



**CEHMM**

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## **LPC/DSL CCA/A Strategic Meeting**

**Milnesand, NM**

**9:00 AM**

**Wednesday, April 11, 2018**



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## **Attendees:**

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Brian Pierce      | Texas A&M       |
| Sarah Turner      | Texas A&M       |
| Charles Dixon     | Cannon ASB      |
| John Mohon        | Producer        |
| Bud Bilberry      | Producer        |
| Laura Riley       | NMSLO           |
| Jon Hayes         | Audubon         |
| Whit Storey       | CEHMM           |
| Kyle Dillard      | CEHMM           |
| Josh Ricklefs     | CEHMM           |
| Donna Schooley    | FSA-Lovington   |
| Matt Mathis       | CEHMM           |
| Cassie Brooks     | BLM             |
| Amber Brown       | Pheasants F/QF  |
| Jack Martinez     | NRCS            |
| Christian Hagen   | Oregon State    |
| Blake Grisham     | Texas Tech      |
| Clint Bohl        | USGS-Texas Tech |
| Leland Pierce     | NMDGF           |
| Rhonda Mitchell   | USDA-FSA        |
| Sumer Priest      | USDA-FSA        |
| Joilynn Garcia    | USDA-FSA        |
| Grant Beauprez    | NMDGF           |
| Ron Kellermueller | NMDGF           |
| Lisa Henne        | NMSLO           |
| Gwen Kolb         | USFWS-PFW       |
| Jenny Davis       | USFWS           |
| Debra Hill        | USFWS           |
| Randy Howard      | BLM             |



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On April 11, 2018, CEHMM personnel, LPC and DSL researchers, CCA/CCAA enrollees, and representatives from multiple state and federal agencies came together at the community center in Milnesand, NM to discuss strategic conservation measures and threats to the Lesser Prairie-Chicken (LPC) and Dunes Sagebrush Lizard (DSL). Discussions occurred over current conservation efforts and what conservation measures are viable and beneficial to the two target species. Each attendee was given the opportunity to assign a priority ranking to various areas of concern in regards to both of the target species. After the priority rankings, the top areas of concern were thoroughly discussed, along with what conservation measures will address them best.

## **Discussion of LPC Concerns**

For the LPC, the main concerns were drought, habitat fragmentation, energy development (petroleum and alternative), and livestock grazing. Other concerns discussed for the LPC included land conversion to agriculture, inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, and predation; these were not ranked as high of a concern to the species as the aforementioned topics.

Drought is the only concern that is unpredictable and uncontrollable. Preparing for a drought is critical to preserving habitat for the LPC. Management of landscapes in which livestock grazing is the economic driver for people is critical for the species. Fence and water projects through CEHMM or other agencies such as NRCS help producers to better manage and/or develop grazing strategies that are geared toward meeting the conservation measures related to forage utilization and vegetative habitat components outlined in the CCA/CCAA. It was said that these projects ensure that critical habitat will be preserved during periods of drought due to enhanced grazing management practices and that reliable water sources for the LPC (and all wildlife) will be available in these times. When the forage utilization goals are met, the native grass and forbs that the LPC rely on for all life cycles are able to better recover after a long period of drought. Without proper management on enrolled lands, LPC habitat will be degraded and lost over time. Proper management cannot occur without well planned infrastructure design that includes fence and water distribution. These projects allow the producer to design a grazing management plan that fits their property and will achieve forage utilization and habitat management goals. Grazing and drought planning workshops were suggested by participants to assist with this concern.



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Recent research has shown that LPC avoid mesquite that has encroached onto otherwise suitable habitat. Mesquite in essence creates a barrier and isolates populations of LPC that would have the opportunity to interact if not for the presence of this shrub. It was agreed upon that mesquite encroachment is best mitigated by aerial/hand application of herbicide, followed by mastication of the dead standing mesquite structure. This increases connectivity, resources for the native grasses and forbs that the LPC relies on while at the same time decreasing habitat fragmentation caused by mesquite encroachment in Eastern New Mexico. In District 2, LPC have been observed in areas that mesquite treatment/mastication have occurred.

