

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET UPDATE

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STATE BIOLOGIST



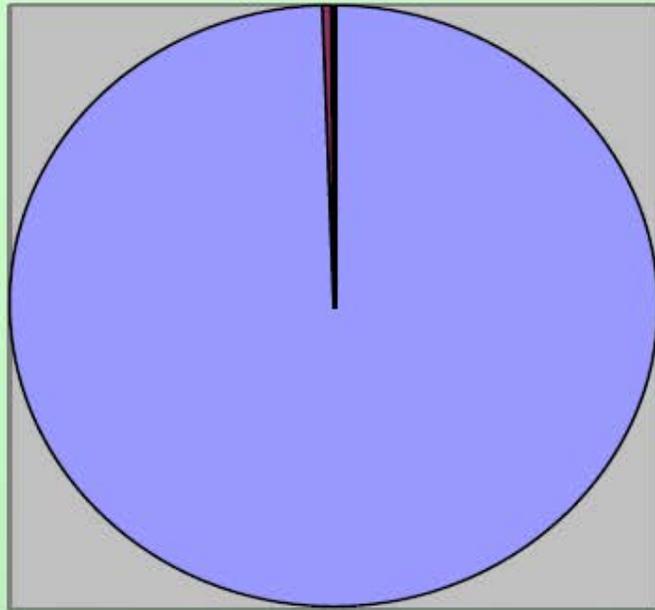
THIS IS JUST FYI!



HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

- **Historically, the black-footed ferret occupied an estimated 100 million acres of intermountain and prairie grasslands in the western U.S., Canada, and Mexico, within ~ 562 million acres of potential habitat. By 1987, there were no remaining wild ferrets.**

