Montana State Legislature

Exhibit Number: 13

This exhibit exceeds front to back 5-page maximum; therefore only a small portion of the exhibit is scanned for your research. The original exhibit is on file at the Montana Historical Society and may be viewed there

Montana Historical Society Archives, 225 N. Roberts, Helena, MT 59620-1201; phone (406) 444-4774. For minutes in paper format, please contact the Montana State Law Library, Justice Building, 215 N. Sanders, Helena, MT 59620; (406) 444-3660. Tapes and exhibits are also available at the Historical Society (tapes are retained for five years). Scanning done by: Susie Hamilton

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Mountain-Prairie Region

EXHIBIT 13
DATE 1.25.05
NO. 286

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228

August 12, 2004

Contact:
Pete Gober, 605-224-8693
Seth Willey, 303-236-4257
Sharon Rose, 303-236-4580

Black-tailed Prairie Dog Removed from Candidate Species List

An updated evaluation of the best available scientific information has led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine that the black-tailed prairie dog is not likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future and no longer meets the Endangered Species Act definition of threatened. Therefore, the prairie dog will be removed as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. A finding that the black-tailed prairie dog does not warrant listing was delivered today to the Federal Register.

"With new information regarding the range-wide impact of disease, chemical control and other lesser factors and recent state estimates of occupied black-tailed prairie dog habitat, the Service has determined that the black-tailed prairie dog does not meet the Endangered Species Act's definition of 'threatened'," said Ralph Morgenweck, director of the Service's mountain-prairie region.

Until now, the best scientific and commercial information available to the Service indicated that the impacts of disease, chemical control and other lesser factors were substantial enough to warrant listing of the black-tailed prairie dog as a threatened species. Since 2002, State agencies, Federal agencies, Tribes, and other parties provided additional information regarding the black-tailed prairie dog which was considered by the Service in an evaluation of the status of the species.

Previously, the Service focused attention on a few large black-tailed prairie dog populations impacted by sylvatic plague and assumed that population losses at these sites were indicative of losses across the species' entire range. Based on new data, these assumptions no longer appear appropriate. Dramatic fluctuations in the amount of black-tailed prairie dog occupied habitat at specific large complexes may occur due to plague or chemical control, but they do not appear to influence range-wide species persistence. Recent information illustrates the prairie dog's resiliency to short-term, site-specific population declines.

Since the prairie dog was first determined to be a candidate for listing, State agencies have employed improved survey techniques and now estimate approximately 1,842,000 acres of occupied habitat in the United States. This represents a substantial revision in the estimated abundance of black-tailed prairie dogs from 2000, when the best available information indicated 676,000 acres of occupied habitat. Estimates of black-tailed prairie dog density vary depending upon the season, region, and climatic conditions, but typically range from 2 to 18 individuals per acre, with an average of 10 individuals per acre. If 10 is used as an average number of black-tails per acre, the estimated population of black-tailed prairie dogs in the U.S. would be 18,420,000.

New information also shows that the black-tailed prairie dog is more able to persist over time in light of ongoing impacts. The increase in the Service's knowledge of additional occupied habitat played a supporting role in the decision to remove the species from the candidate list.

During the past few years some States and Tribes have made substantial progress in initiating management efforts for the black-tailed prairie dog, including completing surveys to provide more accurate estimates of occupied habitat. Additional activities included drafting management plans, enacting laws that change the status of the species from pest to a designation that recognizes the need for special management, establishing regulations that allow for better management of recreational shooting, and setting future goals for occupied habitat that will address population management needs for disease and other threats.

Prairie dogs are small, stout ground squirrels. The total length of an adult black-tailed prairie dog is approximately 14-17 inches and the weight of an individual ranges from 1 to 3 pounds. Individual appearances within the species vary in mixed colors of brown, black, gray, and white. The black-tipped tail is characteristic. Black-tailed prairie dogs are diurnal, burrowing animals. They do not hibernate as do white-tailed, Gunnison's, and Utah prairie dogs. The black-footed ferret, swift fox, mountain plover, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, and numerous other species are dependent upon prairie dogs to varying degrees.

For further information about the black-tailed prairie dog, visit the Service's web site at: http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/mammals/btprairiedog/

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our home page at http://www.fws.gov

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON REMOVAL OF THE BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG AS A CANDIDATE SPECIES
August 12, 2004

1. Why is the black-tailed prairie dog being removed as a candidate species?

With new information from States and other entities about the range-wide impact of disease, chemical control and other lesser factors and the number of acres of occupied black-tailed prairie dog habitat, the Service determined that the black-tailed prairie dog no longer meets the Endangered Species Act's definition of "threatened."

2. What is the definition of "threatened?

The term "threatened" means any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. Each of the three criteria specified in the "threatened" definition should be met before a "warranted" finding is appropriate. In the case of the black-tailed prairie dog, these criteria are no longer met.

3. How did estimates of the acreage of occupied black-tailed prairie dog habitat change with the new data received by the States?

State agencies now estimate approximately 1,842,000 acres of occupied black-tailed prairie dog habitat across the United States. An additional 51,589 acres also exist in Mexico and Canada. This estimate is substantially larger than the 676,000 acres across the United States estimated in the 12-month finding in 2000 or the

estimated 364,000 acres in 1961.

4. Where are black-tailed prairie dogs found?

Black-tailed prairie dogs are found east of the continental divide in the states of Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska. They have disappeared in Arizona. They are also found in Canada and Mexico.

5. What new information has the Service received?

All 10 states with occupied black-tailed prairie dog habitat have provided the Service with comprehensive survey information. Since the 12-month finding in 2000 nine of the 10 states have completed additional statewide surveys. These efforts were systematically designed and implemented, although methodologies differed among states. We believe that the current statewide estimates are likely more accurate than those provided in the 12-month finding, which were also based at that time on the best available scientific data which included earlier data, extrapolation of partial surveys, telephone surveys, and desktop exercises. More recent current estimates were derived directly from aerial surveys, field surveys and/or interpretations of recent remotely sensed data.

6. How do you estimate prairie dog populations?

Estimates of prairie dog populations are not based on numbers of individual animals, but on estimates of the amount of occupied habitat. However, many people are interested in the estimated numbers of prairie dogs. The actual number of animals present depends upon the prevailing density of animals in that locality. Estimates of black-tailed prairie dog density vary depending upon the season, region, and climatic conditions, but typically range from 2 to 18 individuals per acre, with an average of 10 per acre. If 10 is used as an average number of black-tailed prairie dogs per acre, the estimated population of black-tailed prairie dogs in the U.S. would be 18,420,000.

7. How does recreational shooting of black-tailed prairie dogs affect population densities?

It can reduce population densities at specific sites. In the case of the black-tailed prairie dog, extirpation may have occurred in isolated circumstances. However, the Service believes interest in recreational shooting is generally not high where populations are at low levels. Also black-tailed prairie dog populations can recover from very low numbers following intensive recreational shooting.

8. Is disease a threat to the continued existence of the black-tailed