUS AREAS



Outcomes and Impacts

WLFW is enhancing NRCS' ongoing conservation efforts to support prairie-chicken recovery by strategically focusing the right practices in the right places to achieve beneficial outcomes. Partnerships between NRCS, scientists and private landowners provide scientific insights and tools that guide broad initiative investments, help plan and implement individual projects, and assess resulting outcomes. All of which also help share the working lands story and increase overall participation in the conservation effort. Anticipated long-term outcomes of this initiative are improved rangeland health, greater connectivity of core prairie-chicken habitat, and stabilization or recovery of prairie-chicken populations. Read more about LPCI outcomes in this May 2020 report at <https://www.lpcinitiative.org>.

Through conservation, ranchers are helping the prairie-chicken and other wildlife while improving operations.

Landowner: Dwight Abell, Kansas.
Photo by Jeremy Roberts.



Fiscal Year 2021 Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative NRCS Financial Assistance Contract Summary Environmental Quality Incentive Programs (EQIP)

State	Acres	NRCS Investment	Contracts
Colorado	14,801	\$514,322	4
Kansas	0	\$0	0
New Mexico	48,763	\$774,152	3
Oklahoma	0	\$0	0
Texas	18,211	\$267,958	5
Totals	81,774	\$1,556,432	12

Data source: NRCS Economic and Policy Assessment Division, October 2021

NRCS Goals

NRCS recognizes that America’s iconic grasslands support ranchers and rural communities, provide wildlife habitat, and store carbon and is committed to helping landowners and partners conserve them at landscape scales. The WLFW Framework for Conservation Action—Great Plains Biome is used to provide a common vision and coordination to address resource concerns and ecosystem threats across state boundaries. LPCI helps achieves Framework goals by targeting resources to address several of the key drivers responsible for widespread grassland loss and degradation. All of these actions benefit lesser prairie-chickens but also provide habitat for other grassland and prairie species as well. Starting in FY 2016 and continuing today, NRCS has focused LPCI on the following five threats to lesser prairie-chicken:

1. Degraded rangeland health.
2. Invasive conifers.
3. Invasive mesquite.
4. Cultivation of grazing lands.
5. Lack of fire in grassland habitats.

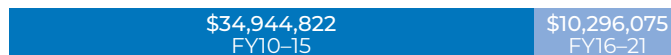
Voluntary actions by private landowners are pivotal to lesser prairie-chicken success as 95% of their habitat is privately owned.

Photo by Jeremy Roberts.



Overall Summary

Total NRCS Investment:.....\$45,240,897



Number of Contracts: 927



Total Acres Contracted:.....1,852,227



Milestones FY16-21 ■ Acres Completed ■ Acres In Progress
Addressing Threats to Lesser Prairie-Chickens.

Degraded Rangeland Health:.....141,391 total acres



Invasive Conifers:.....26,655 total acres



Invasive Mesquite:.....27,564 total acres



Cultivation of Grazing Lands:.....119 total acres



Lack of Fire in Grassland Habitats:.....5,953 total acres

