

LANDOWNER/PRODUCER LESSER-PRAIRIE CHICKEN CONSERVATION SIGN-UP DEADLINE FEBRUARY 28

Feb. 13, 2014

Conservation practices qualify landowners for financial incentives

PRATT – Kansas landowner/producers can receive sign-up incentives and payments for implementing grassland conservation practices that benefit lesser prairie-chickens. The application deadline to enroll land in the Lesser-prairie Chicken Conservation Program is Feb. 28, according to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). Landowner/producers with land in the lesser prairie-chicken range are eligible to apply, and those who are accepted will receive payments for implementing conservation practices such as mechanical brush removal, prescribed grazing, and establishment and management of planted native grass stands. Only producers not currently enrolled in federal farm bill programs are eligible to apply for five- and 10-year contract options.

Applications will be ranked by the WAFWA based on their value to lesser prairie-chickens. Accepted landowner/producers located in the high-priority locations can receive payments of up to 125 percent of the estimated cost of implementing the conservation plan. If the species becomes federally listed, participating producers will be exempt from the take prohibition of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) if the take occurs while implementing the practices prescribed in their conservation plan. Interested landowner/producers should contact the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's Region 1 office in Hays, 785-628-8614 for more information and enrollment application forms.

The WAFWA consists of 23 state and provincial wildlife agencies that have primary responsibility and authority for protecting and managing fish and wildlife in the western United States and Canada. Member agencies in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado worked through the WAFWA over the last two years to produce the Lesser-prairie Chicken Range-wide Conservation Plan (RWP) as a means to preclude a federal listing of the species under the ESA. On October 23, 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) endorsed the RWP as “a comprehensive conservation plan that reflects sound conservation design and strategy that, when implemented, will provide a net conservation benefit to the lesser prairie-chicken.” To date, the RWP is the only plan that has been endorsed by the USFWS and is the only pathway that has the potential to lead to a not warranted final decision. The amount of voluntary enrollment in the RWP will likely weigh heavily into the final listing decision that must be announced by the end of March.