



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Rocky  
Mountain  
Region

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Guy N. Cameron  
President  
American Society of Mammalogists  
University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0006

Dear Dr. Cameron,

Thank you for your letter of August 4, 2004 to the Deputy Undersecretary David Tenny on behalf of your membership. You wrote to express your concerns about poisoning, or shooting of prairie dogs, on the Buffalo Gap National Grassland, and specifically in Management Area 3.63, Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat.

As you are aware, the national grasslands play an important role in conservation of native prairie ecosystems. On July 31, 2002, the Forest Service completed the revision of the Land and Resource Management Plans for the national grasslands in the Northern Great Plains. Under the revised Plans, prairie dogs are expected to increase, and areas were allocated to MA 3.63 in three geographic areas of the Nebraska National Forest and associated units. However, at the same time, the Forest Service made a commitment to being a good neighbor to local communities, particularly with regard to unwanted colonization by prairie dogs of adjoining private lands.

The Forest Service has cooperated with others, over many years, in efforts to conserve the black-tailed prairie dog and to restore the endangered black-footed ferret, while minimizing impacts on neighboring landowners. Actions that have been taken include land consolidation to reduce the amount of public/private boundary, adjustment of livestock grazing practices and stocking levels, live trapping of prairie dogs along boundaries, and lethal control. An important result of these efforts is that the Buffalo Gap National Grassland has successfully established a self-sustaining population of black-footed ferrets.

South Dakota is currently experiencing a severe drought. The Forest Service is monitoring range conditions, and has adjusted livestock stocking as necessary to protect the vegetation and other natural resources. Drought conditions tend to encourage prairie dog movements, and some landowners in South Dakota have filed complaints about the unwanted colonization of prairie dogs moving onto their private land. Under state law, the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks is required to provide direct control of prairie dogs that have moved from adjacent public lands onto private lands.

To address private landowner complaints about unwanted colonization by prairie dogs, the Forest Service along with other state and federal agencies has agreed to consider short-term control actions. Poisoning has occurred on private lands with a shared boundary where prairie



dog colonies have moved onto private lands, and a complaint has been filed. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service – Wildlife Services (APHIS-WS) has agreed to poison the adjoining areas of National Forest land in complaint areas. Estimates of the maximum number of acres of public lands that may be poisoned are shown in the table below. As you can see, the intent is not to eradicate prairie dogs. Because of land consolidation efforts on the Wall Ranger District, we do not expect that poisoning along the boundary will compromise the core of the prairie dog complex.

|   | <b>Current acres of prairie dog colonies</b> | <b>Maximum acres under consideration for poisoning</b> |
|---|--|--|
| Fall River Ranger District (includes a potential reintroduction site) | 7,691  | 3,020 (39% of total)                                   |
| Wall Ranger District (harbors the population of black-footed ferrets) | 25,016                                       | 3,760 (15% of total)                                   |

The Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, APHIS-WS, and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks have agreed to closely coordinate prairie dog control actions to assure that the black-footed ferret population is not jeopardized. Visual surveys will be conducted so that any ferrets present can be located, captured, and removed prior to poisoning.

In addition to the short-term control actions, the Forest Service is considering an amendment to the revised Land and Resource Management Plan to modify direction with regard to unwanted colonization by prairie dogs. We anticipate that the amendment may consider lifting the shooting ban currently in place for MA 3.63, and relaxing limitations on prairie dog poisoning. If you or your members would like to be placed on the mailing list to receive information about the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for this amendment, please contact Jerry Schumacher on the Nebraska National Forest at (308) 432-0324.

Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns, and for your interest in the management of the National Grasslands. If you have any further questions, please contact Nancy Warren, Regional Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Program Leader, at (303) 275-5064.

Sincerely,



RICK D. CABLES  
Regional Forester

cc: Dave Tenny