



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Endangered Species

Mountain-Prairie Region



BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG



Species Description: Prairie dogs occur only in North America. They are rodents within the squirrel family and include five species-- the black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), the white-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys leucurus*), the Gunnison prairie dog (*Cynomys gunnisoni*), the Utah prairie dog (*Cynomys parvidens*), and the Mexican prairie dog (*Cynomys mexicanus*) (Pizzimenti 1975). The Utah and Mexican prairie dogs are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened (49 FR 22339) and endangered (35 FR 8495) respectively. Generally, the black-tailed prairie dog occurs east of the other four species in more mesic habitat.

Prairie dogs are small, stout ground squirrels. The total length of an adult black-tailed prairie dog is approximately 14-17 inches. 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 (Hoogland 1995). Black-tailed prairie dogs are diurnal, burrowing animals. They do not hibernate as do white-tailed, Gunnison, and Utah prairie dogs (Hoogland 1995, Tileston and Lechleitner 1966). The black-footed ferret, swift fox, mountain plover, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, and number other species are dependent upon prairie dogs to varying degrees.

Location: The historic range of the black-tailed prairie dog included portions of 11 States, Canada, and Mexico. Today it occurs from extreme south-central Canada to northeastern Mexico and from approximate the 98th meridian west to the Rocky Mountains. The species is currently present in 11 States including Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming.

Most estimates of black-tailed prairie dog populations are not based on numbers of individual animals, but on estimates of the amount of occupied habitat. Density of animals varies depending on the season, region, and climatic conditions, but typically ranges from 2 to 18 individuals per acre. Density also can vary temporally due to poisoning, plague, and recreational shooting. A rangewide estimate of historically occupied habitat for the black-tailed prairie dog is 80 to 100 million acres. Current occupied habitat is estimated to be 2.1 million acres.

The black-footed ferret is a federally listed endangered species that depends upon prairie dogs as a source of food and uses its burrows for shelter. Any actions that kill prairie dogs or alter their habitat could prove detrimental to black-footed ferrets occupying the affected prairie dog towns. The Service's revised black-footed ferret survey guidelines provide criteria for determining when and how prairie dog towns need to be searched. In Colorado, the Service has block-cleared some areas in Colorado where black-footed ferret surveys are no longer necessary, [see maps on the Black-Footed Ferret website](#). If there are any questions about an activity to be conducted in prairie dog towns in Colorado, please contact

the Colorado Ecological Services Field Office at 303-236-4773 or the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

Recent Actions: After review of a petition seeking to protect the black-tailed prairie dog under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Service will undertake a more thorough review of the species to determine whether to propose adding the black-tailed prairie dog to the list of threatened or endangered species.

This petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to give the black-tailed prairie dog protection under the ESA. Rather this finding is the first step in a long process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available.

The public is invited to provide comments and information about the species and its habitat. Comments will be accepted until January 30, 2009. Please see the Federal Register notice for more information.

- Federal Register Notice: December 2, 2008 [90-Day Finding on a Petition To List the Black-tailed Prairie Dog as Threatened or Endangered](#)
- Press Release: December 2, 2008 [Fish and Wildlife Service to Conduct Status Review of the Black-tailed Prairie Dog](#)

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.

- **Press Release: August 12, 2004, [Black-tailed Prairie Dog Removed From Candidate Species List](#)**
- [Questions and Answers](#)
- **Federal Register Notice: August 18, 2004, [Finding for the Resubmitted Petition to List the Black-tailed Prairie Dog as Threatened](#)**
- [2004 Species Assessment and Listing Priority Assignment Form](#)

Previous Assessments

- [2002 Candidate and Listing Priority Assignment Form](#)

- [2001 Candidate and Listing Priority Assignment Form](#)

12 Month Administrative Finding for the Black-tailed Prairie Dog (2/2000)

- [Letter Summarizing the 12 Month Status Review of the Black-tailed Prairie Dog](#)
- [Memorandum from FWS Region 6 Director Regarding 12 Month Status Review](#)
- [Table of Contents for the 12 Month Finding for the Black-tailed Prairie Dog](#)
- [Chapter 1 - Summary of Service Considerations and Decisions](#)
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- [Download entire 12 Month Administrative Finding Report as self extracting zip file](#)

Federal Register Notice: [90-day Finding for a Petition to List the Black-tailed Prairie Dog \(3/25/1999\)](#)

Multi-State Conservation Strategy - Final Draft and related documents (11/1999)

- [The Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Assessment and Strategy Plan](#)
- February 1, 2002 [Addendum to the Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Assessment and Strategy](#)
- [Cover letter accompanying the Conservation Assessment and Strategy Plan](#)
- [Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation Assessment and Strategy Plan](#)

[More information can be found on the Service's ECOS webpage](#)

Last updated: July 10, 2009

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