

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Interstate Working Group 2020 Annual Report



Formed in 1995, the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Interstate Working Group (IWG) coordinates activities and integrates lesser prairie-chicken management among the five state wildlife agencies within the range of the species.

The IWG is charged with the following responsibilities to further the goals of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Range-wide Conservation Plan (RWP):

- Update and revise the RWP
- Update and revise the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Critical Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT)
- Review and update, as necessary, ecoregions, focal areas and connectivity zones
- Make nominations to the Science Subcommittee
- Annually provide a report to the WAFWA Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative Council

Additionally, each member chairs the Lesser Prairie-Chicken State Implementation Team in their respective state, serves on the RWP Science Subcommittee, and coordinates annual ground survey data collection and analysis.

The Lesser Prairie-Chicken Interstate Working Group (IWG) met more than nine times in 2020 (all meetings were held virtually due to travel restrictions). Discussions primarily included the 5-Year Review of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Range-wide Conservation Plan (RWP), contributions to the USFWS Lesser Prairie-Chicken Species Status Assessment (SSA), aerial survey coordination, including discussion of results and future funding, and coordination of State Implementation Teams. The IWG provided updates to the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative Council (LPCIC) at the WAFWA Mid-winter Meeting, the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, the WAFWA Summer Meeting, and the AFWA Meeting. The Chair was a member of the CCAA Realignment Working Group and provided feedback to the LPCIC and USFWS Regional Leadership regarding IWG feedback on the SSA. Additionally, the IWG assisted the Prairie Grouse Partnership in the development of a RCPP proposal for conservation work in Kansas. In November, Kent Fricke was re-elected to chair the IWG through 2022.

5-Year Review of Range-wide Plan

- Completed analysis of habitat quality data on RWP mitigation conservation properties
- Updated habitat suitability model completed by USGS
- Completed impact analysis of oil and gas and wind turbine projects in the LPC range
- IWG framework for targeting conservation efforts to meet RWP stronghold goals was finalized and shared with Prairie Grouse Partners to assist in RCPP application
- Completed review of endowment sustainability
- Developed draft revised focal areas and connectivity zones
- IWG will send draft 5-Year Review to Science Subcommittee for review before providing report and recommendations to LPCIC

Species Status Assessment

- IWG members served as primary state contacts for USFWS SSA Technical Team as they designed and drafted the SSA analysis and document
- Provided feedback on data layers used for habitat assessment, the most current information on LPC occupied range, and estimates for state conservation efforts
- IWG members submitted state partner reviews of draft SSA

LPC Aerial Survey—Coordination and Funding

- IWG members and WAFWA Grassland Coordinator developed and administered contracts to fund the eighth year of range wide aerial surveys
- Members communicated with contractor to ensure safe and coordinated surveys in each state
- Developed news release for WAFWA to announce aerial survey results
- Coordinated and developed proposals and funding streams to ensure funding of 2021 surveys
- Working with researchers to develop a population model to inform future population monitoring decisions

State Implementation Teams

- State Implementation Team meetings were held in Kansas and Texas in 2020; Colorado meeting planned for January 2021
- Meetings provided partners with updates on activities related to the RWP, 5-Year Review and SSA and 12-Month Finding
- Teams provided feedback on draft recommended changes to LPC focal areas and connectivity zones

Prairie Grouse Partners' RCPP Application

- Worked with the Executive Director of North American Grouse Partnership to assist in efforts to increase conservation actions to benefit LPC
- Provided an overview and results of targeting tool to help identify areas where targeted conservation efforts would be most beneficial
- Worked with North American Grouse Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, Common Ground Capital, and Playa Lakes Joint Venture to finalize RCPP application for conservation work in Kansas

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Interstate Working Group

Agency / Organization	Members	Position
Colorado Parks and Wildlife	Liza Rossi	Bird Conservation Coordinator
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism	Kent Fricke (chair)	Small Game Coordinator
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish	Grant Beauprez	Lesser Prairie-Chicken Biologist
Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation	Brett Cooper	Prairie Grouse & Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	Russell Martin	Panhandle Wildlife Diversity Biologist
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Bill Van Pelt (ex officio)	Grassland Initiative Coordinator