

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Texas petroleum trade associations endorse rangewide plan for lesser prairie chicken

The Panhandle Producers & Royalty Owners Association and the Permian Basin Petroleum Association, representing more than 2000 independent oil and gas producers, service companies and mineral royalty owners in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and southwestern Kansas, have endorsed a plan to protect the lesser prairie chicken while continuing to explore for oil and gas. The plan is also endorsed by the Texas Alliance of Energy Producers, a statewide organization with more than 3300 members. The member companies of the associations control several million acres in the lesser prairie range.

The five-state rangewide plan, endorsed by U.S. Senators and governors from Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico identifies prime habitat for the chicken and lays out a strategy for protecting populations of the ground-nesting member of the grouse family. The conservation system will be managed by the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, a non-profit made up of representatives of wildlife agencies in the five states.

The plan is being considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which will rule on its suitability early next year. If approved, operators can voluntarily and immediately begin enrolling their acreage; the prairie chicken will not be listed as a threatened species. Furthermore, if the bird is listed, operators will be protected from the limitations that a federal listing would bring. A threatened designation could be devastating for a number of industries, including oil and gas, agriculture, wind energy and others..

The goal is minimizing impact of oil and gas exploration on the LPC and its nesting grounds. It includes a network of buffers around exploration and production locations. Companies operating inside the buffers pay a fee used to contract with land owners who have chicken-friendly habitat to mitigate any potential impacts and improve the habitat. In turn, the land owners agree to plant native grasses and limit grazing.

If petroleum companies choose to explore and set up operations outside the buffers, larger fees are charged, depending on the density of bird populations and condition of their habitat. The fees will be set by a governing body of representatives of the participating state wildlife agencies.

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