

**New Mexico's
11th Annual High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival
April 20-22, 2012
Milnesand, New Mexico**

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, in cooperation with the Nature Conservancy of New Mexico, Grasslans Charitable Foundation, the Community of Milnesand, and a host of other collaborators is inviting you to join a flock of grouse enthusiasts for the 11th *Annual High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival* in Milnesand, New Mexico.

Milnesand, New Mexico may be a small dot on the map, but it is big in the heart of New Mexico's prairie grasslands. Each spring, the lesser prairie-chicken, an icon of the Southern Great Plains, congregates on traditional breeding grounds called "leks". Witnessing these birds perform their mating ritual is an experience that leaves memories permanently etched in the mind!

Please join us for the opportunity to:

- Observe and photograph the mating rituals of the lesser prairie-chicken
- Birdwatch throughout the day with some of the best birders in New Mexico
- Talk with ranchers and biologists working to conserve prairie-chickens
- Learn about the Southern Great Plains ecosystem through our tours on prairie dog ecology, archeology, plant identification, playa lakes, reptiles
- Enjoy good food and Western hospitality

POSTER CONTEST: Each year the Public Information and Outreach Department at New Mexico Department of Game and Fish holds a prairie chicken art contest to select the artwork for the commemorative poster. Please visit the Game and Fish website (below) for details (after January 1st).

PRE-FESTIVAL PHOTO CLINIC: As he has done the last three years, Tom Hill will be offering a three day photo clinic during the week immediately prior to the Festival. Those wanting additional photo opportunities and tips for improving their photo skills should see his website (below) for more information.

Additional information, registration form, directions for travel, festival schedule, lodging options and pre-Festival photo clinic details can be found at the following (after January 1st):

- <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us>
- <http://www.nature.org/newmexico>
- <http://www.tom-hill.biz> (Then click on "workshops" at the top)

For additional information, please contact Festival Co-Coordinator:

Tish McDaniel, TNC
#1 Pueblo Pt.
Clovis, NM 88101

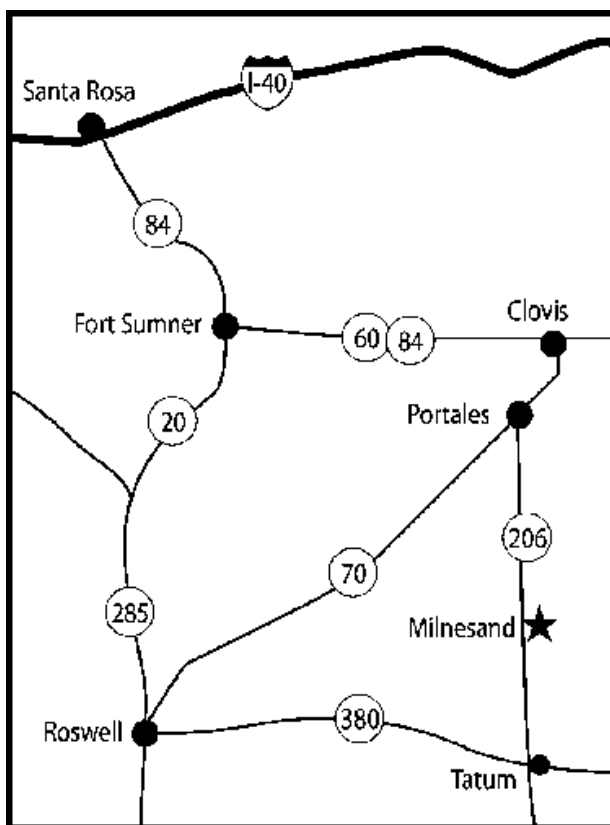
Phone: (575) 762-6997, cell (575) 714-4577 Email: chickenfestival@yahoo.com

Accommodations

Camping is free and available on-site. The Milnesand Community Center has a large parking area to accommodate self-contained RVs. A limited number of electrical hook-ups (but no sewer or water hookups) are available for RVs for an additional \$30 fee. Across the road, tent sites will be available behind the Kountry Junction General Store. Chemical toilets will be available at both sites.

The nearest motels are in Portales, approximately 35 miles north of Milnesand. You can contact the Portales/Roosevelt County Chamber of Commerce for details about room rates and availability at (800) 635-8036 or www.portales.com.

It's Springtime on the High Plains!



