

Helping People Help the Land

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Executive Summary

- ➤ In 2010, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas along with partnering agencies developed the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) to bring about protection to the species and a change in the philosophy of land management for both conservationists and land stewards managing private lands throughout lesser prairie-chicken (LPC) range.
- The objective of the LPCI is to provide the ability for land stewards to improve their working lands in a manner which provides economic sustainability while creating, maintaining or improving LPC habitat.



Background

- Historically, farmers and ranchers have been afforded the opportunity to utilize state and federal conservation programs to address natural resource issues across the nation.
- Natural resource issues such as soil erosion, soil condition, water quality, plant health, and occasionally wildlife habitat, were identified as conspicuous on the landscape.
- These issues were often addressed in their sole capacity without much regard to other beneficial effects to other resource issues or ecological services.

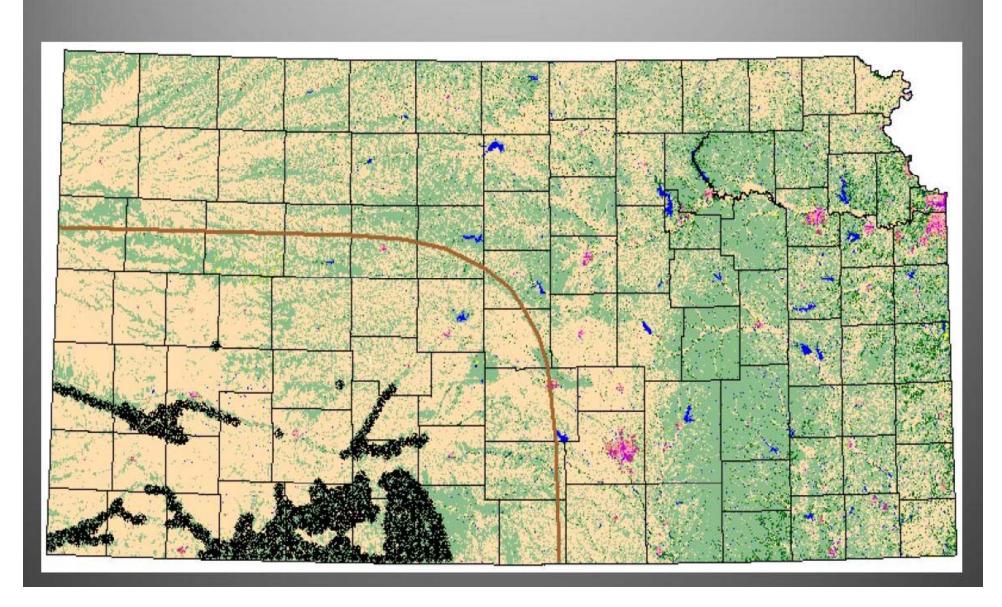


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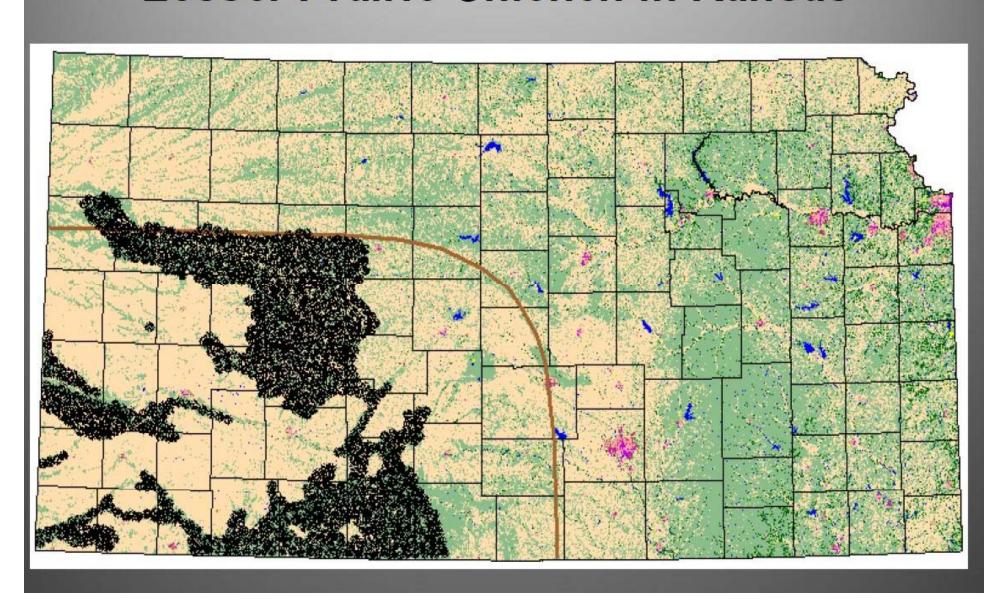
- With the advent of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the mid '80s [and ensuing years]; commodity production, erosion, wildlife, water quality, and a host of other benefits have been attributed to the program.
- As an indirect benefit or unintended consequence, LPC habitat quantity and quality have greatly increased and their range expanded in Kansas (Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism [KDWPT]).