Black-footed Ferret Occupied Habitat, Historically & at Proposed Delisting



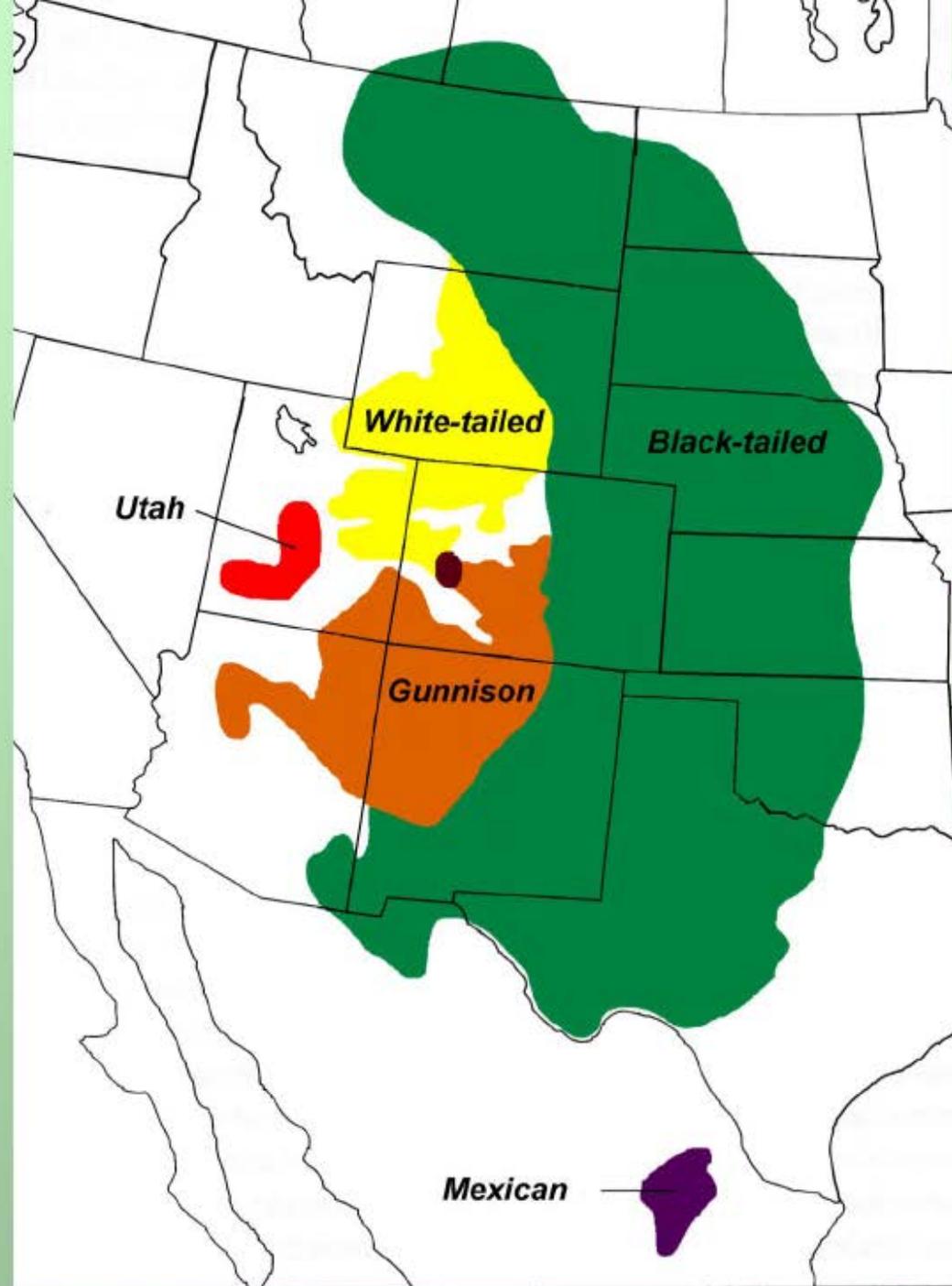
■ Historical ~100,000,000 acres

■ Delisting ~500,000 acres





The historical range of the black-footed ferret coincided with ranges of the black-tailed, white-tailed, and Gunnison's prairie dogs. Approximately 85% of all ferrets occurred in black-tailed prairie dog habitat, 8% in Gunnison's, and 7% in white-tailed.



The decline of black-footed ferrets was tied to its close association with prairie dogs, which were dramatically reduced beginning in the late 1800s due to:

- Conversion of native range to cropland (1880s - 1920s)
- Large-scale prairie dog poisoning (1918 - 1972)
- Sylvatic plague (1940s - present)



Plague Considerations

- Plague **directly** impacts ferrets via infection and subsequent mortality.
- Plague **indirectly** impacts ferrets via its effects on prairie dogs and subsequent dramatic declines in the ferret's primary prey base.
- **Plague can be managed.**



