

Lesser Prairie Chicken *Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*

Status: Designated as a candidate species by the Service on June 9, 1998 (63 FR 31400).



Description: The lesser prairie chicken (LPC) is in the Order Galliformes, Family Phasianidae, and is recognized as a species separate from the greater prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*). The LPC is slightly smaller than the greater prairie-chicken. Average length ranges from 38-41 centimeters (15 to 16 inches). The plumage of the LPC is similar to that of the greater prairie-chicken, although it is somewhat lighter and is characterized by alternating brown and buff-colored barring. Males have long tufts of feathers on the sides of the neck which are erected during courtship display. Males also display yellow-orange eye combs and reddish-purple air sacs during courtship display.

Distribution: The historical range of the LPC included the areas of sand sagebrush-bluestem, or shinnery oak-bluestem grasslands in southeast Colorado, southwest Kansas, western Oklahoma, northwest Texas, and eastern New Mexico. The current occupied range is restricted to extreme southeast Colorado, and reduced portions of southwest Kansas, western Oklahoma, eastern New Mexico, and the Texas panhandle. A range map depicting the historic and the current (known) distribution of the species in Texas is on the back of this paper. Note that the historical account of the LPC in Pecos County may be an anomaly.

Habitat: In Texas, LPCs inhabit areas characterized by sand sagebrush-bluestem or shinnery oak-bluestem vegetation communities typically occurring on sandy range sites. Areas that have a diversity of mid to tall grass vegetation on rolling sand hills, interspersed with areas of tighter soils supporting short grasses, provide optimal habitat. Unlike quail or pheasants, the LPC requires large tracts of habitat (some estimates of 20 square miles) to provide all the bird's annual habitat needs.

Leks: LPCs exhibit a lek mating system. Males gather to display on leks at dusk and dawn beginning in late February through early May. Male attendance is highest early in the breeding season. Females arrive at leks in early spring, with peak hen attendance occurring at leks during mid-April. Lek sites are characterized by sparse vegetation and are typically located on knolls or ridges.

Other Information: The diet of LPCs is dominated by vegetative matter in autumn and winter, with insects increasing in proportion in the diet during the summer months. Conversion of native habitat to areas of cultivation, overgrazing, and habitat fragmentation appear to be the major reasons for the decline of the species. In Texas, the LPC is an upland game bird with a legal harvest from October 18-19. The five state wildlife agencies within the current range of the LPC, along with other state, federal and private partners formed the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Interstate Working Group in 1996 to identify potential threats to the population on a regional basis and develop/implement regional conservation actions that will enhance habitat and populations rangewide.