QUARTERLY REPORT

2025 *January 1, 2025 - March 31, 2025*

CEHMM
Conservation & Environmental Services

Candidate Conservation Agreements for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken and the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard in New Mexico

505 North Main Street, Carlsbad, NM 88220 ● (575) 885-3700 ● www.cehmm.org

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The Candidate Conservation Agreements

This report describes the activities conducted in the first quarter of 2025 for the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*; hereafter LPC) and Dunes Sagebrush Lizard (*Sceloporus arenicolus*; hereafter DSL). The Center for Environmental Health Monitoring and Management (CEHMM) administers a CCA for federal lands and minerals and a CCAA for non-federal lands and minerals. The two agreements, collectively referred to as the CCA/A, allow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and CEHMM to work in cooperation and in consultation with landowners and industry to support conservation measures for the LPC and the DSL. Both species are now listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1531, et seq.). In 2023, the LPC was listed as endangered in its southern distinct population segment and threatened in its northern distinct population segment (Appendix A). In 2024, the DSL was listed as endangered throughout its entire range. The purpose of the CCA/A is to:

- Develop, coordinate, and implement conservation actions to reduce and/or eliminate known threats to the LPC and the DSL in New Mexico on federal, state, and private surfaces and minerals
- Support ongoing efforts to re-establish and maintain viable populations of LPC and DSL in currently occupied and suitable habitats
- Encourage the development and protection of suitable LPC and DSL habitats by giving incentives to Participating Cooperators to implement specific conservation measures

Under the CCA, federal lessees, operators, or permittees, who joined by voluntarily signing a Certificate of Participation (CP), receive a high degree of certainty that additional restrictions are not to be placed on their otherwise legal activities with the federal listing of both species. The companion CCAA provides incentives for voluntary conservation of the LPC and the DSL on non-federal lands. By signing a Certificate of Inclusion (CI) under the CCAA, the lessee, owner, operator, or permittee voluntarily committed to implement specific conservation

measures for the species on non-federal lands. Under the CCAA, private landowners receive assurances that additional restrictions cannot be placed on their otherwise legal activities on enrolled lands. In both cases, enrollment in the CCA or CCAA is voluntary. CEHMM is the federal permit holder for these agreements and is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and reporting on projects completed with CCA/A funds.

CEHMM is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation based in Carlsbad and Milnesand, New Mexico. CEHMM's participation allows for a federally approved, independently audited financial management system to provide funding for management and administration.

The following quarterly report details projects funded and completed with CCA/A funds. The report also details the daily implementation of the agreements including activities such as sitting energy development out of DSL habitat, monitoring the species through the use of presence/absence surveys, and monitoring participant conservation commitment. For more details on the CCA/A programs, visit our website at www.cehmm.org.

Benefits of Candidate Conservation Agreement Programs

- Voluntary enrollment
- Measurable on-the-ground conservation
- Landscape-based approach
- Allow landowners and industry to continue work on the ground

Enrollment Numbers

The number of enrollees in the LPC and DSL CCA/A programs can be found in Table 1. Currently, there are 2,345,125.21 acres enrolled by ranching participants in the program (Figure 1). To date, industry participants have enrolled 4,965,343.28 acres in the CCA/A program (Figure 1). CEHMM is continuously updating enrolled acreage through the All-Activities method of enrollment, as participants can add or remove their covered acres at any time.

Table 1. Current program enrollment totals for LPC/DSL and DSL only CCAs, and LPC/DSL and DSL-only CCAAs for ranching, industry, and linear development. Industry enrollment is divided by parcel-by-parcel and all-activities enrollment types.

Enrollment Type	LPC/DSL CCA Enrollments	DSL Only CCA Enrollments	LPC/DSL CCAA Enrollments	DSL Only CCAA Enrollments
Ranching	40	1	103	1
Industry (Parcel-by-Parcel)	14	0	12	0
Industry (All-Activities)	47	3	50	3
Linear Development	31	6	32	6

