

The following are my comments to the proposed amendments to the Resource Management Plan on the Thunder Basin National Grasslands.

The recent plaque event (2017) is the third such event I have experienced since 2000. The occupied acres of prairie dogs have nearly doubled or surpassed doubling just prior to the next plaque event all three times. This phenomenon is of indescribable concern. It is telling me we are looking at somewhere near 180,000 acres. This should behoove us to take immediate action to curtail this. I'm quite sure no one wants to see 180,000 acres in the condition the 90,000 acres were in in 2017. Therefore, the new plan should address specific plans to aggressively reduce prairie dog population on TBNG to no more than 10 to 15 thousand occupied acres. How do we accomplish this?

1. Starting as soon as possible in 2020, eradicate all dogs not in category 1, 2 of the current plan.
2. Remove the rule that only commercial applicators can control prairie dogs on Forest Service administered lands. It is my opinion that grazing permit owners would gladly control prairie dogs on their private, state and allotment acres in 2020 and 2021 while numbers are down. If we wait too long and numbers grow this huge opportunity will be missed and costs will grow greatly. None of us can afford to wait, especially the resource we are charged with managing. I have no doubt the county weed & pest would administer and supervise this undertaking or help FS in this regard.
3. Choose parts and pieces of the last three alternatives of the new plan that will facilitate reduction of prairie dog acres to 10 to 15 thousand occupied acres.
4. Control density to 3 prairie dogs per acre on the 10 to 15 thousand occupied acres.
5. After new plan is in effect apply aggressive control on all prairie dogs outside of 3.67 from the get go of the new plan. It may take 4 or 5 years for prairie dog population in 3.67 to reach target population and acres but they will reach it naturally. If we don't control outside of 3.67 while it is growing to target plan by the time it reaches target the population and acreage outside of 3.67 will have reached a point that they will be unmanageable and we are well on our way to 180,000 infested acres.
6. All these plans must be very well articulated so everyone can work toward the goal and new administrator have no doubt of plan and leave no room for adverse interpretation.
7. Allow more lethal control options to avoid bait shyness, to take advantage of any new innovations and don't allow acreage growth to occur because of what we are currently using isn't controlling the problem and allowing things to get out of control again.
8. In the event we have to continue managing under current plan, aggressive control must be applied immediately outside of category 1 & 2 or we will again be on the way to 180,000 acres of moon scape.

If any of these comments are out of the scope of the new amendment then the scope is not broad enough and needs adjustment.

