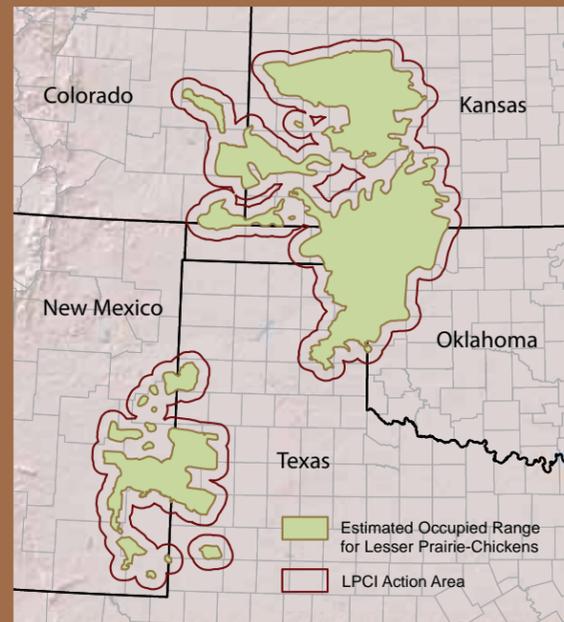




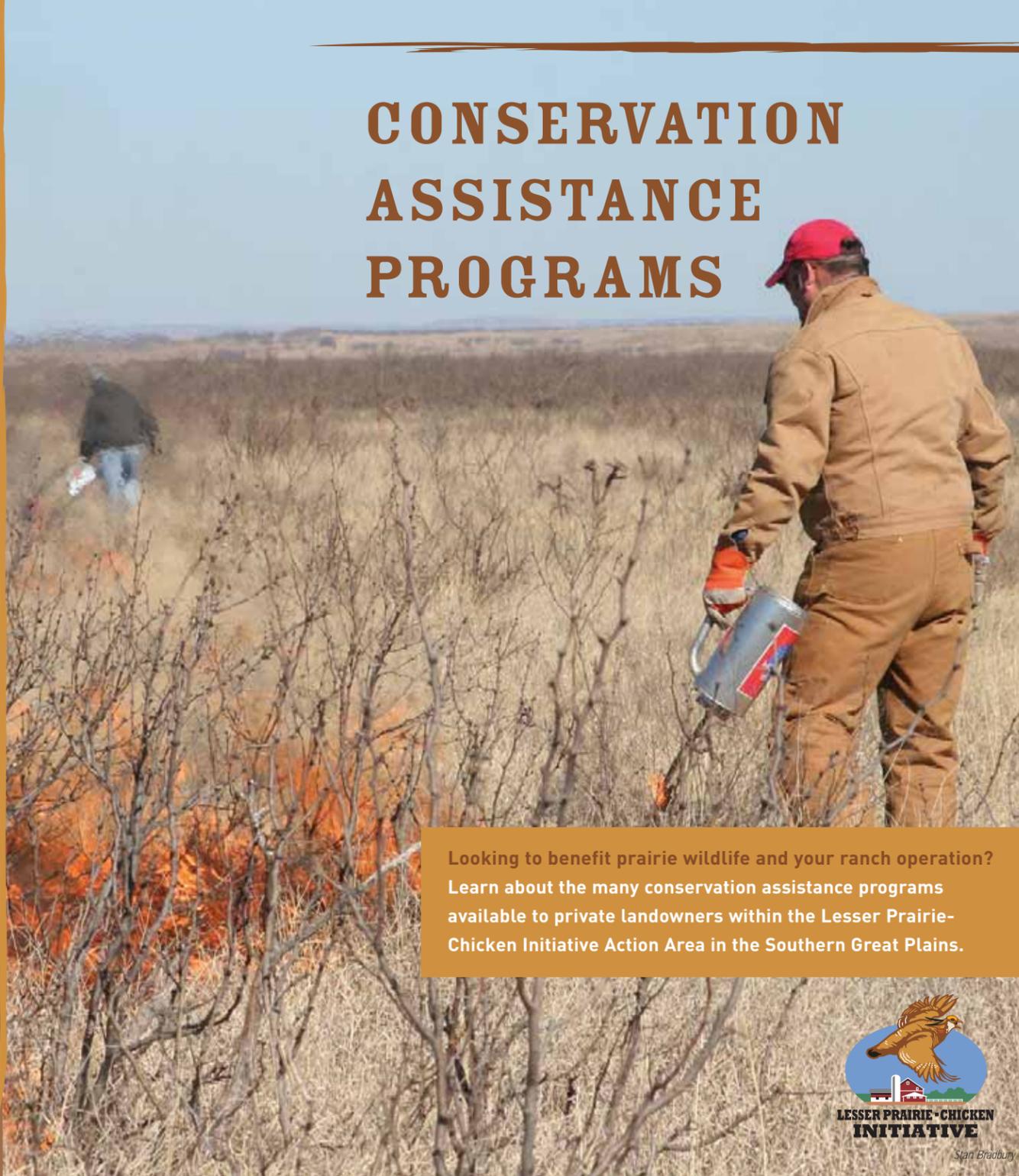
Leks Keep 'em Booming!

