

**Protocol
For
Incidental Take Permit and Authorization**

Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*)

Note

If carrying out a given protocol is not feasible, or multiple listed species in a given management area pose conflicts, contact the Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC) 608-267-2108. Staff in NHC will work with Science Services (Research) staff, species experts, and managers to establish an acceptable protocol for a given site that will allow for incidental take without further legal consultation or public notice

I. Species Background Information

A. Status

State status: Threatened

USFWS Region 3 Species of Management Concern? No. Non-migratory.

Global Range: Found only in the U.S. Hunttable populations in South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Kansas and remnant populations in Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

B. Habitat

General Habitat Description: Greater prairie chickens require large grassland landscapes (>10,000 acres) with high amounts of open space. At least 35% (50% to 75% preferred) of the landscape needs to contain grass-dominated vegetation, including large undisturbed patches with a well-developed litter layer. This species prefers to nest and roost in grass > 15 cm (6 in), but also requires some short grass for displaying on leks. Treelines, woodlots, and other timber should be limited to ≤20% of the landscape and exist only in small, scattered blocks. At least some idle grasslands should be managed as brood-rearing cover and contain a significant forb content that will produce the abundant insect population important to chicks during their first month of life. Winter cover and an adequate winter food supply also are critical. Areas with tall, dense forbs, scattered shrubs, or small patches of regenerating aspen provide protection from severe weather and

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also contain the weed seed, buds, berries, and grains required for sustenance (Sample and Mossman 1997, Keir 2006, Johnson et al. 2011, Warnke 2004).

Critical habitat features: Large areas of undisturbed grassland and open horizons are essential components of prairie chicken habitat. Recently disturbed grassland is preferred by broods. The appropriate habitat mix must be present on a minimum of 18 square miles.

C. Life History

The greater prairie chicken is a non-migratory grouse native to the state of Wisconsin. It is a lekking species, meaning that adult males congregate communally in spring on many breeding display grounds scattered throughout the occupied range. These display grounds are referred to as leks, or booming grounds in the case of the prairie chicken. Adult male prairie chickens may spend much of their entire life in close proximity to one of these booming grounds.

Prairie chickens require large expanses of open grassland. Most mating occurs at the lek site, with the peak occurring around April 18 each year. Females typically nest within a one-mile radius of the lek. Clutch size is 10 to 12 eggs, and the peak of the hatch in Wisconsin is in late May and early June, after 23 to 25 days of incubation. Hens with broods spend most of their time in suitable grasslands searching for food, primarily insects.

Brood dispersal occurs throughout the fall, winter, and early spring, and can account for prairie chicken observations well removed from the occupied range. Juvenile hens exhibit the greatest dispersal movements.

Prairie chickens group together in “packs” of birds for the late fall and winter. Packs are associated with winter-feeding sites, and may separate into smaller groupings for night roosting. In central Wisconsin, birds in these packs may number in the dozens, perhaps as many as 200 individuals or more.

D. Definitions

Nesting habitat: Nesting habitat for greater prairie chickens is open grasslands with residual growth of moderate to tall height present at the beginning of the nesting season (April 15). Open grasslands, as used here, is defined as areas with minimal to no brush or tree cover that are dominated by cool or warm season grasses that may be mixed with forbs but do not include monotypic areas of invasive forbs including, but not limited to, goldenrod, nettle, spotted knapweed. Nesting habitat excludes any lands that are managed primarily for the production of forage or commodity crops.

Property: Property, as used here, is defined as ownership boundaries or defined private or public management areas (e.g. Leola Marsh Wildlife Area, Buena Vista Wildlife Area, Paul J. Olson Wildlife Area, Mead Wildlife Area).

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II. **Management Protocol For Authorized Incidental Take**

If the management activity is for the purpose of recovering, maintaining, or improving the grassland, prairie, or savanna ecosystem that includes habitat for prairie chickens, then incidental take is allowed if these conditions are followed:

First, for any suitable prairie chicken nesting habitat, the **combined total of all treatments (as listed below) may not exceed** 20% of the entire property between the following dates (outside of these dates all management actions are allowed so long as take is minimized).

A. **Burning**

Burning is not allowed between May 10 and August 1.

B. **Mowing**

Mowing is not allowed between May 10 and August 1.

Note: Many grassland birds may nest earlier than prairie chickens. To minimize impacts to all grassland birds, mowing should begin being restricted after April 15th.

C. **Selective Brush Cutting**

No restrictions on brush cutting.

D. **Grazing**

Grazing is not allowed between May 10 and August 1.

Note: Many grassland birds may nest earlier than prairie chickens. To minimize impacts to all grassland birds, grazing should begin being restricted after April 15th.

E. **Herbicide Use**

To the extent possible, herbiciding should be avoided between May 10 and August 1. If herbiciding during this period is necessary to control herbaceous vegetation, spot application with low persistence/short half-life herbicide using wick, sponge, or hand-held spray applications may be used. During this period, broadcast spraying should not be conducted. For woody species, cut- stump or basal bark applications should be used.