Dusting to combat plague at Conata Basin, SD

Captive breeding has been successful



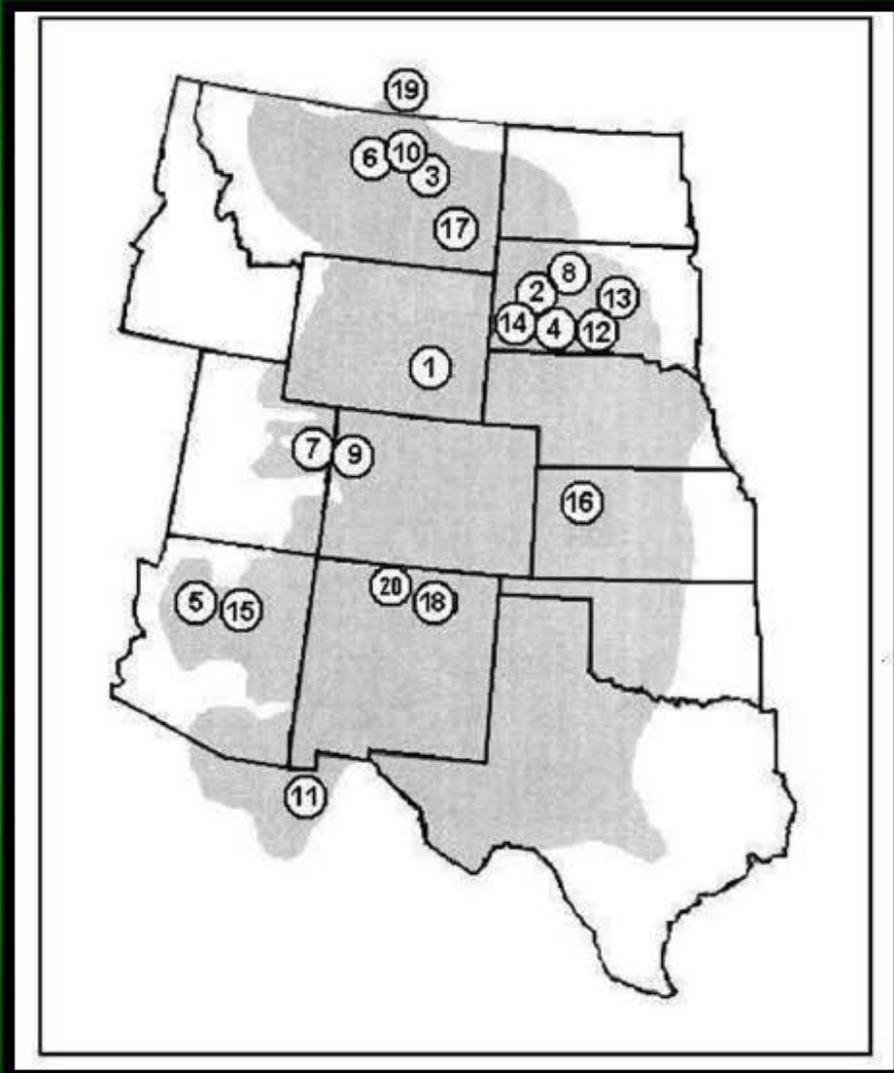


Reintroduction efforts have been successful

SPECIES RECOVERY STATUS



Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Sites



- 1) Shirley Basin, WY, 1991
- 2) Badlands NP, SD, 1994
- 3) UL Bend NWR, MT, 1994
- 4) Conata Basin, SD, 1996
- 5) Aubrey Valley, AZ, 1996
- 6) Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation, MT, 1997
- 7) Coyote Basin, UT, 1999
- 8) Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, SD, 2000
- 9) Wolf Creek, CO, 2001
- 10) BLM 40-complex, MT, 2001
- 11) Janos, Mexico, 2001
- 12) Rosebud Indian Reservation, SD, 2004
- 13) Lower Brule Indian Reservation, SD, 2006
- 14) Wind Cave NP, SD, 2007
- 15) Espee Ranch, AZ, 2007
- 16) Logan County, KS, 2007
- 17) Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, MT, 2008
- 18) Vermejo Park Ranch, NM, 2008
- 19) Grasslands NP, SK, Canada, 2009
- 20) Vermejo Park Ranch, NM, 2012

Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Efforts through November, 2009

Classification	Criteria	Site
Successful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-sustaining (no current augmentation)• 30 or more breeding adults• Can support other sites with translocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aubrey Valley, AZ• Cheyenne River, SD• Conata Basin, SD• Shirley Basin, WY
Improving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing population	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Badlands NP, SD• Rosebud, SD
Marginal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performing minimally, or at an unknown level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coyote Basin, UT• Janos, Mexico• UL Bend NWR, MT• Wolf Creek, CO
Unsuccessful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Populations declining or extirpated• No recent litters documented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fort Belknap, MT• BLM 40 Complex, MT
Recent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiated within the past 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Espee Ranch, AZ• Logan County, KS• Lower Brule, SD• Northern Cheyenne, MT• Vermejo Ranch, NM• Wind Cave NP, SD• Grasslands Nat Park CN

