

Working Lands for Wildlife Signup Announced for Lesser Prairie-Chicken

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar recently announced the Working Lands for Wildlife (WL4W) partnership that creates a \$33 million partnership with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to use innovative approaches to restore and protect the wildlife habitats for seven identified species in specific geographic areas.

A cutoff date of Monday, April 30, has been set to rank eligible applications for funding in the first sign-up period. If funds remain, a second sign-up period will be held through Wednesday, May 30, 2012. The unique circumstances and concerns of interested historically underserved ranchers are also addressed by offering a higher payment rate for them. For more information, contact your local USDA Service Center. Phone number and address are available on the internet at offices.usda.gov.

Kansas landowners may sign up to manage and restore high-priority habitats for the lesser prairie-chicken (LEPC) within the 36 eligible Kansas counties (see map). The targeted Kansas counties include: Barber, Clark, Comanche, Edwards, Ellis, Finney, Ford, Gove, Graham, Grant, Gray, Greeley, Hamilton, Haskell, Hodgeman, Kearny, Kiowa, Lane, Logan, Meade, Morton, Ness, Pawnee, Pratt, Rush, Scott, Seward, Sheridan, Sherman, Stafford, Stanton, Stevens, Thomas, Trego, Wallace, and Wichita.

“The aim of the new program is to focus available conservation dollars and wildlife expertise on the recovery of these at-risk species,” said Eric B. Banks, state conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Kansas.

The targeted at-risk species in Kansas, the lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*), is a ground-nesting bird native to the rangelands of Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas (see map). In the spring during the lesser prairie-chickens’ breeding season, they are known for their “gobbling” sounds and unique courtship displays on leks (booming or strutting grounds). Males attract females to the leks with elaborate dancing displays, showing off their yellow combs and red air sacs that inflate. LEPC populations declined dramatically during the past several decades due to loss of native prairie, habitat fragmentation, and degradation of habitat on both private and public lands.