



August 2, 2013

Dan Ashe, Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Ashe:

The Governors of the states within the range of the Lesser Prairie Chicken (LPC) have been at the forefront of conservation efforts for the species. We applaud the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) efforts in advancing that same objective.

We would also like to thank you for your decision to extend final determination of the LPC's proposed listing as "threatened" by six months. This will provide states more time to demonstrate that conservation measures, such as the implementation of the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for the Lesser Prairie Chicken* (RWP) described below, will preclude the need to list the species.

In a time of limited federal resources – stretched even further as the number of such candidate species grows – use of public-private partnerships to conserve at-risk species is a growing imperative. The LPC provides a good case study of effective public-private partnerships. For many years, state and federal agencies, along with industry, non-governmental organizations, and individuals, have been working to conserve the LPC and its habitat.

In 1996, the wildlife agencies of the five states encompassing the range of LPC habitat – Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas – formed the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Interstate Working Group (IWG). The IWG is comprised of a science team of nationally-recognized experts in LPC biology tasked with development of a conservation plan (the RWP) covering the entire range of the species. The RWP – released in April 2013 – is intended to deliver consistent and coordinated benefits to the LPC across its range. This range-wide approach is unprecedented in scope and is a landmark development in species conservation. This historic undertaking was endorsed by the Western Governors' Association in the


organization's Policy Resolution 11-10, which urged a policy of cooperative management among the states to maintain and restore LPC populations while encouraging responsible development.

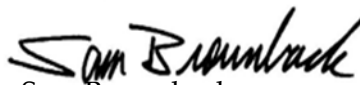
We, the Governors in the LPC states, strongly request the Service to approve the RWP as an enrollment vehicle that carries the same assurances for participants as provided by Candidate Conservation Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAs and CCAAs, respectively). These voluntary programs, coupled with Farm Bill conservation programs (e.g. Conservation Reserve Program and the Lesser Prairie Chicken Conservation Initiative) have led to nearly 9.7 million acres of land and millions of dollars directed to conservation within the five-state range of the LPC. The RWP has the same potential to provide similar conservation benefits for the LPC, helping to build a model for cooperative protection of wildlife species, their habitat, and the economic activities in those habitats.


We hope that with the conservation framework provided by the RWP, the FWS will ultimately come to the same conclusion as did the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in its comments submitted into the LPC record on June 7, 2013, concluding that listing the LPC as threatened is not warranted at this time. Given its expansive and successful Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative, USDA is clearly the federal entity with the most experience with implementation of successful conservation measures for LPC.

We are certain that continued state management and authority over this game bird is the best pathway to long-term conservation of LPC. We look forward to continuing to partner with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

  
John Hickenlooper  
Governor, State of Colorado

  
Sam Brownback  
Governor, State of Kansas

  
Susana Martinez  
Governor, State of New Mexico

  
Mary Fallin  
Governor, State of Oklahoma

  
Rick Perry  
Governor, State of Texas