

WASHINGTON - The federal government will begin a yearlong review to determine whether the lesser prairie chicken, whose habitat is concentrated in western Oklahoma and four other states, should be listed as a threatened species. Oklahoma elected officials who had been concerned that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would pursue a path toward listing the bird as an endangered species hailed the decision Friday and said the proposed protection would mean fewer restrictions on energy development, agriculture and other activities. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., who has been working with Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe on the issue, said, "Given the tough odds that we faced originally, a proposed listing as 'threatened' is the best possible outcome at this time because it brings us one step closer to achieving a 'not-warranted' decision in the coming months." A not-warranted decision would mean that the bird, a species of prairie grouse, wouldn't have federal protection. The Tulsa World and Oklahoman Staff Writer Paul Monies contributed to this story.

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