

## Lesser Prairie-Chicken Advisory Committee Recommendations

The Interagency Task Force on Economic Growth and Endangered Species provided the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Advisory Committee with the following charges.

1. Provide input to Task Force on information to help prevent listing and minimize harm to economic sectors if listing does occur.
2. Assist in outreach and education efforts on potential listing decision and methods to minimize the impact of listing.

### Advisory Committee Members

The Honorable Donnie Allred — Oldham County  
Mr. James Blackwell — Texas Wildlife Association  
Mr. James Bradley — Pampa Economic Development Corporation  
Mr. Mike Brumley — Deaf Smith County landowner  
Mr. Mike Carter — Playa Lakes Joint Venture  
Mr. Richard “Buzz” David — Amarillo Economic Development Corporation  
Mr. Stacey Dunn — Cochran County  
Mr. Joe Reed — Swisher County landowner  
Ms. Sarah Robinson — Audubon Texas  
Mr. Currie Smith — Hemphill County landowner  
Mr. Randy Unfred — Terry/Gray County landowner  
Mr. David Wolfe — Environmental Defense Fund

After reviewing information available on the economy of the Panhandle, programs to assist in the conservation of the lesser-prairie chicken (LPC) and requirements of the Endangered Species Act, as well as receiving public input at five meetings across the region, the advisory committee members view the current status of the LPC and potential for further loss as a serious consideration for the economy of the Panhandle. The advisory committee emphasizes the urgency of working on this issue collaboratively and provides the following recommendations on an approach to conserve the LPC in lieu of federal regulation to ensure continued economic development in the Panhandle region of Texas.

### *Guiding Principles*

The advisory committee developed the following overriding guiding principles that should be included in efforts working toward the conservation and recovery of the LPC in Texas.

1. All programs should be *voluntary*.
2. Any program or efforts should look at how to maximize the use of limited dollars to ensure the most significant gains in conservation and recovery. As mentioned several times during advisory committee meetings, it is important to “get the best bang for the buck” in working on these issues.

3. Efforts should be *cooperative*. Successful initiatives will take cooperation and collaboration among private landowners, industry, non-profit organizations and state and local government agencies.
4. It is very important to have all sectors of the economy in the region involved in conservation efforts for the species. Fostering a culture of conservation will assist in restoring LPCs to a sustainable level.
5. LPC conservation discussions and programs should be focused on quantifiable and measurable results evaluated against a stated population or habitat goals.

### Recommendations

The recommendations from the advisory committee cover three core areas of emphasis: outreach and education, use of targeted programs with associated success measures and landowner incentives. This three-fold approach is important to the success of efforts working with the LPC.

#### *Outreach and Education*

There are many programs currently available for landowners to assist in the conservation and recovery of the LPC. It is important to do everything possible to educate landowners and businesses on issues relating to the LPC and the voluntary programs available for conservation and voluntary offsets. There should be heightened awareness of the responsibility of all industries and their role to assist in efforts for LPC conservation.

1. Charge the appropriate agency/agencies to expand focused outreach and education efforts on the status of the LPC and availability of programs to assist in conservation of the species.
2. The appropriate state agency/agencies should complete an inventory of all industries that could possibly be impacted by a potential listing of the LPC.
3. Provide for additional educational programs and meetings for affected industries to share information on the status of the LPC, programs available to assist in conservation and recovery efforts, and opportunities for voluntary conservation and offset.
4. Recommend all industries that have an impact of LPC habitat and populations develop best-management practices to minimize impact to habitat. Provide technical assistance to these industries in developing these practices
5. Reiterate to the Public Utility Commission the significant relationship between impacts to LPC habitat and considerations for future economic growth in the region as it relates to the final location of CREZ transmission line routes.

#### *Targeted Programs with Associated Measures*

The estimated occupied range of LPC habitat in Texas covers 3.1 million acres. Since funding is limited, it is imperative to have targeted goals for conservation and recovery of the species. Although many programs are in place to assist in conservation of LPC, there is no quantitative understanding of benefit to the species from existing programs. While population numbers in Texas are still thought to be in decline, we have no estimate of

population size and therefore little understanding of the contribution of existing programs to a stated goal. Effects of loss, fragmentation and degradation of habitat should be better known, as well as associated contributing factors such as predation, weather and wildfires. Obtaining additional data on LPC populations and habitat, and using this information to develop population or habitat targets, is critical to managing this species.

1. Set a targeted and publically known goal for the amount of LPC habitat and number of individual birds needed to achieve a sustainable population across the range of the species in Texas.
2. Increase efforts to obtain additional data on LPC numbers and location by providing additional funding for research, and use these results to develop models and set more empirical targeted habitat and population goals.
3. Prioritize benefits, in terms of birds or habitat, that current programs can have in sustaining or increasing numbers of LPCs.
4. Focus efforts where habitat is sustainable or contributions to recovery of the species are made.

#### *Landowner Incentives*

As the majority of LPC habitat in Texas occurs on privately owned lands, private ideas, management and stewardship is crucial for LPC population viability. It is important to have a proactive approach that rewards landowners for their management of the species. Landowners should not be penalized, but rather should be incentivized for protecting and/or enhancing LPC habitat on their property. Panhandle industries can benefit by working to increase and sustain LPC numbers through innovative offsets that reward landowners with LPC populations while continuing to develop lands outside the boundaries of LPC priority areas.

1. Federal funding should be more targeted to meet specified goals. Additional local, state and private dollars will be needed to assist in targeted conservation initiatives. Funds should be used where the LPC exists to safeguard the existing habitat or to conserve priority areas suitable for LPCs.
2. Landowner incentives, through voluntary offset programs, should be developed in the Panhandle region. Opportunities for payment for ecosystem services (including LPC habitat management) should be explored.
3. It will be important to develop an offset program that provides quantifiable benefit to the bottom line of industry and tangible benefit/protection of LPCs.
4. Compensation for LPC habitat management and “growing birds” should be provided at a level that ensures landowners can continue to make a living on their land similar to other competing economic opportunities.