

Working Lands for Wildlife Questions and Answers

- 1. What is Working Lands for Wildlife?** Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is a partnership between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Through this partnership, landowners can receive technical and financial assistance by volunteering to restore habitat for species on their land.
- 2. What species are included in WLFW?** WLFW includes seven species, including the bog turtle, golden-winged warbler, gopher tortoise, greater sage-grouse, lesser prairie chicken, New England cottontail, and southwest willow flycatcher.
- 3. Are these species listed under the Endangered Species Act?** The bog turtle, the western range of the gopher tortoise, and the southwest willow flycatcher are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The eastern range of the gopher tortoise, the greater sage-grouse, the lesser prairie chicken, and the New England cottontail are not currently listed under the ESA, but are candidates for listing in the future. The golden-winged warbler is not currently listed under the ESA or a candidate for listing.
- 4. Why should I enroll in WLFW?** The program provides technical and financial support for landowners who voluntarily choose to implement conservation practices for the species while continuing to manage the habitat as working lands. These conservation practices were developed in partnership by NRCS and FWS to benefit the species. WLFW also provides landowners with regulatory predictability about the use of the conservation practices and the ESA.
- 5. What does “regulatory predictability” under the ESA mean for landowners who sign up for WLFW?** While the benefits from implementing the conservation practices are clear, some practices such as prescribed burning could have negative “incidental” impacts to the listed species in the short run but significant benefits in the long run. Landowners who voluntarily sign up for WLFW receive “regulatory predictability” that they will be exempted from any “incidental take” of the listed species that was inadvertently caused by the implementation of the conservation practices identified in WLFW. To provide this predictability to landowners, FWS has completed “biological opinions” for the listed species under section 7 of the ESA, assessing the impacts of the conservation practices and exempting any incidental take anticipated to occur from them. If a landowner voluntarily continues to implement the conservation practices in the future, any incidental take anticipated in the opinions to occur from their implementation is exempted for as many as 30 years.
- 6. How will “regulatory predictability” address the candidate species in WLFW that are not listed now, but may be listed in the future?** The FWS will be determining in the future whether to list the eastern range of the gopher tortoise, the greater sage-grouse, the lesser prairie chicken, and the New England cottontail as threatened or endangered under the ESA. In the event that any of the species are listed, the FWS is committed to confirming the “conference report and opinions” that the agency has already completed for these species as biological opinions. The conference reports and opinions, like biological opinions, assess the impacts of the conservation practices on these candidate species. The biological opinions will exempt

incidental take from the conservation practices for as many as 30 years. As a result, the predictability for landowners is clear. They will know that the conservation practices will continue to benefit wildlife for as long as they are implemented, and that any ESA issues associated with their implementation have already been addressed.

7. How does “regulatory predictability” relate to the golden-winged warbler? The golden-winged warbler is neither currently listed under the ESA nor a candidate species for listing. Should the species status change in the future and the potential need for listing be considered, FWS intends to follow the same approach to ESA predictability for NRCS and landowners that has been used for the other species in WLFW.

8. Where do landowners go to find out more about WLFW? Interested landowners should contact their local NRCS office. An NRCS planner will determine if habitat on the property is suitable, can be improved, or created to benefit the species. If so, the NRCS planner and the landowner will jointly develop a conservation plan, which will recommend a combination of practices and associated conservation measures that the landowner will apply to create or improve the habitat for the species.