Weather changes can be extreme on the Southern Great Plains. It could snow or rain and there may be strong winds. Bring layered clothing, a camera, binoculars, water, sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat.

Some area ranchers will be offering rooms for rent. For more information please call:

Kyle & Corrie Dillard
(575) 309-4976

Exa Kaye Luman
(575) 675-2317

For more information, call Festival Co-Coordinator
Tish McDaniel at (575) 762-6997, cell (575) 714-4557
chickenfestival@yahoo.com

See you in Milnesand!

2012 FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2012

3-6pm Sign In: Milnesand Community Center
6:00pm Orientation and Supper: Milnesand Community Center

MORNING TOURS-SATURDAY & SUNDAY

Saturday, April 21, 2012

Sunday, April 22, 2012

4:30 am Wake up with coffee and donuts
5-8 am Early morning viewing and photography of lesser prairie chickens
7:00-8:30am Early birding (not lesser prairie chicken)
8-9:30am Breakfast at the Milnesand Community Center
9:30-11:30 am Field Tours* (Tour topics and availability may vary)

Saturday, April 21, 2012

11:30-12:30 Lunch at the Milnesand Community Center

AFTERNOON & EVENING ACTIVITIES

Saturday, April 21, 2012

1:00-2:30 pm Various Activities at the Community Center
2:30 -5:00ish Afternoon Field Tours* (Tour topics and availability may vary)
6:00 pm Supper & Entertainment at the Milnesand Community Center

*** FIELD TOURS**

- Archaeology and History of Eastern New Mexico
- Ecology of Prairie Dogs
- Ecology of Playa Lakes
- Guided Birding Tours
- Reptiles & Amphibians
- Life of the Lesser Prairie Chicken
- Fence Collisions! Fixing the Problem for LPCH
- Native Plants
- How to Keep a Naturalist's Notebook

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THE 2012 FESTIVAL.....

As many of you may know, and those of you who live here in the Southwest surely know, we have experienced a particularly harsh drought over the past year. The bone-dry spring of 2011 coupled with high summer temperatures and late occurring winds has had a negative impact on our local lesser prairie chicken population. The lack of insects and forbs this past spring meant that many hens did not even attempt to nest and those that did were generally unsuccessful. Our fall lek counts, where birds are counted during the short period that they occupy the leks in September and October, were down 60% in 2011.

What does this mean for the Prairie chicken's future? Of course, it's not easy to predict the future, but looking to the past, we know that they have endured droughts such as this before. Our current conditions have been compared to those in the early 1950's and the mid-1990's. In both cases, since the local landscape was not altered in any substantial way, the prairie chicken populations recovered once suitable rainfall occurred. Since there are not currently any major threats to our local landscape, we expect populations to increase again once we get some favorable rainfall patterns.

What impact will current conditions have on the 2012 Festival? Well, that's a question we cannot answer as of yet. We won't be able to know what is happening with the chickens until they return to the leks in March, 2012 and resume their mating displays. A wide variety of scenarios are possible. On the favorable end of the scale, we may find enough leks to operate the Festival essentially unchanged. If numbers are down enough to reduce lek numbers significantly, we may have to limit visitors to viewing the chickens on one day only, so we can use our two days to make sure everyone gets an opportunity to see them. In the worst case scenario, if numbers are low enough that we cannot locate enough leks to operate, we could be forced to cancel the Festival. We will make our final assessment of how we will have to operate by April 1, 2012 and advise all registrants promptly by email.

We fully understand that these uncertainties make planning difficult for some of you. Those making airline reservations may want to consider some form of trip insurance. Certainly, we hope that the worst case doesn't become reality, but we want to keep you advised of all the possibilities.

As has always been the case, we can only take 100 registrants for the Festival as that is the limit we can handle with our small, local infrastructure. We select those folks in the order that their registrations are received following the release of the current registration materials. We will do the same this year except that we will hold all checks until we make the final assessment of how we will be able to operate on April 1, 2012.

SOME NOTES ON PRAIRIE CHICKEN VIEWING.....

We take you to view the displaying chickens in 12-15 passenger vans, typically 10 people to a van. We arrive at the lek site in the pre-dawn darkness and park at a spot previously determined to be good for viewing that particular lek. Once there, we await the sunrise and the arriving chickens. Some typically fly in while it is still too dark to see them, so we usually hear them before it is light enough to see them. We will stay until about 8 AM when the intensity of the displaying wanes and the birds move off the lek to feed. Point and shoot photo opportunities are available from the van, but there isn't room for big lenses and other bulky equipment. We are normally very close to the displaying birds, and the quality of the viewing experience seems to exceed virtually everyone's expectations. In the 10 years we've been conducting the Festival, we have never had someone not get to see the displaying chickens!