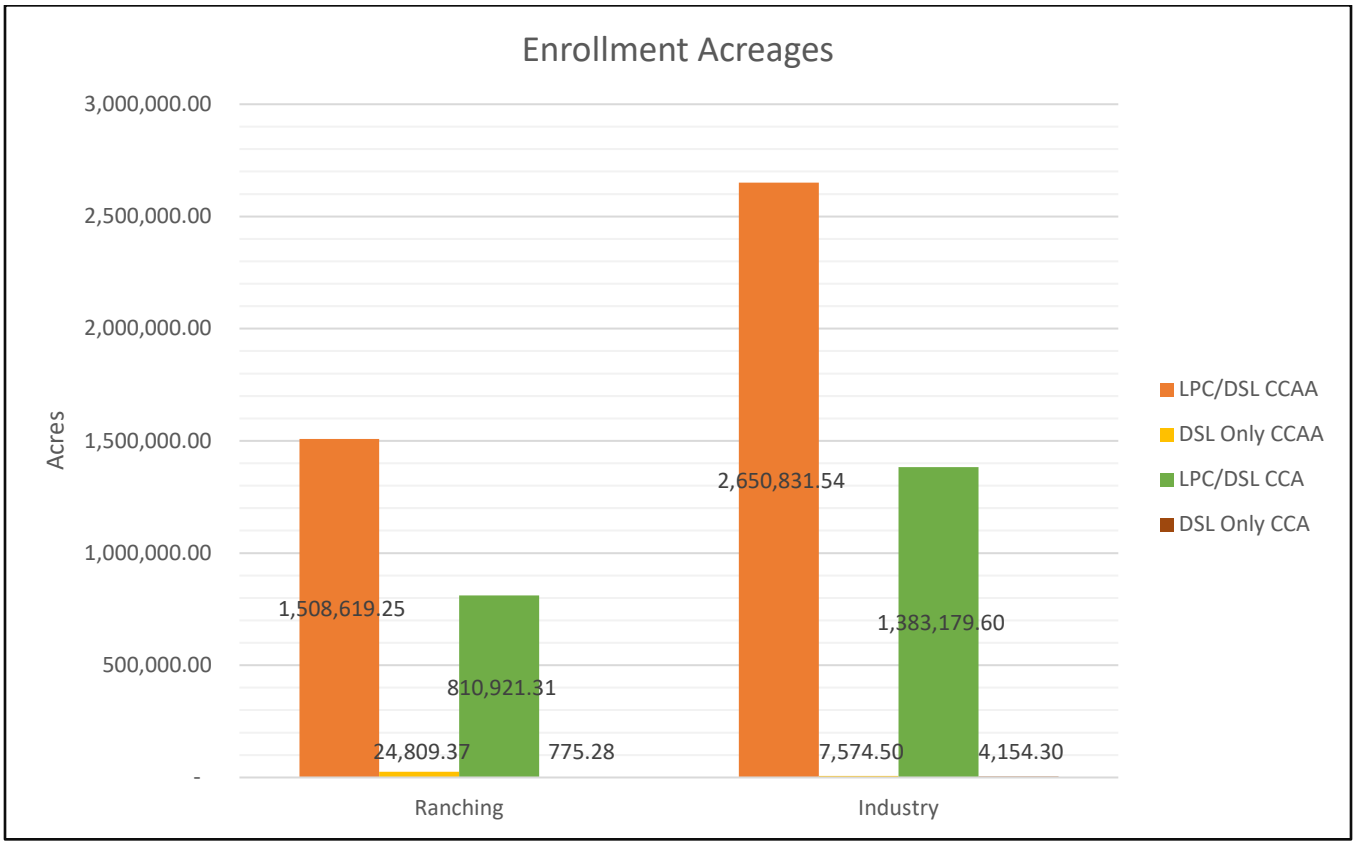


Figure 1. Current enrollment acreages for LPC/DSL and DSL-only CCAs and CCAAs for ranching and industry enrollment types.

Habitat Conservation Fund

CEHMM establishes a Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) for each oil and gas operator, as well as each linear development operator, that executes a CP or CI. The contribution amount is determined by the number of acres enrolled within their CP or CI agreements. Once land-disturbing activities are identified and permitted in the operator's certificate, conservation fees are debited from their HCF. Approximately 29% of the funds received are allocated for overhead expenses. The remaining balance is used exclusively in support of the CCA/A programs. Supported activities include, but are not limited to, planning and implementation, on-sites, grazing programs, projects authorized by the ranking team, research, enrollments and amendments, project monitoring, education and outreach, and support services (e.g., vehicle and equipment procurement and maintenance).

Habitat Restoration Projects Completed in Q1 of 2025

TNC Fence

Completed: February 2025
Units: Removal: 6 miles of fence; Installation: 5.3 miles of fence
Description: Removed approximately 6 miles of dilapidated interior fencing. Replaced approximately 5.3 miles of that fence with wildlife-friendly fencing.

TNC Water

Completed: February 2025
Units: Installation: 5 troughs; Removal: 4 windmill towers
Description: Removed and replaced 5 non-functional water troughs and replaced them with 20-foot fiberglass tanks. Removed 4 windmill towers.

