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Lessor Prairie Chicken Corridor

BLM and other parties have invested considerable effort over the past six years to maintain and enhance habitat for the lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard. These efforts are designed to reduce the need to list these species as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Products of these efforts include the 2008 Special Status Species Resource Management Plan Amendment and the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances.

Efforts to reduce the need to list the chicken continue. A recent review of current practices and the pace of oil field development on public land indicate further measures may be necessary to reduce habitat fragmentation. Specifically, BLM is considering the need to bury utilities (electric, communications and cable) within the corridor shown on the attached map.

Before any decisions are made, we want to provide the public an opportunity to learn more about this issue and provide input. The links on this site will take you to information about conditions within the proposed corridor. Scoping comments will be accepted through July 30, 2010, and those comments can be sent to nmrfo_comments@blm.gov.

Questions and Answers About the LPC Corridor

What is the purpose of this corridor?

The purpose of the proposed corridor is to maintain a north-south travel way for lesser prairie-chickens.

Isn't the corridor chicken habitat?

While portions of the proposed corridor meet the definition of suitable chicken habitat, currently, there is no occupied chicken habitat in the corridor. Occupied chicken habitat is defined as an area within 1.5 miles of an active lek (mating ground) that has been active for one out of the last five years.

The area has not been occupied lesser prairie-chicken habitat for quite a number of years. Why all the concern about oil and gas development in the area now?

The purpose of the proposed corridor is to maintain a north-south travel way for lesser prairie-chickens and monitoring indicates chickens use the corridor in the winter months. By maintaining the corridor with relatively few impediments to seasonal use by chickens, BLM believes genetic diversity of the species can be more easily maintained. This might be an important factor should the chicken be listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

The area is crossed by electrical distribution and transmission lines already. Why bury distribution lines?

Chickens tend to avoid overhead structures. Research indicates chickens avoid overhead electric power lines by about 0.2 miles. This leads to habitat fragmentation. At some point, increased fragmentation leads to near total avoidance. By reducing the amount of fragmentation or holding fragmentation at a known level, chickens will continue to use an area.

Why not bury all electric lines, regardless of size?

Burying transmission lines are not feasible due to voltage, cost and safety considerations. Burying distribution lines (33Kv and less) is safe and feasible although more expensive than overhead lines. Buried electric distribution lines are common throughout the country.

Wouldn't anti-perch devices on power poles discourage raptors?

Anti-perch devices would discourage predators. Chickens, however, would not know these devices are in place. Research indicates chickens have evolved to avoid all tall structures as a survival instinct.

Wouldn't the requirement to bury distribution lines discourage further oil and gas leasing within the proposed corridor?

Approximately 74% of the federal minerals within the area are already under lease. The remaining federal minerals are generally available for lease under the prescriptions of the 2008 Special Status Species Resource Management Plan Amendment (SSS RMPA).

Why not simply ban further oil and gas development?

Lease holders have valid rights and expectations to develop their leases. Plus, domestic energy production is vital to health of the country.

This corridor wasn't included in the SSS RMPA. How can BLM propose it now? The corridor wasn't considered or analyzed in the 2008 SSS RMPA which is why the proposal and the impacts of implementing this proposal must be analyzed in the NEPA process. Proposals can be generated internally by BLM or by external parties. In this case, BLM believes there may be a need to establish this corridor.

The SSS RMPA was supported by an environmental impact statement (EIS).

Documents

[Habitat Evaluation Report](#)

Maps

[Proposed Corridor Map](#)
[Restore New Mexico Projects Map](#)
[Current Oil and Gas Development Map](#)

Contact Information

Howard Parman
 BLM Roswell Field Office
 2909 W. Second Street
 Roswell, NM 88201-2019
 (575)627-0212
Howard_Parman@blm.gov

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LPC Corridor

Since this proposal would amend the RMPA, shouldn't this proposal be analyzed in an EIS as well?

An EIS is developed when impacts are significant. Levels of significance are defined by the Council on Environmental Quality and in both BLM planning regulations and planning guidance. If the impacts can be mitigated to a point of insignificance, then development of an environmental assessment is appropriate. This is indicated by a manager signing a finding of no significant impacts or FONSI.

Will the public have an opportunity to comment on this proposal?

Certainly. The open house on June 2, 2010, was the first opportunity for the public to comment. There will be other opportunities as the analyses are completed.

What about protesting or appealing this proposal?

The time to protest is when the finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is signed and issued with a proposed decision. The proposed decision will include the process for making a protest. The time to appeal is when a BLM manager signs the decision record, making the decision final. The decision record will include the information about the process for filing an appeal with BLM and the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA).

How can I receive notification of comment periods, protest periods and appeal periods?

Make sure you get on BLM's notification list and you can do that by sending an e-mail to nmrfo_comments@blm.gov. Include your name, mailing address and/or your e-mail address. BLM will then notify you at each stage of the process.

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