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Comments: Dear US Forest Service,

As a Wyoming resident, citizen co-owner of US public lands, and stakeholder in the extraordinary wildlife that inhabit our state and federal lands, I am dismayed and vehemently opposed to your proposals to amend prairie dog management on the Thunder Basin National Grassland in ways that would reduce protection for the species and increase their killing.

Prairie dogs are a federally designated Sensitive Species for good reasons-- as native wildlife, they play a critical role providing habitat, food, and other ecosystem services to a wide range of other species including those with federal legal protection, such as blackfooted ferrets, burrowing owls and other raptors, and many other animal and plant species. Despite their ecological importance, they occupy a tiny fraction of their traditional habitat, making their remaining refugia-- Such as Thunder Basin-- of critical importance. As a stakeholder in these lands and species, the continued survival of prairie dogs and Great Plains native ecosystems is also of significant personal and spiritual importance... at a time when so much of our region's native landscape has been converted to grazing, urban-, and industrialized lands, the areas we have left that harbor something close to complete ecosystems are not only vital as ecological arks, but for the human knowledge that such places do still exist. The management of Thunder Basin to date that has fostered this outcome should be celebrated and reinforced, not undermined with these new proposed amendments.

Specifically, I encourage you in the strongest possible terms to continue management of prairie dogs in ways that:

- Disallow poisoning or shooting anywhere on Forest Service lands. This should include a prohibition of the US Forest Service itself from killing or preventing prairie dogs from accessing their native habitats, either on or off National Grasslands.
- Prairie dogs should be restored to their natural densities and historic range. Population control of prairie dogs on Thunder Basin should be limited to nonlethal translocation of animals to areas where their population densities are low, in order to foster ecosystem restoration. In addition, 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.

If livestock producers that enjoy the privilege of conducting their business on public lands cannot do so in a manner that coexists with the native wildlife that belong to all Americans that inhabit Thunder Basin National Grassland, their cattle are the animals that should be removed from the lands, not the native wildlife. I have no doubt that enterprising, forward thinking livestock producers that are willing to conduct their business in a way that respects native ecosystems would be happy to procure those leases, without systematic killing of native species.

I earnestly hope you decide to act on this manner guided by values of stewardship and ecological restoration, the foremost exigencies of our time as humanity faces the profound and growing consequences of anthropogenic climate change in the years and decades ahead. There is not greater task today that preserving the ecosystems we have left, in hopes that they can weather the changes underway.

Thank you very much for all your work on behalf of America's public lands and wildlife, and thank you very much for considering my comments on this important issue.

Sincerely, Shiva Polefka