

# USDA Forest Service Update

August 2011

## Subject: Black-Tailed Prairie Dog and Black-Footed Ferret

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**Issue:** The **black-tailed prairie dog** is designated as a sensitive species and a Management Indicator Species on National Forest System (NFS) lands in the Great Plains. NFS lands are very important to the conservation of prairie dogs and other wildlife species associated with them. The **prairie dog** receives special management emphasis at sites identified for reintroduction and recovery of the endangered **black-footed ferret**, and currently, there are about 35,000 acres of black-tailed prairie dog colonies on NFS lands. Population numbers and density can be variable between years, particularly in response to annual precipitation and plague.

### Key Points:

- The Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands are implementing a variety of tools for management of prairie dogs in cooperation with state and federal agencies and other partners.
- To date, black-footed ferrets have been reintroduced only on the Buffalo Gap National Grassland at Conata Basin, SD. This has been one of the most successful reintroduction sites and continues to contribute importantly to the recovery program.
- Since 2008, plague has eliminated over 18,000 prairie dog colony acres in the black-footed ferret reintroduction area at Conata Basin. About 13,000 acres of colonies continue to be treated with DeltaDust® to kill plague-carrying fleas. Dusting has been highly effective and is critical to sustaining the black-footed ferret population in the short term. An oral plague vaccine for prairie dogs holds the greatest promise for a long term solution.
- The Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands recently completed a Supplemental Information Report to evaluate the impact of plague on their ability to achieve management objectives for black-tailed prairie dogs and black-footed ferret. The Forest Supervisor determined that the previous grassland plan decisions remain valid.
- On the Thunder Basin National Grassland (TBNG), WY, an amendment to the grassland plan was completed in 2009 to incorporate a cooperative prairie dog management strategy. The amended plan is being implemented in cooperation with many partners using a variety of tools to increase prairie dogs in certain areas and discourage them from colonizing areas where they are unwanted. These tools include: prescribed fire, dusting, mowing, land exchanges, translocation, rodenticide application, vegetation barriers, and expanded shooting closures.
- The Forest Service is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to complete a 10(j) rule that would facilitate reintroduction of ferrets on TBNG as early as 2012.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has decided to accept smaller acreages of prairie dog colonies as ferret reintroduction sites because few large complexes are available. Other national grasslands in the Great Plains have the potential to become future reintroduction sites. Staff are evaluating or completing the steps necessary to participate in recovery efforts.

**Background:**

The **black-tailed prairie dog** is identified as a Management Indicator Species and a Sensitive Species by the Forest Service. The Forest Service utilizes a variety of tools to manage this species in cooperation with state agencies, federal agencies, and other partners. **Black-footed ferrets** have been reintroduced on the Buffalo Gap National Grassland, SD. Other national grasslands in the Great Plains have the potential to become future reintroduction sites and are evaluating or completing the steps necessary to participate in the recovery program.

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