Table 6. Black-footed ferret recovery guidelines by State

State	Breeding adults established to date	Adults/acres to downlist	Adults/acres to delist
Arizona	35	74 adults/17,000 ac	148 adults/34,000 ac
Colorado	4	149 adults/29,000 ac	288 adults/58,000 ac
Kansas	13	123 adults/18,500 ac	246 adults/37,000 ac
Montana	11	147 adults/22,000 ac	294 adults/44,000 ac
Nebraska	0	134 adults/20,000 ac	268 adults/44,000 ac
New Mexico	2	220 adults/39,000 ac	440 adults/78,000 ac
North Dakota	0	38 adults/6,000 ac	76 adults/12,000 ac
Oklahoma	0	70 adults/10,500 ac	140 adults/21,000 ac
South Dakota	185	102 adults/15,000 ac	204 adults/30,000 ac
Texas	0	254 adults/38,000 ac	508 adults/76,000 ac
Utah	7	25adults/6,000 ac	50 adults/12,000 ac
Wyoming	100	171 adults/35,000 ac	341 adults/70,000 ac
Total	357	1,507 adults/256,000 ac	3,004 adults/512,000 ac

result in equitable recovery goals for all States. There are many uncertainties inherent in recovery projections. Therefore, we recommend that each of the 12 States within the historical range of the black-footed ferret consider initiating and maintaining some combination of the following types of reintroduction efforts, to provide the numbers of ferrets suggested to meet recovery guidelines:

- One or more large size ferret reintroduction sites with the potential for more than 100 adult breeding ferrets,
- One or more medium size ferret reintroduction sites with the potential for 50–100 adult breeding ferrets, and
- One or more small size ferret reintroduction sites with the potential for 30–50 adult breeding ferrets.

Black-footed Ferret Opportunities

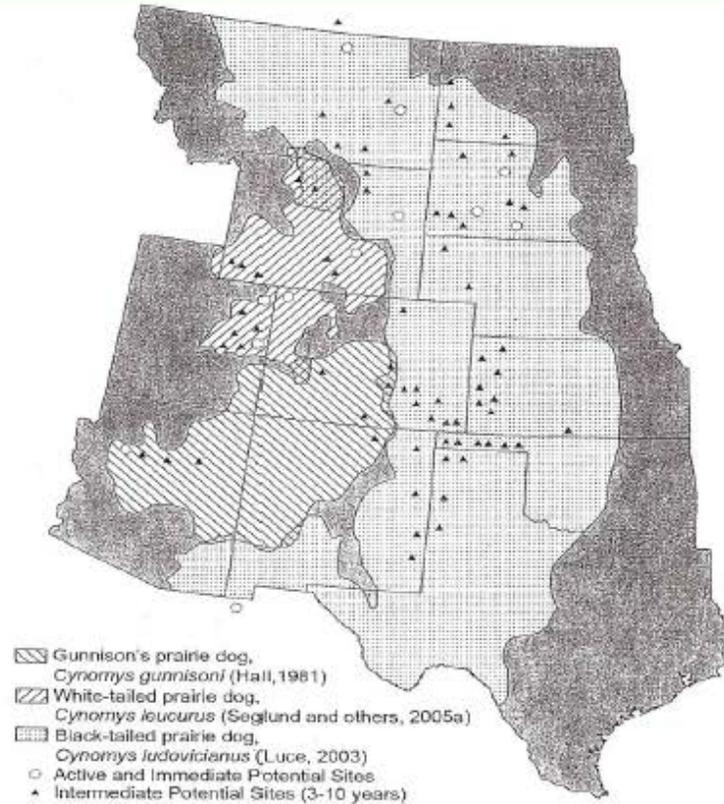
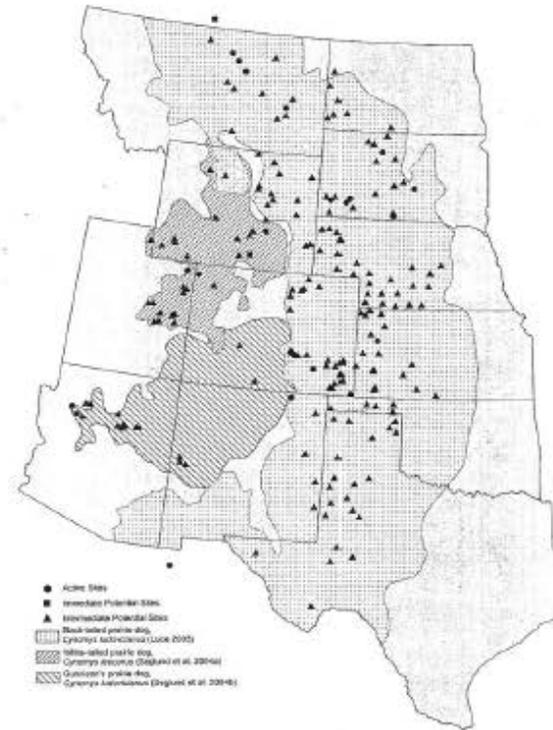