For those of you who would like the elbow room to exercise more serious photo equipment, (big lenses, etc.) we offer space in a mobile photo blind on a first-come-first-served basis and for an additional fee of \$35 per day. Space is very limited, and once again, this opportunity is designed for photographers. As is the case with the vans, we are able to get rather close to the birds (see photo)!



Old livestock trailer converted to mobile photo blind.

For those of you that are super-serious photographers, we offer a special photo clinic during the week preceding the Festival. Photographer Tom Hill conducts an intensive three-day clinic (Tuesday evening-Thursday) that includes morning and evening prairie chicken photography opportunities, other photo opportunities, and tips, critique and analysis tailored to the desires of each attendee. See Tom's website at www.tom-hill.biz (click the "workshops" tab on the upper right) for full details.

11th Annual High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival

Frequently Asked Questions

- **When is the 11th Annual High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival?** It begins Friday, April 20, 2012 at 6 PM and ends at noon on April 22.
- **How do I register?** The Festival is limited to the **first 100 people** who send in their completed registration form and a check for the appropriate fees. The form is the last page of these documents.
- **How much does it cost?** The cost is \$100 per person (adult or child). Checks or money orders should be made out to the High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival and sent to Tish McDaniel, #1 Pueblo Pt., Clovis, NM 88101 **No fax orders** and **no credit cards** can be taken!
- **Are discounts available for senior citizens or youngsters?** Unfortunately, no. Since we can only accommodate 100 people for the weekend we cannot afford to discount any of the limited spaces available.
- **When do I need to register?** As soon as possible...We fill up fast!
- **What's included in the registration fee?** The fee includes Friday supper, Saturday and Sunday breakfasts, Saturday lunch and Saturday dinner, a commemorative poster and entry to all events. There is no discount or refund for registrants who do not eat meals or attend an event.
- **What about refunds if I have to cancel?** If someone decides that they cannot attend after they have registered, they will be refunded in full if we are notified by noon Mountain Time on April 6, 2011. No refunds will be made after that time. Registrations received after we have filled all available spaces will be returned.
- **How do I get to Milnesand?** Milnesand is 45 minutes south of Portales, NM on State Highway 206. For those of you navigating by GPS, Milnesand is included in most databases...just watch the spelling! The GPS coordinates are N33.64186, W103.33991 or N33° 38' 30.7", W103° 20' 23.7"
- **What are the accommodations?** Self-contained RV and primitive tent sites will be available for free in Milnesand. There are no RV sewage or water hookups, but a limited number of electrical connections are available (see Registration Form). Chemical toilets will be available to supplement our indoor facilities. The nearest motels are in Portales, NM. The following local ranches will be renting rooms for the weekend:
 - Kyle and Corrie Dillard: 575/309-4976
 - Exa Kaye Luman: 575/675-2317
- **When do I need to arrive?** The registration desk will open at 3 PM on Friday, April 20, 2012 for check-in. All registered participants must arrive no later than 7pm, Friday, April 20 at the Milnesand Community Center in order to attend our orientation program.