Pre-CRP Range Lesser Prairie Chicken in Kansas



Current Range Lesser Prairie Chicken in Kansas



Background

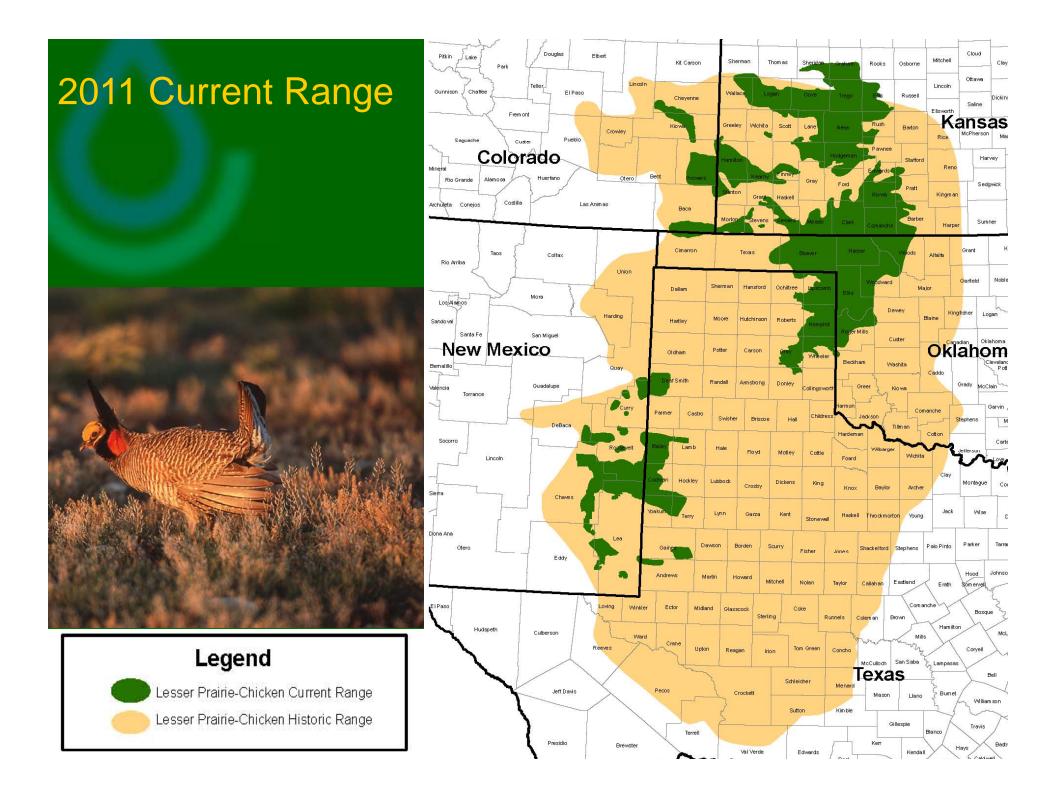
- In addition to CRP, the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) created thru the 1996 Farm Bill have benefitted working lands across current and historic range by providing grazing prescriptions, managing brush, conversion of cropland to permanent cover, and numerous other practices.
- > These practices have addressed a myriad of resource issues and indirectly benefitted LPC and its habitat.



