



Class 4 Winds questions are numbered and in black text; USFWS answers are in blue italics.

1. For decades and decades many landowners have lived in the portion of the Panhandle that is supposed to have a Lesser Prairie Chicken population, but have yet to see one. Where are they?

*I understand this question to be related to polygons of the LPC estimated annual occupied range in Carson, Moore, Randall and the very southeastern portion of Deaf Smith counties. These polygons represent incidental observations (i.e., no lek locations determined but birds have been observed) within the past 5 years (since 2005). The information received to generate these polygons was credible. TPWD is in the process of evaluating these polygons to determine whether they should continue to be retained in the estimated annual occupied range map.*

2. Right now, much of this land is involved in the CRP program. When that changes in the next couple of years, wind farm or no wind farm, will this pose a risk to the Lesser Prairie Chicken?

*Yes - it is anticipated that many CRP contracts will expire in the next few years and will not be renewed unless there are substantial changes made in the program to address the wildlife habitat values of CRP for conservation of species such as the lesser prairie chicken. However, assuming that things stay the same and progress as currently anticipated, loss of CRP contract acres will likely have an adverse effect on lesser prairie chickens, primarily in those areas of CRP that LPCs are using that is planned for conversion to production agriculture after contract expiration. If the grass cover is left intact and the acres are grazed or otherwise managed the risk to LPCs will be much less.*

3. Is it possible to set up a refuge for the Prairie Chickens, away from land that can be developed for wind farms? If so, how much might it cost and how long would it take?

*In theory this is possible, but a refuge would only conserve a small portion of LPC range and the conservation value of a refuge would likely not offset impacts of threats. There are scientific questions about the techniques and how to establish new populations or how to supplement existing populations with birds from other areas. It would take a strong partnership of landowners, wind industry, federal and state wildlife agencies, universities and other interested parties to work out a plan. A project plan would identify goals and objectives, and then evaluate things like priorities, costs, time lines, stakeholder comments, monitoring, long-term research, etc. We wouldn't want to go ahead with anything like setting up a refuge without a plan in place that was agreed upon by all interested parties. It would be very beneficial for interested parties to have discussions about developing conservation lands*



*(e.g., mitigation lands, conservation banking, offset lands, perpetual easements, etc.) to mitigate impacts of development. Any efforts to put lands into perpetual conservation for lesser prairie chickens (refuge, easement, conservation bank) should be considered to their fullest capacity.*

4. What methods are you using in locating leks?

*Leks are located primarily using 2 methods; both methods are in place to locate leks during the spring breeding season. Surveys must be conducted between 15 March and 15 May of each year between sun-up and 3 hours after sun-up. Surveys cannot be conducted when wind speeds exceed 20mph or if it is raining or thick fog. The first method is road-based surveys, which is where a surveyor drives designated routes, stops at predetermined listening locations (often 1 mile apart), may or may not play an LPC call as a “call back mechanism”, listen for birds for 5-10 mins, and then drive to the next listening location and repeat the survey methods. The second method is using aerial surveys (helicopters) for finding LPC leks. This method is obviously more expensive but surveyors can cover approximately 12,000 acres in one morning. Also, the data that are collected via aerial surveys are better for determining presence or absence of leks.*

5. Do you have studies/evidence that wind turbines located near leks affect PC breeding?

*There is research and evidence from Kansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico that indicates that prairie chickens (lessers and greater) will avoid vertical structures such as transmission lines, houses, pump jacks, etc. and that they may also avoid some roads (please see <http://www.suttoncenter.org/chickens.html>) for a comprehensive list of lesser prairie-chicken literature). We do not know the impacts of these displacements on population performance. That is to say, if LPCs are displaced from an area around wind turbines or transmission lines, then a nesting female for example may have to travel further to find suitable and appropriate nesting habitat. If she has to go too far, this may disrupt population communications and maybe gene flow. If she decides to “settle” for something not completely suitable but not as far away, this may cause her nest to be less successful, which may in turn result in fewer chicks making it to breeding age and therefore fewer birds in the population over time. It has always been the position of wildlife biologists working on LPCs that a pre and post construction research study in our fragmented habitats of Texas is necessary to answer this question. A willing industry partner is still required, however.*

6. If there is a possibility of the LPC soon becoming an endangered species, why are they allowed to be hunted?



*Lesser prairie-chickens are not hunted in Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma or Colorado. They are still hunted in Kansas. It is the responsibility of each state wildlife agency to decide how to manage their state population. TPWD decided to suspend the LPC hunting season in Texas 2 years ago. As a candidate species, the FWS works with others to remove and reduce the current threats to species to avoid listing; hunting has never been identified as a threat to the species.*

7. The LPC's native grass is a taller grass. This means that if they have developed leks in the southwestern Texas Panhandle and eastern New Mexico, they must have adapted to shorter grass. Can they be moved?

