

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) Monitoring Questions and Answers

- 1) How will the vegetation data we are currently collecting on lesser prairie-chicken (LPC) contracts be used?

This data will provide local offices with some indication (over time) if the prescribed conservation actions are yielding the vegetation changes sought after in the conservation plan for the ranch. Additionally, because these data are being collected consistently across the range, it will enable us to “roll-up” these data across similar ecological site descriptions (ESDs) or vegetation communities and track trend in vegetation response to the conservation practices on a much broader scale. Additionally, it was discussed how these data are to be used to potentially update the the national ESD database.

- 2) Are there plans to add plant composition (with a frame or other means) to the vegetation surveys?

The NRCS LPCI Monitoring Protocols from April 2012 include having access to the species composition data from the forage inventory, range health, and ESD. The forage inventory should already be done when the grazing plan was completed. The forage inventory will be completed according to each state’s policy and will be species specific. Remember, the LPCI Monitoring Protocols are the minimum protocols. These protocols capture “structure” and the most likely aspects of that structure which might change due to management. Additional data collection can be completed as time allows.

- 3) Will we be concentrating more on nesting season vegetation next year as opposed to conducting the surveys in the fall?

Yes, you should shift gears to sample during the breeding season in 2013 for new sites as well as return visits from 2012 contracts. However, you SHOULD also resample 2012 again next fall to have a one year comparison during similar phenological stage. In 2014 you would ONLY monitor during the breeding season (please refer to guidance on monitoring methodology for appropriate timing of subsequent visits.) This approach will provide for a comparable baseline between years 1 and 2 and the ability to have “correction factor” to assess future years as you will have both breeding season and fall data in 2013.

- 4) Plant Height: Are we considering yucca and prickly pear cacti under the woody category?

Yes. The PLANTS Database lists these as shrub growth habits (even though they are in a lot of forb wildflower plant identification books).

- 5) Line Point Intercept: We attended the first training and it appears a few things changed. On the form received that day, PG=perennial grass was the only grass category and I made notes that we were also to use HG=annual grass. **However, the current form has TG=tufted grass and SG=sod grass instead, which are a little confusing.** My guess is that TG is all bunch grass like species (little bluestem, needle and thread, silver bluestem, blue grama, sand dropseed, red threeawn, six-weeks fescue) and SG are rhizomatous and stoloniferous (big and sand bluestem, prairie sandreed, switchgrass, western wheatgrass, buffalograss)? Where do sand paspalum, sideoats grama, and indiangrass fall in these categories?

Yes, the growth habit categories changed after the Kansas/Oklahoma/Colorado training because of a discussion with the USFWS regarding bare ground (BG). It is defined as non-canopy exposed soil in the draft Interagency Ecological Site Description Handbook.

However, the USFWS biologists consider BG as open ground that the LPC chicks can run through unimpeded. In order to capture this distinction from the transect data, TG and SG are included as opposed to PG and HG. So BG, all litter, and SG will count as BG. TG is used instead of tall grass to recognize that well managed mid-grasses like blue grama and sideoats grama may also impede chick travel (TG category). Closely grazed blue grama would fall into the SG category. Yes, it is subjective, but it was reasoned that it will work with the LPC because of their limited habitat and species mix plus the focus on present STRUCTURE as opposed to species composition. Bunch grass acronym BG would be hard to keep separated from bare ground and would ignore sand bluestem, etc. So, the data collector should be thinking like a LPC chick when deciding whether to put the grass in TG or SG structure categories.

- 6) Similarly what should cheat grass be identified as?
Cheat is TG and should identify in the comments as dominate species
- 7) The litter categories have been expanded since the training. Woody litter (WL) is obvious and herbaceous litter (HL) to be all non-woody plant litter. What is organic litter (OL): cow-pies, other feces, and dead insects? What is artificial litter? Trash?
Exactly right. Artificial litter also includes old fence posts. Litter is detached recognizable plant parts on the surface. WL needs to be ¼ inch thick so woody plant leaves are generally considered herbaceous because the leaves can be moved around by the wind similar to herbaceous. Regardless of cheat grasses' orientation or how dead it looks, if it is attached or embedded, i.e., to enclose snugly or firmly in the soil, it is identified to specie name, TG or SG as if it were alive.
- 8) Plant phenology: What has been done so far is record species observed in each of the stages and then check the box of the predominate (most common) stage for that growth form in the plant community.
That is correct. One can separate cool-seasons from warm-seasons by checking two boxes when both are present. Knowing the date of data collection one can know the phenological stages of both.
- 9) In training, we were instructed to run two independent transects as opposed to the perpendicular and crossed transects used in the National Resources Inventory (NRI) assessments. We have had some other instructions on this, but could you confirm again?
The independent transects were to allow spatial flexibility to monitor on a single site or landform within the site. Crossed transects are OK if both transects stay within these desirable positions.
- 10) The LPCI monitoring instructions do not specify forage clipping for exclusion cages vs. surrounding grazed range. However, this may be a regular part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and related contract monitoring and in relationship and the vicinity of transects. Would you like to supply any additional guidance on providing uniformity in how this should be conducted?
Exclusion cages for EQIP contracts are covered under state policy and should be included in LPCI contracts accordingly.