Background

- With the funding challenges these conservation programs have faced over the last 2 farm bills and steady high crop prices, concerns have arisen with maintaining current CRP enrollment.
- ➤ The highest potential for losing CRP acres came in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012.
- With the proposed candidate listing of LPC, the 5-state NRCS LPC region, state and federal wildlife agencies, and other wildlife interests came together to consider what opportunities might exist.
- > This lead to the development of the LPCI.





Objective

- LPCI is designed to expand the current and historic range of LPC while promoting the overall health of grazing lands and the long-term sustainability of ranching operations.
- This will provide the ability for local farmers and ranchers to manage their working grasslands in a manner which provides economic sustainability all the while creating, maintaining or improving LPC habitat.



- The LPCI provides the opportunity to maintain permanent cover to reduce habitat loss, fragmentation, degradation, and reduce the spread of invasive plants; all of which are the major threats to LPC habitat.
- The state technical committee in every LPCI state provided recommendations on concerns of the LPC. Partners included state wildlife agencies, state universities, wildlife groups, as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- NRCS used geospatial analysis and progress reporting information to generate estimates for landuse and land cover data and conservation treatment applied within current range.
- This information was used to develop estimated needs for additional conservation treatment.

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Historic Range Land Use

Landuse	Private (acres)	Public (acres)	Percent
Cropland	30,523,301	275,169	26.7%
Grassland	75,313,750	3,791,033	68.6%
Forest	1,207,780	42,781	1.1%
Water	236,058	70,523	0.3%
Other	3,847,613	92,178	3.4%
Total	111,128,502	4,271,684	100%



Kansas Specific Land Use Data

Landuse	Private (acres)	Public (acres)	Percent
Cropland	9,839,527	18,517	52%
Grassland	7,825,705	119,947	42%
Forest	133,551	2,853	0.7%
Water	35,756	7,552	0.2%
Other	945,303	8,774	5%
Total	18,779,843	157,643	100%



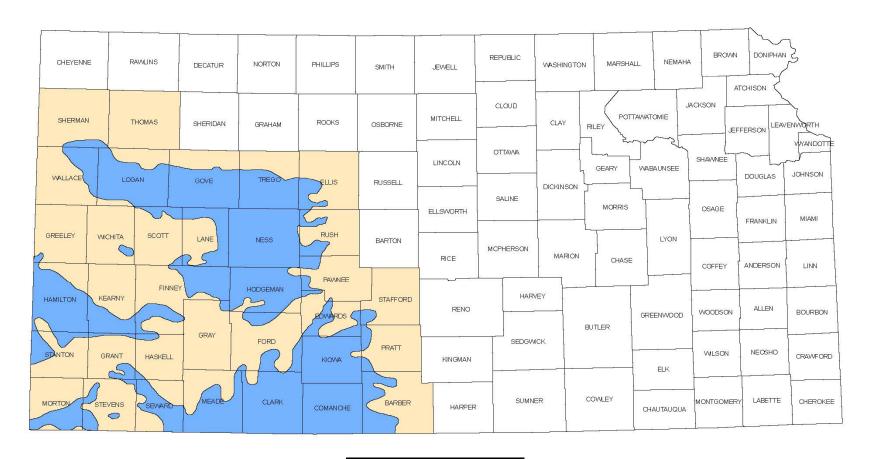
- Through partner support, NRCS requested financial and technical assistance thru EQIP and WHIP in 2010 to create, improve, and expand LPC habitat.
- > The partners and states remain committed to make this program successful.
- Our intent is that program delivery and technical assistance is more uniform across state boundaries.