Figure 1. Location of eight active black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) reintroduction sites (1990–2004); three Immediate Potential Sites (1–3 years); and 70 Intermediate Potential Sites, at which, pending further evaluation, opportunities for reintroducing ferrets may exist in 3–10 years.

Luce (2002)

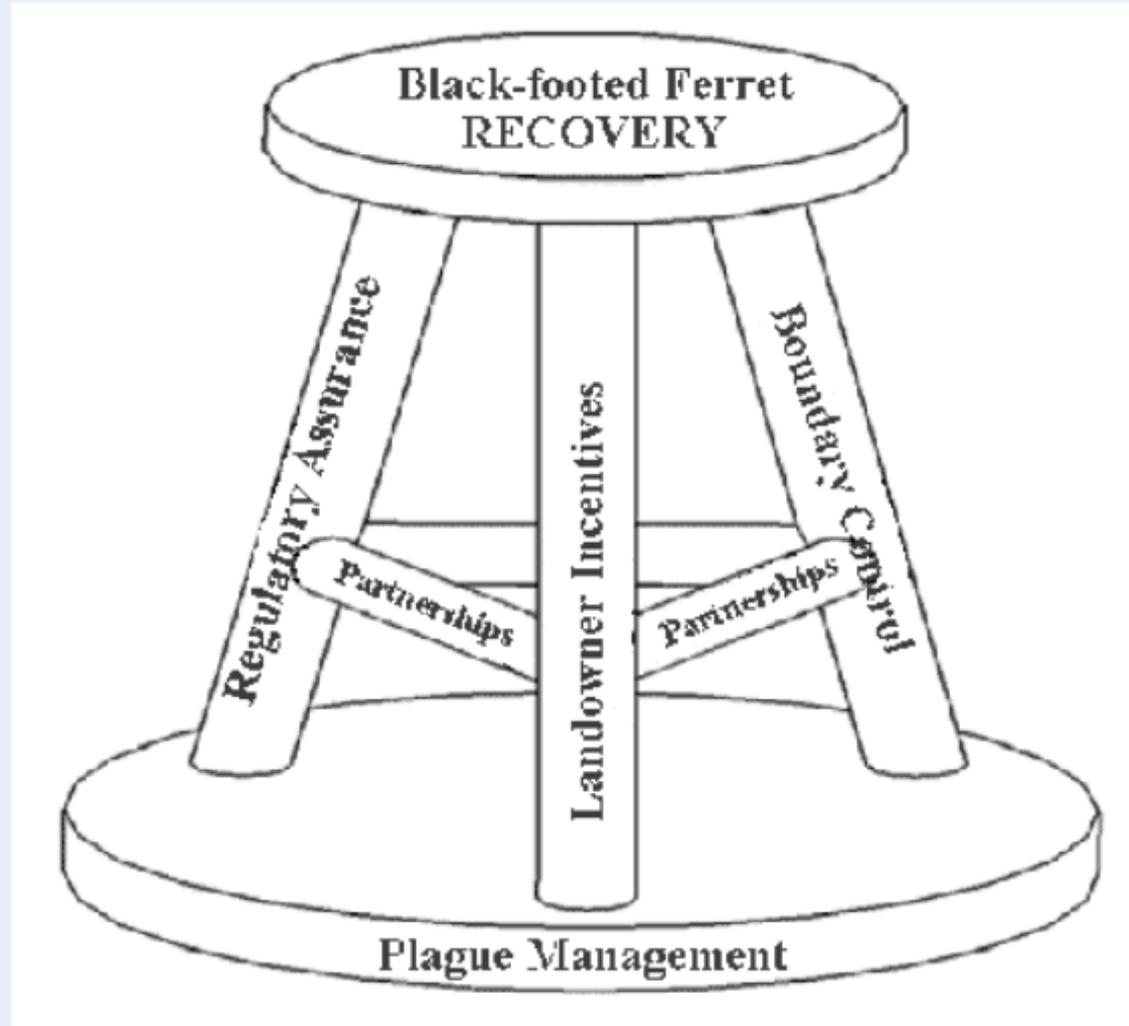
Figure 1. Locations of Active, Immediate Potential, and Intermediate Potential black-footed ferret reintroduction sites in 2008.



