

# Restoring Lesser Prairie-Chicken Habitat in New Mexico

Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) received two grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to fund the restoration and creation of nesting habitat to support larger populations of Lesser Prairie-Chicken within core breeding areas in southeastern New Mexico. From January 2009 to November 2011, PLJV and its partners (The Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management, Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District, Oxy USA, Marbob Energy, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Weaver Ranch, New Mexico State Land Office, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and Audubon New Mexico) examined where road reclamation would have the biggest effect on Lesser Prairie-Chicken, worked with landowners to conduct restoration activities, and demonstrated that reclaiming a few acres can have a much larger effect on creating suitable habitat.



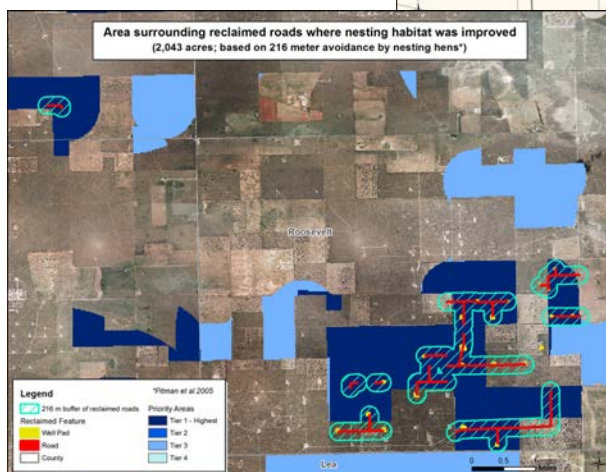
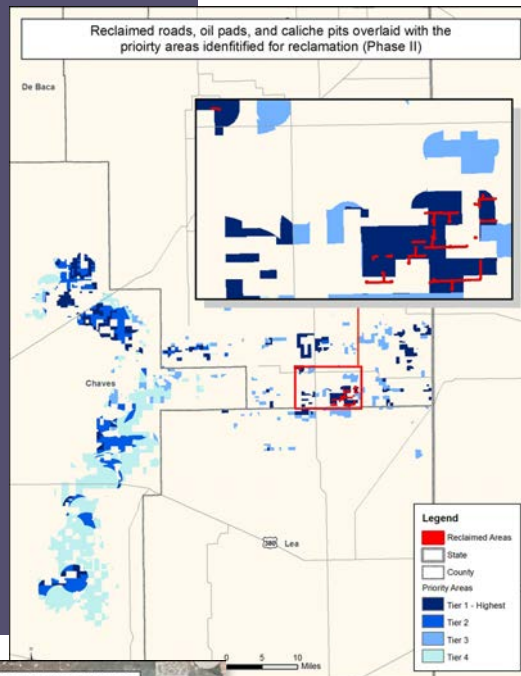
## Project Accomplishments

- Developed a **prioritization map** to target areas for reclamation of abandoned oil and gas infrastructure, ensuring that limited funds were used to create the most impact for Lesser Prairie-Chicken habitat
- Reclaimed 77 acres of caliche roads and oil pads, creating **3,998 acres of suitable nesting habitat** previously rendered unsuitable by those roads
- Marked **11 miles of fence**, in collaboration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, reducing a significant threat to the bird
- Sprayed **145 acres of mesquite** and cut **162 acres of trees** within Lesser Prairie-Chicken core range, increasing the suitability of over 300 acres of habitat
- Found 38 new Lesser Prairie-Chicken leks—26 of them on New Mexico state land—in areas that had not been previously surveyed, resulting in about **14,000 acres being protected** from oil and gas leases in the future

## prioritizing abandoned road reclamation

Priority areas for reclamation are shown in blue. All priority areas include tracts of land with abandoned oil and gas roads and pads, suitable habitat, mineral rights owned by the Bureau of Land Management and no current extraction leases. The highest priority areas (dark blue) are

- low in active well density,
- not on public land,
- near currently active leks, and
- near a conservation area.



This map shows the inset area from above using a satellite image as the base layer. The reclaimed roads are in red and well pads in yellow. A 216-meter buffer has been placed around the roads to illustrate the extent of habitat fragmentation. Hens are effectively unable to nest in the outlined areas; therefore, reclaiming a few acres of road makes the entire area suitable for nesting.

## Photo Credit

*Lesser Prairie-Chicken by Noppadol Paothong*