



Technical Memo

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Date: March 14, 2025

To: Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

From: Cedar Creek Associates, Inc.

Subject: 2024 Programatic Review for the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for the Lesser Prairie Chicken

Cedar Creek Associates, Inc. (Cedar Creek) was retained by Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) to conduct a programatic review for the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for the Lesser Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) in 2024. The CCAA for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken is a voluntary conservation strategy that establishes a mitigation framework which is administered by the WAFWA and permitted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Established in 2014, the CCAA is in partnership with the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, the oil and gas industry and private landowners; for the purpose of providing the oil and gas industry with regulatory assurances should the Lesser Prairie-Chicken become listed under the Endangered Species Act. In exchange, industry participants have agreed to limit the impact of their activities on the species habitat and to mitigate any unavoidable impacts. Mitigation is provided through voluntary agreements with private landowners to manage their properties for the benefit of the lesser prairie-chicken. The CCAA includes an obligation for WAFWA to provide an annual audit, conducted by an independent party, to assess whether WAFWA is managing the program in compliance with the terms of the CCAA.

Auditor Qualifications and Contact Information

The programatic review was conducted by Mr. Jesse Dillon of Cedar Creek. He is a Principal Ecologist with nearly 20 years of professional experience. He has expertise in mitigation banking and has implemented habitat exchanges for greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*), large game and wetlands. The projects have been implemented on federal, state, and private property, often with private and government stakeholders. These projects typically comprise both impact and offset components. Cedar Creek and Mr. Dillon do not have any existing connection to WAFWA, CCAA participants, or any organization involved in Lesser Prairie Chicken conservation. Mr. Dillon holds a bachelor's degree from Colorado State University in Rangeland Ecosystem Science with a concentration in Restoration Ecology.

Mr. Dillon can be reached at: JDillon@cedarcreek.app

Scope of Audit

The review comprised of evaluating the revised 21 compliance points of the CCAA, as well as review the CCAA's annual report to assess if it fairly reflects the expenditures and achievements of the program. To implement the review, Mr. Dillon relied upon the following information:

- 2024 CCAA Annual Report
- Updated Business Plan for WAFWA's Lesser Prairie Chicken CCAA
- WAFWA's Western Conservation Toolkit (WCT).

Results of Audit

Overall, the review revealed passing compliance in 21 of the 21 compliance points of the CCAA. The auditor also found that the 2024 Annual Report fairly reflects the expenditures and achievements of the program.

Citations

WAFWA, 2025. The 2024 Annual Report for the Range-wide Oil and Gas Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Boise, Idaho.

WAFWA, 2021. Updated Business Plan for WAFWA's LPC CCAA. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Boise, Idaho. 20 pp. Online at <https://wafwa.org/initiative-programs/lesser-prairie-chicken/>