Luce (2008 draft)

Black-footed Ferret Conservation

Private Lands Strategy



CONTINUED INTEREST...

BFFF Shea_Weller Letter 11_2_15.doc [Compatibility Mode] - Word

Jensen, Brian M. - NRCS, Casper, WY

Clipboard Font Paragraph Styles Editing

BLACK FOOTED FERRET FRIENDS 

Black-footed Ferret Friends
Chair, John Emmerich
709 Rodeo Avenue
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009
(307) 421-0570

November 2, 2015

Kevin Shea
Administrator
Animal Plant Health Inspection Services
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington DC 20250

Jason Weller
Chief
Natural Resources and Conservation Service
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington DC 20250

Dear Administrator Shea and Chief Weller,

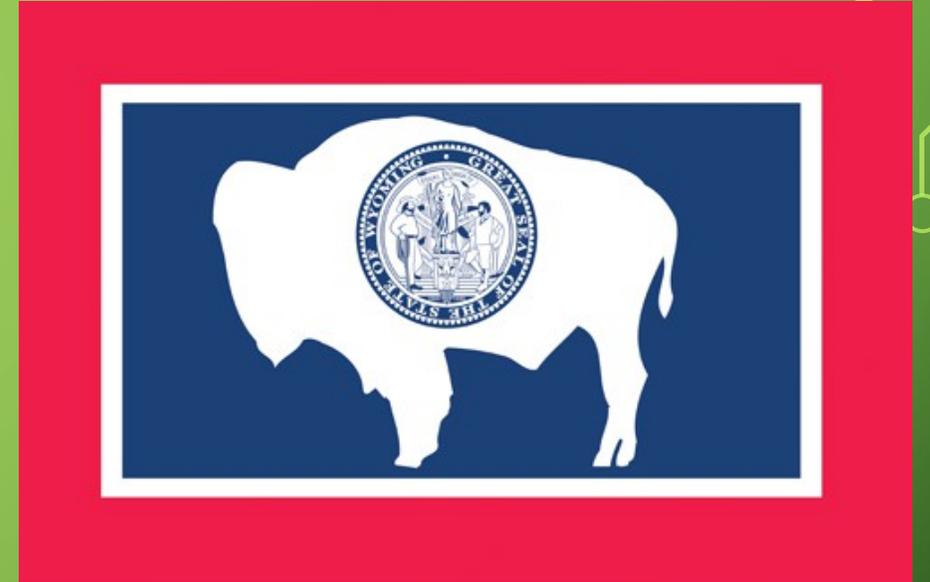
As past Deputy Director Wyoming Game and Fish Department, past chair of the Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) Recovery Implementation Team Executive Committee (BFF RIT EC), an interagency group sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to facilitate black-footed ferret (BFF) recovery and current Chair of the BFF Friends (BFFF) Organization, a private citizen support group, I have spent many years working with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and many other diverse partners, including both the agriculture and wildlife conservation communities in 12 western states, toward the recovery of the BFF. This species has long been identified as one of the most endangered mammals in North America, but is now on the road to recovery and delisting under the Endangered Species Act with over 25 reintroduction efforts in 8 states, Mexico, and Canada. However, there is still more to do in these states and in states that have not yet been involved. Several actions have recently been implemented which have created a great deal of interest in recovery opportunities for the black-footed ferret on private lands. A Safe Harbor Agreement was created and implemented by USFWS which offers private landowners protection from aspects of the Endangered Species Act if they choose to participate in ferret recovery efforts. This protection extends to neighboring property owners as well.