In 2010, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) launched the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) to help ranchers and farmers voluntarily enhance lesser prairie-chicken habitat while improving the long-term sustainability of their agricultural operations.



www.lpcinitiative.org

CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS



Looking to benefit prairie wildlife and your ranch operation? Learn about the many conservation assistance programs available to private landowners within the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative Action Area in the Southern Great Plains.



Stan Bradbury



Ken Brunson



Jeremy Roberts/Conservation Media



USDA NRCS

Several agencies and organizations offer conservation assistance to private landowners in and around the current range of lesser prairie-chickens in the Southern Great Plains (see map on back cover). The agencies and organizations included in this brochure work together to ensure that conservation efforts are doing enough of the right things in the right places to achieve our shared goal of restoring lesser prairie-chicken populations.

The array of available conservation assistance programs can be confusing. The enclosed table and accompanying frequently asked questions aim to help clarify differences among the programs and point you in the right direction to make use of the assistance programs that will work best for you.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. How do I benefit from taking part in a conservation assistance program?

Each of the programs listed in this brochure offers technical and financial assistance that can directly benefit your agricultural operation by improving forage quality and quantity, reducing woody invasives, developing water lines and structures for livestock, and more. Also, when you sign a contract, develop a management plan, and carry out associated conservation practices to benefit lesser prairie-chickens, you can run your agricultural operation without fear of Endangered Species Act regulation (see question 2 below).

2. What assurances do I have that no additional regulations will occur on my land under these programs?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) completed "biological opinions" for the lesser prairie-chicken assistance programs listed in this brochure, assessing the impacts of the conservation practices and exempting any incidental take anticipated to occur from them. ("Take," as defined by the Endangered Species Act, means "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.")

That means that when you sign a contract to participate in any of these assistance programs, you're protected from any "incidental take" of the lesser prairie-chicken inadvertently caused by implementing the conservation practices associated with the program. If you voluntarily continue to implement the conservation practices beyond the length of your contract, any incidental take associated with their implementation is exempted for up to 30 years (until 2043).

