

Plague Background from Shane Walker

Friday 7/24/17

Background

- Sylvatic plague has been present on the Thunder Basin National Grassland for at least 15-years.
- Small outbreaks of plague is a regular occurrence.
- The last epizootic event on the grassland occurred 2007-09, reducing the occupied acreage from approximately 16,000-acres to approximately 3,000-acres.
- The associated sensitive species (Mountain plover, Burrowing owl, and Swift fox) populations were significantly reduced for several years following the last epizootic event.
- A minimum of 43,000-acres of occupied prairie dog colony habitat on the TBNG in 2016.
- Acreage exceeded scientific understanding and TBNG plan expectations of growth and behavior.
- USGS study of plague resistance fleas on TBNG in 2015 and 2016 determined that the fleas are not yet resistant to Delta-dust.
- Planned to poison approximately 10,000-acres of occupied prairie dog colonies on NFS in collaboration and cooperation with partners, cooperators, and neighbors.

Current Situation

- Signs appear to indicate that the epizootic event started in fall 2017 in Weston county and moved west.
- A second outbreak started in Converse county – possibly in winter 2016/17 – and moved east.
- Approximately 6,000 – 8,000 acres of prairie dog colonies have died as to date.
- Anticipate approximately 75% of the prairie dog colony acres to die of plague by fall.
- Anticipate approximately 90% of the prairie dog colony acres to die of plague by spring 2018.
- No guarantee that plague will not kill 100% of the prairie dog colonies in conjunction with recreational shooting and poisoning.
- Collaborating and cooperating with partners, cooperators, and neighbors to monitor the progress of plague across northeastern Wyoming.
- Wyoming Game and Fish Department confirmed two prairie dogs from northeastern Wyoming died of sylvatic plague.

Actions

- Monitoring the progress of plague in coordination and cooperation with our partners on National Forest System, state, and private lands.
- Executing poisoning priorities from the grazing associations this fall.
- Executing broad prairie dog control agreements with Converse, Campbell, and Weston counties.
- Agreements with counties will cover lethal and non-lethal control methods, and dusting for fleas.
- Explaining to the grazing associations and county weed and pest departments the rationale for dusting prairie dogs before poisoning.
- Planning to dust prairie dogs to kill fleas prior to poisoning on National Forest System lands.

- Developing a public service announcement in cooperation with the BLM, WGFD, Converse County, Campbell County, Weston County, Niobrara County, and the chamber of commerce's for communities in northeastern Wyoming in preparation to a large influx of visitors during the solar eclipse.

Recommendations

- Apply shooting restrictions in select areas of the MA 3.63.
- Coordinate with partners and cooperators in applying Delta-dust in up to 3 colonies with high value and occupied habitat for multiple sensitive species in MA 3.63.
 - 12-people in 5-days can cover 1,000-acres.
- Dusting in the 3 priority colonies would occur for the next 3-6 years to ensure plague does not enter the colonies.
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