Habitat Restoration Projects Funded and Awaiting Completion

Running N Kenna Fence

Approved and Funded: September 2024
Budget: $228,880.11
Units: 6.9 miles of fence
Description: Remove approximately 6.9 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it with wildlife friendly fencing.

D2 Shop

Approved and Funded: September 2024
Budget: 140,000.00
Units: 1 shop
Description: Install a shop on the Milnesand property to house all the equipment and tools needed for daily operation in District 2.

Mathis Fence

Approved and Funded: September 2024
Budget: $370,803.69
Units: 11.1 miles of fence
Description: Remove approximately 11.1 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it with wildlife friendly fencing.

Marley Water Project

Approved and Funded: September 2024
Budget: $23,362.78
Units: 3 water troughs
Description: Remove three non-functional water troughs and replace them with 20-foot fiberglass tanks.

Berry Hand Mesquite Treatment

Approved and Funded: September 2024
Budget: $24,047.94
Units: 55 acres
Description: Hand treat approximately 55 acres of mesquite.

Owyhee LPC Survey Research Project

Approved and Funded: September 2024
Budget: $50,000.00
Description: A research project aimed at developing a protocol for conducting aerial LPC surveys using advanced infrared cameras mounted on fixed-wing planes.

Bogle Fence Proposal

Approved and Funded: August 2023
Budget: $375,410.28
Units: 9 miles of fence
Description: Remove approximately 5.5 miles of dilapidated interior fencing and 3.5 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it all with wildlife friendly fencing.

Bogle Mesquite Proposal

Approved: August 2023 **Funded:** September 2024
Budget: $681,313.30
Units: 9,896 acres
Description: Aerially treat approximately 9,896 acres of mesquite.

Kerby Mesquite Proposal

Approved & Funded: August 2023
Budget: $160,818.60
Units: 2,262 acres
Description: Aerially treat approximately 2,262 acres of mesquite.

Kerby Water Proposal

Approved & Funded: August 2023
Budget: $97,426.37
Units: 3 troughs; 5.5 miles of water pipeline
Description: Remove 3 non-functional water troughs and replace them with 20-foot fiberglass tanks. Remove and replace 5.5 miles of water pipeline.
Progress: In 2024, 2 troughs and 3.2 miles of water pipeline were installed.

Taylor Peak Mesquite Treatment

Approved & Funded: August 2023
Budget: $38,139.01
Units: 1,026 acres
Description: Aerially treat approximately 1,026 acres of mesquite.

Navarette Water

Approved & Funded: June 2016 (Amended 2018)
Budget: $39,451.89
Units: 1 trough; 1 solar pump; 1 windmill removal
Description: Remove 1 old windmill and replace it with a solar-powered pump. Install a new 20-foot fiberglass tank.

Pembers DSM

Approved & Funded: March 2022
Budget: $45,784.55
Units: 1,600 acres
Description: Remove approximately 1,600 acres of dead, standing mesquite (DSM).

Running N DSM

Approved & Funded: March 2022
Budget: $148,777.39
Units: 5,800 acres
Description: Remove approximately 5,800 acres of DSM.

Robert Jolley Fencing Improvement

Approved & Funded: October 2022
Budget: $120,215.80
Units: 5.75 miles of fence
Description: Remove approximately 5.75 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it with wildlife-friendly fencing.

Research Project Updates in Q1 of 2025

Owyhee Lesser Prairie Chicken Aerial Surveys

Approved & Funded: February 2025
Budget: $50,000
Description: Conduct aerial infrared (AIR) survey of 23 known LPC lek locations in eastern New Mexico and utilize active leks to determine methodology and efficacy of surveying for LPCs using AIR. Flights were conducted in mid-April over a two-day span. Additionally, CEHMM staff conducted ground surveys at the same lek locations across the same period so that LPC detection can be compared between aerial surveys and traditional survey methods. Data processing and analyses are ongoing but expected to be completed by Q4 of 2025.

USGS Dunes Sagebrush Lizard Population Monitoring and Shinnery Oak Tebuthiuron Studies

Approved & Funded: June 2018
Description: Implement a long-term monitoring study to assess DSL population dynamics across the range in New Mexico. The establishment of population monitoring began in 2018 and has since been continued through additional funding to track population parameters across different DSL populations. Additionally, a secondary study was conducted to assess the potential long-term impact of past tebuthiuron treatments on shinnery oak recovery, as shinnery oak cover is an important predictor of suitable DSL habitat. Preliminary efforts to assess these effects have been completed, and interpretation of these results and the determination of future avenues in shinnery oak recovery continue.