Additionally, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and APHIS Wildlife Services (WS), as partners to the

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WY FERRET PROGRAM STATUS

- 10j rule approved for WY this past Fall.
 - Experimental, non-essential status across WY.
 - Incidental take coverage for private landowners.
- WGFD now in management control of BFFs in WY.
- WGFD planning reintroductions near Meeteetse in 2016 assuming BFFs are available. No other releases currently scheduled in WY.
 - Partner meeting pending to develop future priorities.



NRCS BFF INVOLVEMENT

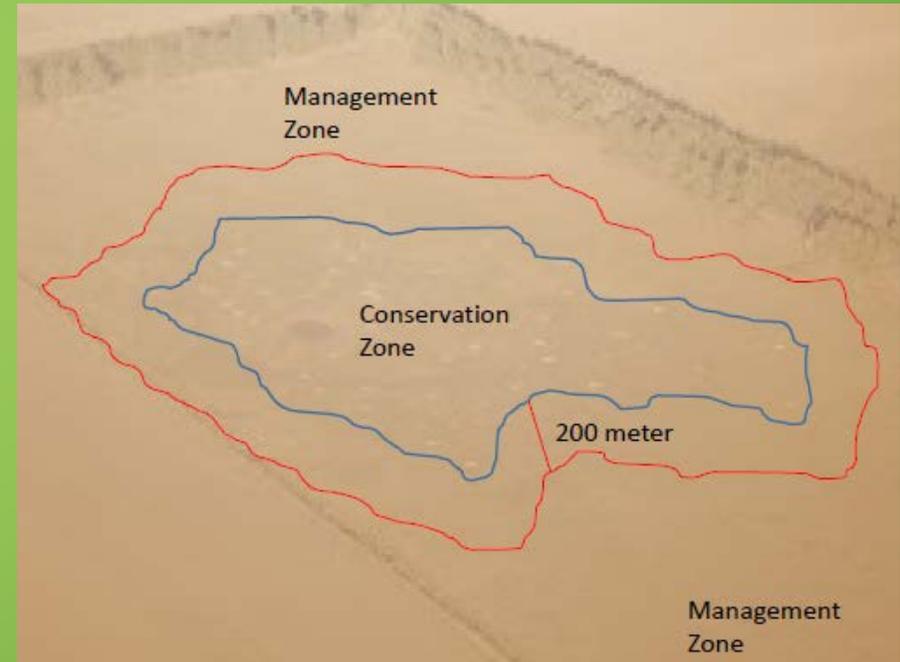
- **Will not be a National BFF Initiative**

- No new initiatives
- Up to the states
- Funds from state NRCS budget
- Some opportunity to provide incentives with existing programs- CSP
- Limitations as to what we can assist with:
 - We don't manage the ferret...
 - No practice for plague control
 - No practice for boundary protection
- Some states moving ahead.