Fiscal Year 2011 - Kansas Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative







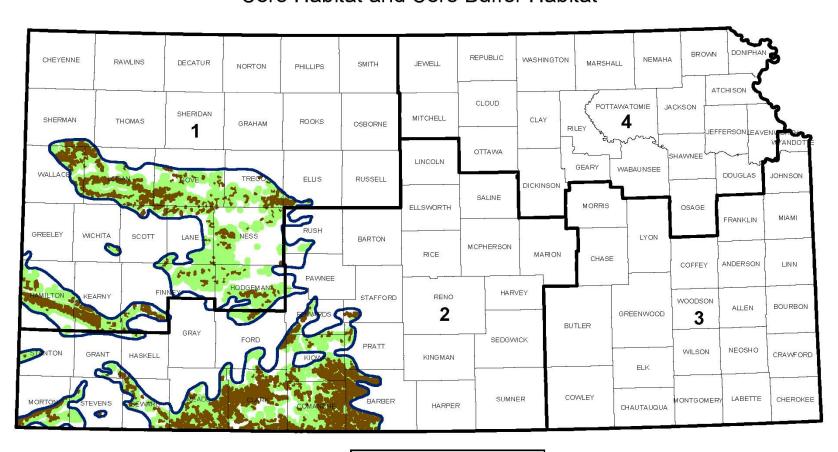
The Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV), KDWPT, and the NRCS utilized a large-block geospatial analysis model to identify high priority areas and rank applications within the LPCI area in Kansas. This process was used to increase planning efficiency, target high priority habitats, improve funding consistency, and provide the greatest benefit to LPC.







Kansas Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative Core Habitat and Core Buffer Habitat



NRCS Administrative Areas





- Recognition that the most desirable LPC habitat is in areas which are grazed provides land managers and planners the opportunity to shape or create desirable habitat through prescribed grazing, prescribed burning, targeted grazing systems, and tools specifically designed to create or manipulate native plant communities.
- > Experts know lacking habitats for LPC are both nesting and brood-rearing.
- Development, improvement, and maintenance of habitats on grazing lands require livestock and their management as the primary disturbance mechanisms.



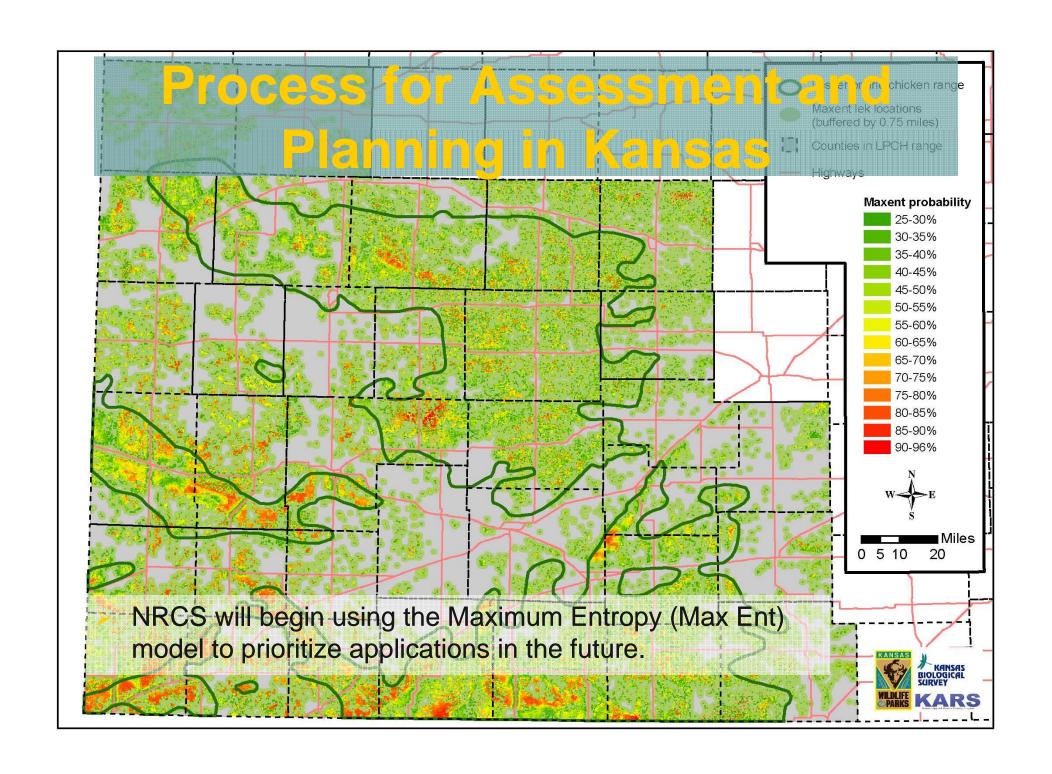
- KDWPT biologists and NRCS range conservationists worked together to develop specific guidance for developing both LPC habitat types on grazing lands.
- ➤ Using a state-developed prairie-chicken assessment tool, range conservationists and biologists gather benchmark conditions onsite.
- Information is used to develop a plan to address habitat needs. This creation or manipulation of cover coincides with the identification of needed habitat types identified thru the field assessment and technical note.
- Prescribed Grazing and Upland Wildlife Habitat Management are the 2 core-conservation practices used for each plan and are specific to each grazing unit.

