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Comments: In 2002, the Forest Service published a Grasslands Plan that designated more than 50,000 acres on the Thunder Basin National Grassland of northeast Wyoming as a Black-Footed Ferret Reintroduction Area, protecting these lands from recreational prairie dog shooters and prohibiting prairie dog poisoning except immediately next to dwellings and cemeteries. Today, at the behest of the livestock industry, the Forest Service is amending the prairie dog plan to abolish the Ferret Reintroduction Area and allow prairie dog shooting throughout the Thunder Basin.

If livestock is allowed at all on public lands, the killing of native wildlife cannot accompany it!

From an ecological standpoint, the black-tailed prairie dog is a keystone species. Without prairie dogs, grassland ecosystems collapse, and numerous rare species, including burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, swift foxes, and mountain plovers, begin to disappear. Black-tailed prairie dogs are a Sensitive Species designated for enhanced conservation by the Forest Service, and, thanks to a systematic program of extermination by the livestock industry, are down to only 0.01% of their historic range in Wyoming. The black-footed ferret, one of America's most endangered land mammals, absolutely requires active prairie dog towns for their habitat and as their food source.

The Forest Service has proposed four plan amendments, all of which would increase the killing of prairie dogs to increase the convenience of ranchers who lease public lands to graze their private livestock. Here are some suggested topics you can share with the Forest Service:

Prairie dogs are a Sensitive Species that must NOT be poisoned or shot anywhere on Forest Service lands.

Prairie dogs are important to the public, personally, as native wildlife, and the relative importance (indeed, negative ecological consequences) of non-native livestock!

The Forest Service has no business killing or preventing prairie dogs from accessing their native habitats, either on or off National Grasslands.

If the livestock industry cannot coexist with native wildlife on the Thunder Basin, all livestock must be removed, and replaced with free-roaming bison. Prairie dogs must be restored to their natural densities and historic range. "Management" of prairie dogs should be limited to nonlethal translocation of prairie dogs to repopulated areas where their population densities are low, and a blanket authorization should be granted to dust for flea control in areas where fleas carry sylvatic plague, which decimates prairie dog populations.

The Black-Footed Ferret Reintroduction Area must be fully restored and protected to support ferret reintroduction on the Thunder Basin.