CO NRCS PROGRAM

- No state-wide 10j rule in CO.
- EQIP Special Effort.
- USFWS does bulk of the outreach and habitat evaluation to determine eligibility.
 - Largely based on acres of PDs- 1,500 acres of black-tail, 3,000 acres of white-tail.
 - Neighborhood contracts???
 - Provide NRCS a “letter of intent”



CO NRCS PROGRAM

- Primary Resource Concern: “Animals: Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife”
- Primary practice is 645, upland wildlife habitat management used for monitoring.
 - Payment made on the Conservation Zone only.
 - Quarterly visual monitoring of PD population density, annual monitoring of colony boundaries, and annual photo-point monitoring of vegetation and landscape response.
 - USFWS conducts follow-up ferret monitoring.
- 528 (prescribed grazing) may also be contracted if planner identifies livestock production limitations, plant health concerns, etc.
 - Facilitating practices may also be contracted.

PRAIRIE DOG OCCUPANCY SURVEY FORM

Surveyor's Name: _____ Start Survey Date: _____

Prairie Dog Colony Identifier: _____ End Survey Date: _____
 (the survey must be completed for 3 consecutive days)

Notes: _____

Survey Date	Plot ID	Count # <small>Remember to wait 15 minutes between counts</small>	Site Conditions ¹⁾		Start Time	End Time	Number of Individual Prairie Dog Observed	Comments
			Wind Speed	Cloud (%)				
		1						
		2						
		3						
		4						
Average Number of Prairie Dogs (total count/4):								
		1						
		2						
		3						
		4						
Average Number of Prairie Dogs (total count/4):								
		1						
		2						
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Average Number of Prairie Dogs (total count/4):								
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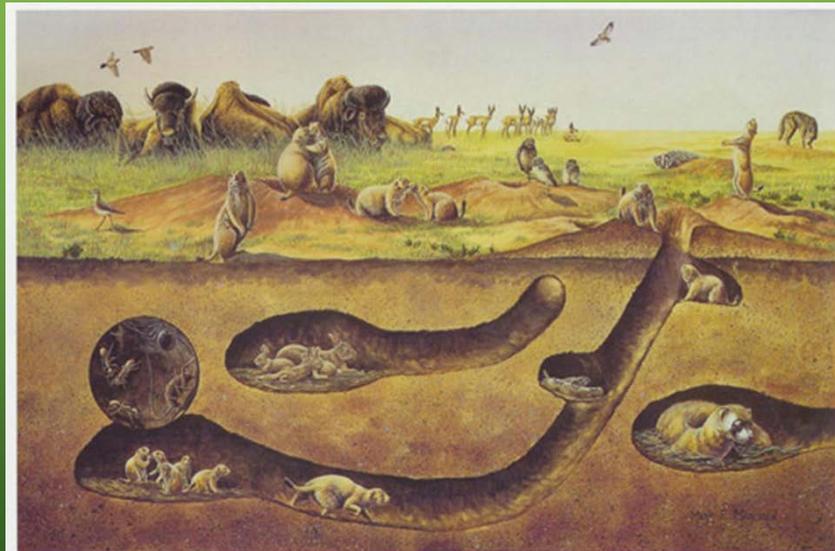
CO NRCS PROGRAM

- Plague Impacts
 - If plague hits before BFF release, contract cancelled.
 - If plague hits during contract, contract modified.
 - Reduced acres
 - 645 removed, other practices stay



CO NRCS PROGRAM

- CSP
 - BFF added to ANM 57- addressing threats to sensitive species
 - Most BFF EQIP participants have subsequently signed up for this program



Cross section of a prairie dog burrow. (Drawing by Mark E. Marcuson; courtesy University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and Wildlife)

PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

- Outreach/Partnerships
 - Training Needs
 - PII Waiver
- WGFD Coordination
 - Intent to release
 - Habitat evaluations
- USDA-APHIS Coordination
 - Boundary Control
 - Flea/Plague Control



PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

- Impact on State Program Allocation
 - CO: \$58K-\$980K/year
 - Payment limitations
 - Not a long-term program
- Program Rules- Contract length, possible cancellation, etc.
- Demand





QUESTIONS?