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Other Conservation Practices Needed

- Brush Management
- > Fence
- Watering Facilities
- > Pipeline
- > Well
- > Access Control
- > Obstruction Removal
- > Range Planting



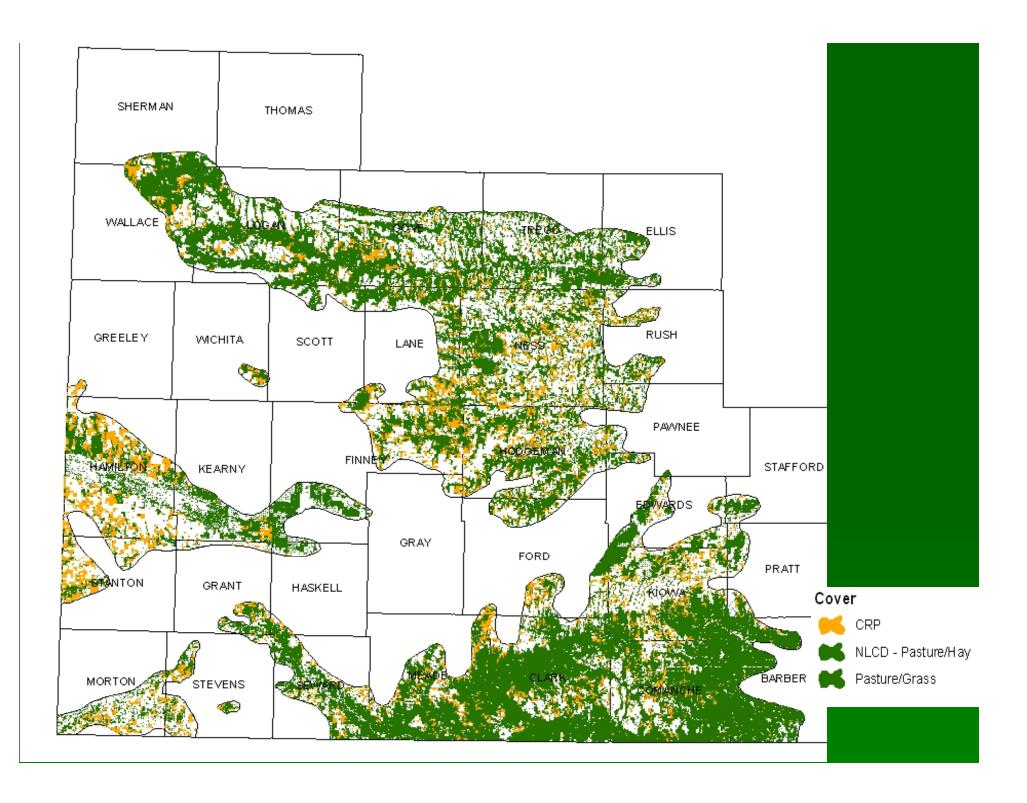


Ongoing Conservation Activities in Kansas

- > The CRP represents one of the largest program opportunities on private land to create and maintain cover. Currently, there are approximately 876,050 acres enrolled in CRP in the LPC current range.
- Many CRP acres in the LPC range are set to expire in 2011 and more are set to expire in subsequent years.