Conservation Assistance Programs Available to You	Land Use	Administering Agency	Enrollment Period	Sign-up Incentive?	Payment Information	Program Description	Contract Length	Notes on Enrollment	Agency Information	Who to Contact
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)* <i>*An EQIP contract is also referred to as "LPCI contract."</i>	Agricultural	Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Continuous	No	Landowner is reimbursed for services completed according to contract stipulations. Maximum of \$450,000 per person or legal entity.	The goal of EQIP is to enhance natural resources by improving soil health, conserving water resources, improving air and water quality, enhancing habitat, and more. Funded through the Farm Bill.	Typically 3-5 years; up to 10 years	In general, EQIP contracts pay lower rates than RWP contracts, but require a shorter commitment and allow higher stocking rates than RWP contracts.	NRCS provides free technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners as well as financial assistance through a number of Farm Bill conservation programs.	Your local USDA/NRCS Office offices.sc.gov . usda.gov
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Agricultural		Continuous	No	Annual payments for implementing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices. Compensation cannot exceed \$200,000 for all contracts entered during any five-year period.	Participants in CSP receive annual land use payments for the environmental benefits that their operation produces—the higher the benefits, the higher the payment. Lands in their final year of CRP enrollment and lands protected through ACEP can be enrolled in CSP. Funded through the Farm Bill.	5 year, with 5-year option	Five-year renewal option, if the producer agrees to meet the stewardship threshold of at least 2 additional priority resource concerns or exceed the threshold on 2 existing resource concerns.		
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Agricultural		Continuous	No	ACEP typically provides 50 percent of the cost of an easement protecting a qualifying farm or ranch.	ACEP provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural land through a conservation easement—a voluntary agreement that restricts development and uses of a landowner's property in order to protect certain functions and resource values. Funded through the Farm Bill.	In perpetuity	Specific ACEP options, like the Agricultural Land Easement "projects of special significance," can reduce an eligible entity's required cash contribution.		
Conservation Reserve Program, State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (CRP SAFE)	Agricultural	Farm Service Agency (FSA)	Continuous	Yes (per-acre incentive for newly enrolled lands)	Annual rental payment; Cost-share assistance (up to 50% of participant's costs for establishing approved cover and for mid-contract management activities for wildlife benefits.)	CRP provides annual rental payments to agricultural landowners to establish grassland cover on sensitive agricultural lands to reduce erosion, improve water quality, and establish wildlife habitat. The State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program is a subset of CRP specifically targeted to significant natural resource landscapes and associated benefits, including threatened and endangered species. Funded through the Farm Bill.	10-15 years	FSA may offer additional incentives through increased rental rates, additional cost-share, or sign-up bonus payments on wildlife friendly practices.	FSA administers CRP, and NRCS provides technical assistance.	Your FSA state office www.fsa.usda.gov
Lesser Prairie-Chicken Range-wide Conservation Plan (RWP) Term Agreements	Agricultural and non-agricultural	Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA)	Continuous application period; ranking and selection of sites each fall	Yes	Incentive payment made at signing based on location of the property and duration of contract; landowner is reimbursed for restoration practices completed according to prescription; annual rental payment each fall based on location and LPC habitat quality.	Participants in RWP contracts receive payments for implementing conservation practices that maximize the value of their property for prairie-chickens (i.e. mechanical brush removal, prescribed grazing, and establishing native grass stands.) Landowners in high priority locations who are providing optimal habitat to the LPC receive up to 135 percent of the estimated cost of implementing their conservation plan. Funded through mitigation fees paid by industries enrolled in the RWP. Minimum 160 acres.	5 or 10 years	In general, RWP contracts pay higher rates than EQIP contracts in high priority conservation areas, but require longer commitment and lower stocking rates. EQIP provides higher payments in poor quality habitat and lower LPC priority areas.	WAFWA represents 23 public agencies that protect and manage fish and wildlife resources in the western United States and Canada.	Your regional WAFWA biologist, www.wafwa.org/initiatives/grasslands/lesser-prairie-chicken/
RWP Perpetual Conservation Agreement	Agricultural and non-agricultural		Continuous application period; ranking and selection in July and January	Yes	Upfront payment for appraised value of easement and a parallel management agreement with an endowment to cover annual maintenance payments in perpetuity.	RWP provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural land through a conservation easement—a voluntary agreement that restricts development and uses of a landowner's property in order to protect certain functions and resource values.	In perpetuity			WAFWA Conservation Delivery Director, Jim Pitman, 620-208-6120, jim.pitman@wafwa.org

3. Can I sign up for assistance through more than one program at the same time?

At present, a landowner cannot have the same acres enrolled in both a federal program and a WAFWA contract. In general, the same acres may only be enrolled in one federal Farm Bill (NRCS or FSA) program contract at a time. Exceptions to this rule include the following: Lands in their final year of CRP enrollment and lands protected through ACEP can be enrolled in CSP or EQIP.

Acreage enrolled in a federal Farm Bill program (NRCS or FSA) may be simultaneously enrolled in a Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) contract as long as they are not paying for the same practice on the same acre. For example, NRCS and PFW cannot both pay a landowner to cut invasive trees on the same acre; however, NRCS can enroll a landowner under a prescribed grazing plan and PFW could assist with invasive plant control.

4. Can I enter into a perpetual easement under the NRCS ACEP program and still participate in a 5-10 year WAFWA RWP contract?

Yes, though limitations may apply.

5. If I apply for a WAFWA RWP contract, do I have to cancel my LPCI and/or PFW contracts and pay back any cost-shared practice payments?

Your best option is to complete your current LPCI and/or PFW contracts and then enroll into RWP. That way, no payback is required. Moreover, your annual WAFWA payments would start off higher due to the improved habitat quality you create by completing the federal contract.

6. Many of the conservation assistance programs cover a percentage of the anticipated costs of implementing conservation practices. Landowners can contribute "in-kind services" to cover part of their portion of project costs. What are in-kind services?

In-kind services are "sweat-equity" or other non-monetary contributions to such practices as prescribed burning, firebreaks, fence removal, brush control, herbicide applications, or other supporting activities.