- **Is transportation provided for the tours once I arrive?** Yes, we will provide transportation (vans) from Milnesand to all tours and events.
- **Can I take my own vehicle out to view the lek sites or go on the tours?** No.
- **What is a “lek?”** By the strictest definition, a “lek” is the group of displaying prairie chickens while the area on which they are displaying is (for lesser prairie chickens) called a “gobbling ground.” Modern common usage, however, has “lek” referring to both the birds and the site of their displays.
- **What is the schedule of events?** The schedule is included elsewhere in these registration documents.
- **How do I get to view the prairie chickens?** Participants will be transported to lek sites in vans from which we will view the displaying prairie chickens (See Viewing Notes elsewhere in these documents). No one will be allowed to take their personal vehicle to view birds on the leks. Once we are at the lek, no one will be allowed out of the vehicle. No toilets are available at the leks or on the tours. No pets are allowed at the lek sites or on the tours.
- **Are there bathrooms at the leks?** No! You will be encouraged to not drink too much coffee, etc. before we set off to the leks in the morning! We will be confined to the vans/blind for up to three hours; anyone who exits the van/blind will flush the birds and ruin the viewing for everyone.
- **Are photographic blinds available at the lek sites?** Yes, there will be a limited number of spaces available in a portable trailer blind for an additional fee of \$35 per person. See the Viewing Notes elsewhere in these documents. Simple point and shoot photography can be accomplished from the vans; these blind spaces are designed primarily for people with telephoto or other bulky photo equipment that cannot be accommodated easily in a van. Those interested must request a blind space on their registration form.
- **Do I have a better chance of seeing the chickens display if I sign up for the photo blind?** No! We realize that usually bird-watching entails some risk of not seeing the bird you are looking for, but in the ten years we have been conducting the Festival we have never had anyone leave without seeing the birds. The vans normally provide a viewing experience that exceeds most people’s expectations. The photo blind is intended for those folks with large, bulky camera lenses and other equipment that we cannot accommodate in a van.
- **Are children welcome at this Festival?** While a few folks have brought young children over the years, the logistics of viewing the chickens do not usually suit children well. We need to drive to the leks at 5 AM and will be spending up to three hours confined to vans or blinds; this timing doesn’t typically fit the schedule and attention spans of young children. Also, due to the limited spaces available, no fee discounts are available for children.

- **What if I have unique dietary needs?** Our cooks prepare vegetarian meals to accommodate those who request them on their registration form. If you have particularly restrictive dietary needs, however, you should probably plan to bring your own food. We can try to help by providing refrigerator space as needed, for example, but we are not equipped to prepare individualized meals beyond basic vegetarian fare.
- **Is gasoline available in Milnesand?** Milnesand is a remote rural crossroads and while we do have a small country store that sells gasoline, it is only open limited hours and they can occasionally run out of fuel. We recommend that you fill up in Portales or Tatum on your way in as our area is fairly isolated.
- **Will I have cell phone service?** That depends. There is a cell tower in Milnesand but it may not accommodate all services. We will be headquartered at the Milnesand Community Center and the number there is 575-675-2411 if you need to be reached in an emergency and a cell phone call won't go through.
- **I'm a very serious photographer that would like some extended opportunities to photograph the birds. Are any such opportunities available?** Yes! During the week preceding the Festival, Tom Hill conducts a high-end photo workshop for serious photographers. Check his website, www.tom-hill.biz , for workshop details.
- **Where can I get more information?** If you have a question that is not sufficiently addressed anywhere in these documents you can email us at chickenfestival@yahoo.com or call Tish McDaniel at (575) 762-6997, cell (575) 714-4577.

See Next Page for Registration Form!

Registration Form

New Mexico's 11th Annual High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival

April 20-22, 2012
Milnesand, New Mexico

Due to our limited facilities **attendance at the Festival will be limited to the first 100 people who register**. Cost is \$100 per person and covers the cost of 5 meals (2-breakfasts, 1-lunch, 2-dinners), coffee & donuts, a commemorative poster, and all field trips. We're sorry, but since we must limit attendance at 100 people, we cannot offer group, senior, or underage discounts. **Please register early!**

Sorry, no refunds after April 6, 2012.

Please send completed registration forms, with a check or money order (sorry, no credit cards or purchase orders will be accepted) made payable to High Plains Prairie-Chicken Festival, to:

Tish McDaniel, TNC
#1 Pueblo Pointe
Clovis, NM 88101

Phone: (575) 762-6997, cell (575) 714-4577; Email: chickenfestival@yahoo.com

Registration Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

We'll be viewing the prairie chickens from vans and routine photo opportunities will be available to everyone. For the more serious photographers a **limited number** of photo blind spaces are available at an additional cost of **\$35 per person**. These spaces will be allocated on a first-come basis. In addition, a limited number of electrical hook-ups (no sewer or water) are available for RVs at the Milnesand Community Center for an additional \$30 fee. Please review the **Notes on Prairie Chicken Viewing** and **Frequently Asked Questions** elsewhere in this document.

Registration (\$100.00/person) \$ _____

Saturday Morning Photo Blind (\$35.00/person, Choose **one** day only) \$ _____

Sunday Morning Photo Blind (\$35.00/person, Choose **one** day only) \$ _____

RV electrical hook-up (\$30.00 for whole weekend) \$ _____

Enclosed check/money order (payable *High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival*) \$ _____

I prefer vegetarian meals _____

Special needs: _____