Fragmentation as a result of energy development was also addressed. Avoidance of infrastructure created by powerlines, pumpjacks, and roads was discussed. CEHMM has worked to correct habitat fragmentation caused by infrastructure associated with energy development by reclaiming and re-seeding well pads and caliche roads no longer in service to operators. Discussion about continued reclamation efforts was had to create suitable habitat. It was determined at the meeting that there isn't enough research out yet to determine how much of an impact alternative energy development has had on LPC. Participants state that a review of LPC avoidance to wind turbines and other anthropogenic disturbance was being reviewed at the time of the meeting. This discussion goes hand in hand with the new development of the energy industry in LPC habitat. Concerns about new wind farms were mentioned, but as stated earlier, there is not enough research to show any impact on the species due to this specific action.

Grazing was also a concern for the species. Debate about grazing took place, and it was concluded that grazing can have a positive or negative affect on the LPC. How grazing is implemented, and not the specific action of grazing was determined to be the main concern. It was said that by affording livestock managers the ability to implement grazing management that will not degrade LPC habitat through range improvement projects will benefit LPC, especially during drought periods previously discussed.

## **Discussion of DSL Concerns**

The topics of most concern for DSL were impacts from oil and gas activity (including sand mines), tebuthiuron treatments on Shinnery Oak in sand dunes, alternative energy development, and the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms. Other concerns included



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impacts from cattle grazing, off-highway vehicles, overutilization for commercial, recreational or educational purposes, predation, increased competition, disease and/or parasitism, and impacts from hydrogen sulfide. These concerns were not as high of a concern as the previous four mentioned.

Concerns with sand mines and oil and gas development in occupied DSL ranked the highest among participants' concerns for DSL. The main concern is that there is no known way to recreate the structure of dunes that DSL rely on for habitat. Other infrastructure associated with oil and gas production such as well pads is to be located no less than 30 meters (m) outside of suitable dunes, however concern about the effectiveness of this action was discussed. Questions included increasing the buffer distance, has there been monitoring to determine if DSL are still using the dunes that were protected, and if there was quantifiable data that showed the results and effectiveness of the conservation measures implemented through the CCA/A. In addition to habitat loss, the possibility for sand mines in New Mexico is unknown, especially on privately controlled lands that are not enrolled in the CCAA. . It was proposed to analyze areas where new sand mines are potentially going to be implemented and overlay that with the New Mexico Natural Heritage (NMNH) map to prevent sand mines interfering with DSL habitat.

The CCA/CCAA agreements does not allow tebuthiuron (TEB) treatments enrolled within 100 m of sand dune complexes, within 500 m of occupied DSL habitat, or in corridors between dune complexes that are less than 2,000 m. The NRCS do not permit applications of TEB in suitable dunes either. The concern associated with this once again is on private lands not enrolled in the CCAA where treatment of suitable dunes may occur.

Alternative energy development was also a priority concern for LPC. If to be put in DSL habitat, destruction or modification of habitat would take place to allow for structures including but not limited to turbines, solar farms, roads, and transmission lines. Increased vehicular traffic may also impact the species.

The last concern related specifically to DSL was the inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms. The thought that the BLM would not allow sand mines in habitat and already has requirements for infrastructure in relation to habitat was mentioned, but it is unknown if there would be any restrictions on sand mine development on state trust lands in New Mexico.



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## **Discussion of Land Acquisition**

Land acquisition was a topic that was discussed to conserve and protect habitat for both species. It was stated that this would be the best practice to protect habitat but concerns about who acquired lands and how they were acquired were mentioned. Conservation easements were also mentioned as an alternative. It was suggested to use the NMNH map for DSL to determine priority areas for easements.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout all of the discussion and comments held, the priorities and conservation strategies for both species were identified. Proposals for projects to address these concerns are always accepted by CEHMM and are reviewed for approval on an annual basis according to the benefits that they will provide to both or either species by representatives from CEHMM, the Bureau of Land Management, the New Mexico State Land Office, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.