

Oklahoma's Republican U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, ranking member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, recently said that Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to propose a "threatened" listing for the lesser prairie chicken under the Endangered Species Act is "great news for Oklahoma" because it provides a crucial step toward achieving a "not-warranted" decision in the coming months. As ranking member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, Inhofe said he has made it a priority to avoid a listing of the lesser prairie-chicken under the Endangered Species Act, working closely with FWS Director Dan Ashe to advance public-private partnerships to preserve the species. Inhofe hosted a visit by Ashe to the state last September to listen to Oklahomans' concerns about how a listing of the lesser prairie-chicken "would negatively affect agriculture, the construction of highway infrastructure, and energy development, especially wind development projects in the Woodward area." Ashe heard also "about the extensive voluntary efforts underway in Oklahoma, which have been successful in stabilizing the lesser prairie-chicken population." At an Environment and Public Works hearing in April 2012, Ashe gave Inhofe his assurance that FWS "will provide as much flexibility as [it] can" for Oklahoma as it goes forward with a listing decision for the lesser prairie-chicken. He also said that he sees Oklahoma as a leader in voluntary efforts. Later in June 2012, the FWS director called Inhofe to inform him that FWS would not list the sand dune lizard under ESA due to the "tremendous success of voluntary efforts" and said that Oklahoma has the "right ingredients" for a similar decision on the lesser prairie-chicken. Ashe contacted Inhofe recently to deliver the news about the lesser prairie-chick, and explained that before the listing is final, there is "still a good chance we can get to a 'not warranted' decision" due to the successful voluntary efforts put forth by Oklahoma stakeholders to preserve the species. Ashe also committed to holding a hearing on the decision in Woodward, Okla. on Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2013 at 6:30 pm at the High Plains Technology Center. "Fish and Wildlife Service's decision on the Lesser Prairie Chicken is great news for Oklahoma," Inhofe

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. I was especially encouraged today when Director Ashe called to tell me that there is 'still a chance we can get to a not-warranted decision' due to Oklahomans' excellent voluntary efforts. He also made a commitment to return to Woodward, Oklahoma to conduct hearings, and I look forward to welcoming him there. As a senior Republican on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, achieving a 'not-warranted' status will one of my top priorities." Oklahoma Secretary of the Environment Gary Sherrer said, "Today's decision by the Fish and Wildlife Service to list the lesser prairie chicken as 'threatened' rather than 'endangered' is a direct a result of the conservation efforts being made by landowners, industry and our state agencies. I am glad that FWS is seeing the successful voluntary actions being undertaken in Oklahoma, that I believe will lead to a 'not warranted' decision in the coming months. The state now has strong momentum to carry out this goal and I look forward to working with the Fish and Wildlife Service and Director Dan Ashe on this very important issue. I also wish to thank Sen. Inhofe for his hard work and assistance throughout this process."