Vegetation Monitoring

In the first quarter of 2025, CEHMM staff began preparing the grazing exclosures that will be monitored in the upcoming year. In District 1 (i.e., ranches enrolled south of NM 380), 24 grazing exclosures have been prepared. Of the 24 exclosures, 1 was newly added, 7 were still located in suitable areas, and 16 needed to be relocated. The relocated exclosures were moved to new areas of the ranch to ensure even representation of all soil types. In District 2 (i.e., ranches enrolled north of NM 380), 45 grazing exclosures have been prepared. Of the 45 exclosures, 4 were newly added, and 41 were in suitable areas. None needed to be relocated.

Preparing the grazing exclosures involves relocating them at least six feet from their previous locations to new, representative areas within the same pasture. This process helps to avoid forage weight bias that may occur when exclosures are left in the same location for four years. Once grazing exclosures are moved to novel sites, the grass inside is clipped to ensure that data collection is representative of the current growing season. CEHMM staff is still in the process of moving and installing cages, and updates will be provided in the 2025 Q2 Report. In 2025, CEHMM staff in Districts 1 and 2 plan to complete grazing monitoring for 102 grazing exclosures within 17 enrolled ranches.

LPC Monitoring

In March 2025, CEHMM staff surveyed six enrolled ranches and observed a total of 173 LPC individuals across 19 leks. Surveys will continue through May 2025, and updated numbers will be included in the second quarterly report.

During LPC surveys (including road surveys and lek surveys), the following data are collected: survey area (i.e., ranch name), presence of LPCs, direction of LPCs, time, temperature, wind speed, cloud cover, noise sources, noise levels, and other wildlife observed or heard. During roadside surveys, surveyors stand outside of the vehicle and listen for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, all environmental data is collected. When the 10 minutes have expired, the surveyor returns to their vehicle, drives 1 mile down the road, and repeats the process. When LPCs are heard on a roadside survey, a bearing is taken in the direction of the LPC; then another bearing is taken at the next stop. This allows the approximate location of the LPC to be triangulated, and the lek to be flushed and counted. Lek surveys are completed on enrolled ranches. Lek surveys consist of visiting historic and active leks to determine the current LPC count for each existing lek. When the LPC is heard, surveyors walk to the lek and flush individuals. This allows a count to be taken and the lek coordinates to be recorded. Surveys are initiated 30 minutes prior to sunrise and conclude at 9 a.m. If wind speeds exceeded 15 miles per hour, surveys are stopped and continued the following day. This is because high wind speeds inhibit surveyors from hearing the LPCs, thus increasing the possibility of detecting false negative observations.

Mitigation of Impacts to Habitat

Oil and gas development and associated infrastructure can pose a serious threat to the DSL because of its specialized nature and dependence on dynamic sand dune habitats. Due to the severe loss of these habitats in the wake of development, enrollees have agreed on the implementation of certain conservation measures to offset further decline, including no surface occupancy within 30 meters of suitable or occupied DSL habitat. There are four major ways (i.e., field consultations, desktop block reviews, linear development desktop consultations, and pad desktop consultations) that CEHMM staff ensures that infrastructure does not fall within this 30-meter buffer. Field consultations include on-site visits with enrolled companies to appropriately relocate proposed developments near suitable or occupied habitat and to help ensure that dune habitats within the required 30-meter buffer are avoided. The remaining three assessment types are conducted via desktop analysis in which CEHMM staff utilizes aerial imagery, soil layers, and DSL habitat layers to 1) delineate suitable habitat, 2) reroute linear infrastructure, and/or 3) relocate pads. The number of wells and rights-of-way (ROW) moved out of DSL habitat in Q1 of 2025 is shown in Table 2. It is important to note that not all the consultations depicted in the table below were located within suitable DSL habitat.

	Field Consultations	Desktop Block Reviews	Linear Development Desktop Consultations	Pad Desktop Consultations

Initial Area Reviews	9	8	21	7
Number Relocated out of Habitat	8	6	17	3

Table 2. On-sites and development relocations due to DSL habitat conflicts in Q1 of 2025.

Carlsbad High School Natural Resources Management Class

In March 2025, CEHMM staff had the opportunity to teach Carlsbad High School students about environmental assessment procedures for rights-of-way. During these classes, staff shared examples of natural resource concerns that oil and gas producers and linear development companies must evaluate before construction begins. CEHMM staff also presented case studies demonstrating how this knowledge relates to real-world scenarios CEHMM has assessed.