expiration Date	Kansas CRP Acre
9/30/2011	175,803
9/30/2012	219,507
9/30/2013	65,745
9/30/2014	28,326
9/30/2015	25,607





Ongoing Conservation Activities in Kansas

- Without re-enrollment of acres into CRP, a significant amount of permanent cover may be lost to conversion to small grain and row crop agriculture. Although CRP received high re-enrollment during the last two signups, the threat remains.
- > The LPCI provides an opportunity to maintain and manage those acres not re-enrolled as permanent cover.
- Additional conservation program assistance is available thru the U.S. Department of Agriculture's EQIP and WHIP as state-wide ranking categories in both Kansas and Texas.
- > The importance of LPC habitat has been introduced, discussed, and supported at state technical committee's in each initiative state.



Anticipated Short- and Long-Term Outcomes

- The overall goal of the initiative is to increase LPC numbers. Short-term goals will be realized through practice implementation. Implementation of the core practices, Prescribed Grazing and/or Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, will take place on all contracted acres. The long-term implementation of these two practices is vital to the success of this project. In addition, supporting practices such as brush control, water developments and associated practices, and fence will provide the tools producers need to properly implement prescribed grazing or upland wildlife habitat management.
- In the short term, the desired outcome is management and protection of the current LPC range. Ultimately the expansion of this range into the Historic Range of the LPC should take place.

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Evaluating the Results

- States have been monitoring and tracking lek sites along with actual counts of LPC numbers for a number of years.
- The KDWPT began surveying LPC in 1967 with the establishment of 3 survey routes. Additional survey routes have been added over the years and KDWPT now surveys chickens annually along 16 routes.
- Monitoring will continue by state and federal wildlife agencies.

 NRCS in the initiative states have partnered with state and federal agencies to assist with this effort.
- Expansion of new lek sites will be tracked to determine if this expansion is related to LPCI and other programs.



Summary

- NRCS in Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas along with partnering agencies developed the LPCI to bring about protection to the species and a change in the philosophy of land management, for both conservationists and to land stewards managing private lands throughout LPC range.
- As described, the objective of the LPCI is to provide the ability for land stewards to improve their working lands in a manner which provides economic sustainability while creating, maintaining, or improving LPC habitat.



Summary

In Kansas, NRCS has received approximately \$1.45 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 and \$1.44 million in FY 2011 for financial assistance to fund conservation practices on approximately 50,000 acres of private land. This represents the single greatest federal investment ever to directly benefit LPC.

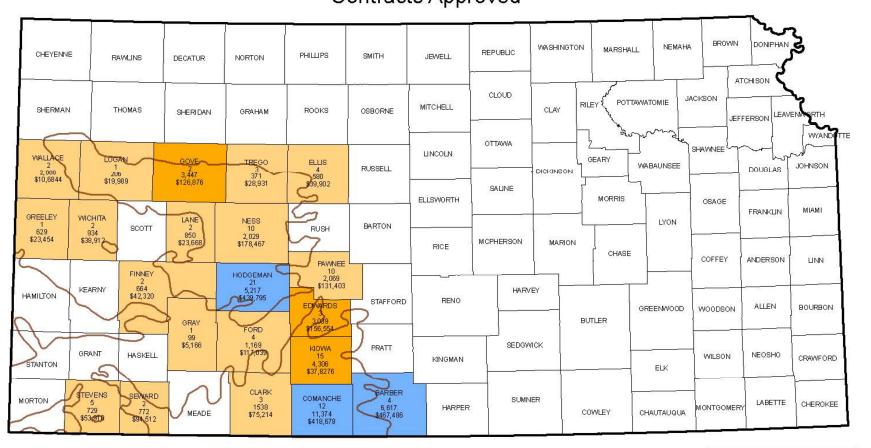






Fical Year 2010 and 2011 - Kansas

Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative Contracts Approved



Lesser Prairie-Chicken Current Range

1st No. = Number of Contracts 2nd No. = Number of Acres 3rd No. = Number of Dollars 





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