*I'm not sure what this question is getting at. LPCs use short, mid and some tall grass prairies, depending on what's available. The question of moving LPCs was raised in an earlier question, so please see the question about LPC refuges for answers on moving birds.*

8. Is there a possibility that this could affect future infrastructure improvements? (roads, water, electrical transmission, etc?)

*Not clear what "this" means "...possibility that this could affect future..."*

*Does this question refer to a listing action and how that might affect other landuse activities and infrastructure improvements?*

9. Might the Texas CREZ lines be affected by the LPC issue?

*Yes – the Texas CREZ transmission lines could be affected by the LPC issue. The Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT) and its CREZ contractors (Sharyland and CTT in the panhandle) must consider environmental impacts of their proposed actions. They must complete an environmental assessment of preferred and other alternatives and demonstrate good faith efforts to balance all concerns. In addition, PUCT and its contractors have solicited and received comments about LPCs from TPWD and they must address those comments. However, if and until the LPC is proposed for listing as threatened or endangered, there are no regulatory requirements or prohibitions in place that the PUCT or its contractors would violate if they were to impact LPCs and/or their habitat. These actions might, however, be considered as contributions to "threats to the species" during any future assessments of the species' risk.*

10. What constitutes a species being endangered?

*Under the ESA, species may be listed as either endangered or threatened. "Endangered" means a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.*



*“Threatened” means a species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. Section 4 of the ESA requires species to be listed as endangered or threatened solely on the basis of their biological status and threats to their existence. When evaluating a species for listing, the FWS considers five factors: 1) damage to, or destruction of, a species’ habitat; 2) overutilization of the species for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; 3) disease or predation; 4) inadequacy of existing protection; and 5) other natural or manmade factors that affect the continued existence of the species. When one or more of these factors imperils the survival of a species, the FWS takes action to protect it. To ensure the accuracy of the data, the FWS decides all listings using sound science and peer review.*

11. What has happened to the LPC in years past that has caused such a decline in population?

*Population declines are attributed to loss of habitat. This includes direct loss of habitat such as conversion of grassland and prairie to production agriculture, roads, urban development or other incompatible land uses. Loss of habitat also includes indirect loss, which are things such as fragmentation. Lesser prairie chickens need large blocks of relatively intact grassland and prairie habitats to survive as functioning populations. As we slowly “chop up” their habitats via fragmentation (e.g., installation of things they avoid such as vertical structures, roads, etc.) we make less and less habitat available to them, and eventually there is not enough and populations become locally extirpated.*

12. Is there a mountain being made out of a mole hill here? Some feel as though there hasn’t been much research done on this issue.

*There are always many sides to discussions such as these – in fact that is the basis of healthy debate and good decision making when many opinions and options are evaluated. The fact of the matter is that LPCs are facing a number of threats (see question 10) and the FWS must continually evaluate the effects of those threats in balance with the positive effects of conservation actions. The FWS made the decision that listing was warranted in 1998, but due to a lack of resources and higher priority has not initiated the process. The FWS has annually reviewed this decision and the species has continually warranted listing, but in the last few years, with increased threats, FWS increased the listing priority. More specifically, the threats of unregulated wind development and associated features on the landscape, in addition to ongoing threats and other land use changes (such as expiring CRP) caused the FWS to elevate the listing need of LPCs in Dec 2008 from a number 8 to a number 2 (increased listing priority). This means that listing may be more imminent. So the question of mountains and mole hills is one for all stakeholders to address on their own. Do we want to do things on the landscape now that have a high likelihood of impacting the way we do things in the future? The*



*question here is how can we have multiple uses that benefit partners without unintended consequences?*