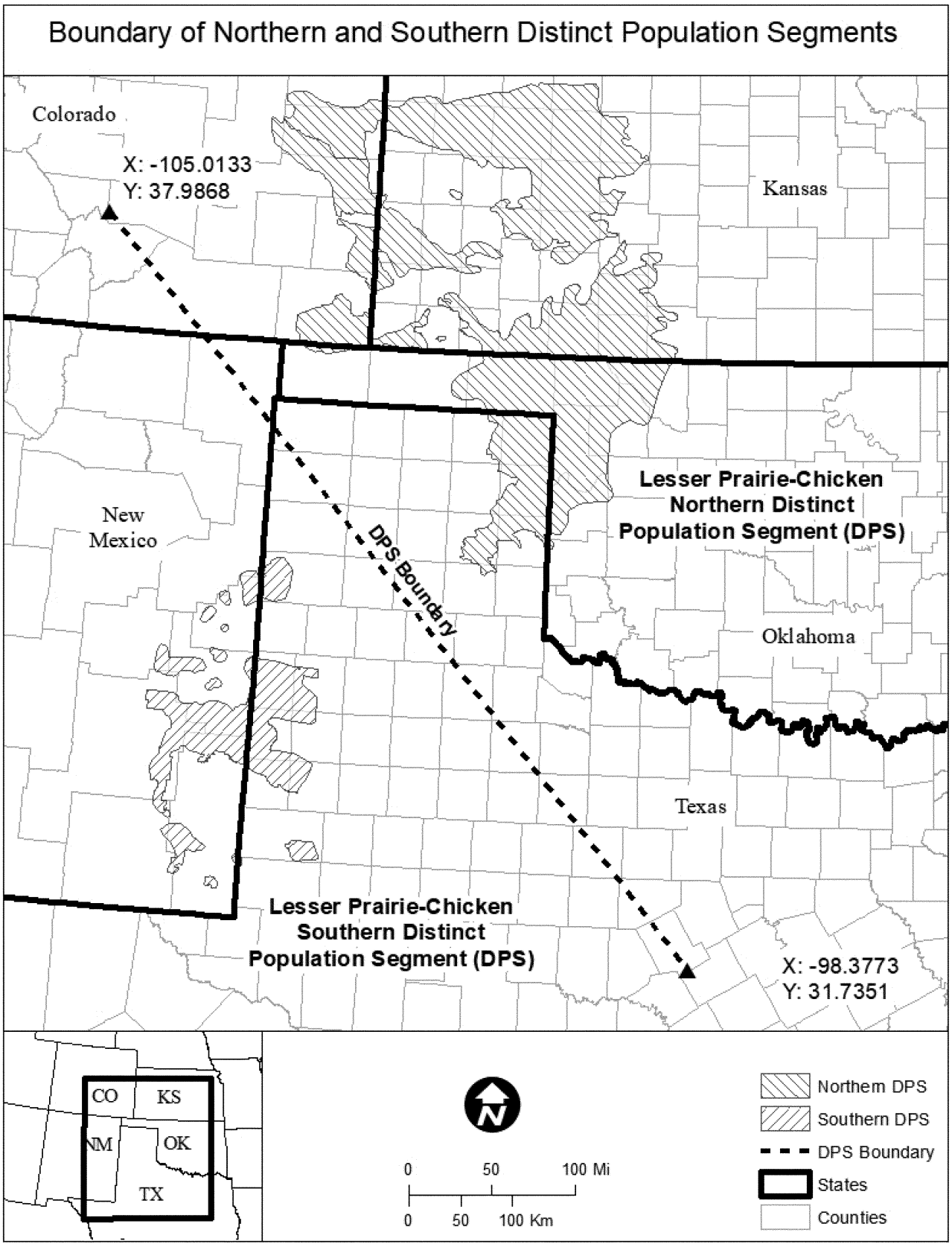
SENMC Annual STEAM Expo

In March 2025, CEHMM staff participated in the Southeast New Mexico College STEAM Expo in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Staff hosted a booth to educate the public about CEHMM's various conservation and environmental services programs.

Rotary Club

In March 2025, CEHMM staff attended a Carlsbad Rotary Club meeting and gave a presentation on the life history and ecology of the lesser prairie-chicken in New Mexico. As part of this presentation, CEHMM fielded questions from attendees about the CCA/A programs and how these efforts support LPC populations in southeastern New Mexico.

APPENDIX A: LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN DISTINCT POPULATION SEGEMENTS



Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service. 87 FR 72674

Executive Director Signature

Signed: Emily Wirth
Emily K. Wirth, Executive Director

Date: 4/22/2025

If you have any questions, please contact Connor Adams at (575) 885-3700 or Kyle Dillard at (575) 675-2324.