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Post Office Box 22
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KNRC Member Commissions
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Bulletin

Contacts
President: Shawn Tasset, Ford County – (620) 338-7067
Staff: J.R. Carlson – Executive Director (620) 260-9169
Norm MacLeod – Policy Analyst (360) 379-8914

USGS Report: Lesser Prairie-chicken continues to decline despite increasing counts; USFWS status review due September 7

In 1998, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the Lesser Prairie-Chicken (LPC) as a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act, (ESA) and in **March 2014** the LPC was listed as a threatened species giving the grouse federal protection. On **September 1, 2015**, the controversial FWS listing was vacated by a U.S. District Court, with the Department of Interior opting not to appeal to the appellate court system. KNRC filed an [amicus brief](#) in favor of vacating the listing.

On **September 8, 2016**, the WildEarth Guardians, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned FWS to list the LPC as *endangered*, also requesting that critical habitat be designated in certain areas and ecosystems. The WEG petition initiated a 90-day process that culminated in a decision by FWS that a 12-month status review LPC was warranted. In the subsequent public comment process, KNRC is on record as demonstrating [the timing of the comment period ended before spring LPC counts could be completed](#).

By statute, the 12-month status review must be complete on **September 7, 2017** at which point FWS is mandated to make one of three possible decisions regarding listing of the LPC:

1. Listing Not Warranted;
2. Listing Warranted, which would include a Proposed Rule;
3. Listing Warranted, But Precluded due to outside factors.

A 2017 aerial survey found dramatically improved LPC counts throughout a five-state region. (We think the rain might have helped). In stark contrast, on August 9, 2017, the US Geological Survey (USGS) and FWS published a population viability statistical analysis (PVA) called [A Projection of Lesser Prairie-Chicken \(*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*\) Populations Range-Wide](#). That study combined demographic rate estimates from previously published literature with demographic rate estimates that **incorporate the influence of climate conditions**. In its “next steps” section, USGS includes a lengthy list of limitations, uncertainties, and they point out that an integrated population model (IPM) “. . . could better integrate multiple lines of evidence into one framework, including both demographic rate observations and counts, and allow for an integrated estimation and projection tool . . .” and, “We only evaluated logit-linear effects of weather conditions on demographic rates . . . it is possible that non-linear models would better account for the influence of weather conditions on demographic rates.”

The USGS report concludes with the statement “Therefore, although there is substantial uncertainty about the magnitude of population decline, and whether the demographic rate studies are overestimating declines, all lines of evidence indicate some degree of range-wide decline.”

KNRC has set aside time at the October 12, 2017, [Fall Policy Committee Meeting](#) to discuss the LPC status review and decisions emerging from that process. As part of those discussions, KNRC has invited subject matter experts to share their projections and review observations why FWS has *expanded* the estimated occupied range (EOR) of the LPC from [39 Kansas counties to now include a 41 county area](#).

