

USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region Update



September 2010

SUBJECT: Prairie Dog Management and Black-footed Ferret Recovery on Thunder Basin National Grassland in Wyoming

The black-tailed prairie dog is a designated sensitive species and a Management Indicator Species, giving the species a higher level of attention and management emphasis.

The Land and Resource Management Plan (Grassland Plan) for the Thunder Basin National Grassland, Wyoming was recently amended to better provide for the conservation of black-tailed prairie dogs and their habitat, to address private landowner concerns about unwanted prairie dog encroachment onto private lands within and adjacent to the TBNG boundaries, and to facilitate future recovery of endangered black-footed ferrets. Implementation of the Grassland Plan in 2010 has included:

- Prescribed burning of 2,700 acres to improve prairie dog habitat in desired locations.
- Translocation of more than 550 prairie dogs from an area where the adjoining landowner has expressed concern about unwanted colonization, to another portion of the national grassland. The release area was prepared by dusting with deltamethrin to reduce exposure to the plague bacterium, construction of a temporary electric fence around trapping sites, mowing tall grasses, and installing acclimation cages. Many partners have contributed to this effort.
- As provided under the Grassland Plan, zinc phosphide poisoning may be used this fall to remove any remaining prairie dogs from the conflict area, and a permanent exclosure fence will be constructed to create a vegetative buffer between the FS and private land.



The Forest Service partnered with Wyoming Game & Fish, USFW, The Humane Society, World Wildlife Fund, Defenders of Wildlife, the Prairie Dog Coalition and Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, which all provided financial and logistical support for the translocation effort. Due to this translocation effort, the colony that the prairie dogs were translocated to grew from 123 acres to 316 acres. This was based on colony mapping completed in June prior to translocation efforts, and re-mapped in August after trapping was completed.

Under the amendment Grassland Plan, the boundaries of the black-footed ferret reintroduction area have been adjusted to minimize conflicts with adjoining landowners. A ferret reintroduction had been planned in 2002, but was delayed by the occurrence of a plague epizootic. The Forest Service is prepared to apply Delta dust as needed on the ferret recovery site until a longer term solution such as an oral plague vaccine

for prairie dogs is available. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has not yet completed their 10(j) rule which would designate the Thunder Basin reintroduction site as a “nonessential, experimental” population. We understand that the rule could be in place to enable releases to begin as early as fall 2011.

CONTACTS:

