

# Conservation Strategies Series

## Fence Marking



In certain locations, wire fences pose a threat to lesser prairie-chickens. A simple marking technique significantly increases fence visibility, reducing the risk of fence collisions.

*Photo: Don Wolfe.*

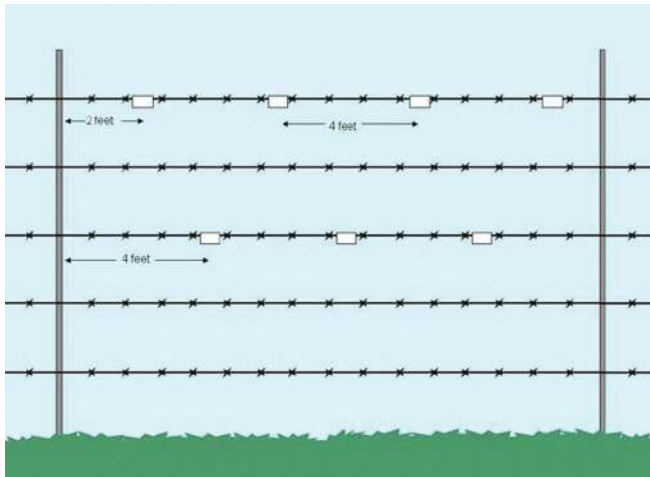
**L**esser prairie-chickens face many obstacles to survival, including habitat loss and fragmentation from redcedar and mesquite encroachment, fire suppression, poor grazing practices, and development. The Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) promotes conservation practices that reduce those obstacles.

Identifying threats can be challenging. In the case of fences, a 2007 research study in Oklahoma and New Mexico clearly showed that fence collisions were a leading cause of death for lesser prairie-chickens. A 2016 study in Kansas and Colorado, where fencing is less densely concentrated, yielded different results, showing no significant mortality risk from fence collisions.

Scientists continue to assess the threat of fence collisions across the lesser prairie-chicken's range. Meanwhile, marking fences in specific, limited locations safeguards prairie-chickens and other grassland birds. Such targeted fence marking has proven track record, reducing fence collisions for greater sage-grouse by a whopping 83%.



*Fence collisions can kill or injure prairie-chickens. Photo: Don Wolfe.*



## Fence Marking Basics

Prairie-chickens appear to be most vulnerable to fence collisions near their booming grounds, or leks, where they gather in spring and fall. That's why LPCI requires participating producers to **mark the portion of new or existing fencing that lies within a ½ mile or ¼ mile radius, respectively, of an active lek.**

The process is simple. Three-inch markers can be cut from white vinyl siding undersill trim strips (available at most big home-improvement stores), which have a lip that allows the marker to be snapped securely onto a fence wire. The material can be cut with tin snips (for small marking projects), or with a 10" miter saw with at least a 200-tooth blade. Eight pieces can be cut at a time with the miter saw (wear safety glasses and a dust mask). Markers should be hung on wire fencing as shown in the illustration above (For 4-strand fencing, attach markers to top two wires).



*Low-visibility fences pose a risk to many wildlife species, like this prairie falcon. Photo: Doug Wood.*

## Volunteers Get the Job Done

Many hands make light work. Fence marking is a great opportunity to involve volunteers of all ages. Local community service groups, like Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Future Farmers of America, and Audubon welcome the opportunity to lend a hand.



*Volunteers mark fences on the Selman Ranch in western Oklahoma. Each spring for several years, rancher Sue Selman has hosted participants from the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Festival, who come to her ranch to watch the springtime mating display of prairie-chickens on a lek on her land. Participants then eat a home-cooked breakfast in her farmhouse and mark fences with vinyl tabs. Photo: Tulsa Audubon Society.*

To learn more about LPCI assistance, contact your local NRCS office, [www.offices.sc.egov.usda.gov](http://www.offices.sc.egov.usda.gov). The Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative, led by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, is a partnership-based, science-driven effort that uses voluntary incentives to proactively conserve America's western rangelands, wildlife, and rural way of life.