

WILDLIFE APPENDIX

TABLE 78
SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES

The following is BLM's approved Special Status Species List for animals in Montana, North, and South Dakota as directed by BLM Manual 6840.

Mammals:

Black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*)
Fisher (*Martes pennati*)
Meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius*)
Merriam's shrew (*Sorex merriami*)
Northern bog lemming (*Synaptomys borealis*)
Spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*)
Townsend's big eared bat (*Plecotus townsendii*)
White-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys leucurus*)

Birds:

Black backed woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*)
Boreal owl (*Aegolius funereus*)
Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*)
Common loon (*Gavia immer*)
Canvasback duck (*Aythya valisineria*)
Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*)
Flammulated owl (*Otus flammeolus*)
Great gray owl (*Strix nebulosa*)
Hairy woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*)
LeConte's sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*)
Long billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*)
Pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*)
Sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*)
Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)
Three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*)

Reptiles:

Snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)
Spiny softshell turtle (*Trionyx spiniferus*)

Amphibians:

Canandian toad (*Bufo hemiophrys*)
Coeur d'Alene salamander (*Plethodon idahoensis*)
Tailed frog (*Ascaphus truei*)
Wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*)

Fish:

Northern redbelly X Finescale dace (*Phoxinus eos*) X
(*Phoxinus neogaeus*)
Pearl dace (*Margariscus margarita nachtriebi*)
Shortnose gar (*Lepisosteus platostomus*)
Westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*)
Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri*)



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Big Dry Resource Area
Miles City Plaza
Miles City, Montana 59301-2844



IN REPLY REFER TO:

6500

JUL 14 1994

Kemper M. McMaster
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P. O. Box 10023
Helena, Montana 59626

Dear Mr. McMaster:

On November 8, 1993, we sent Mr. Dale Harms the Biological Assessment for actions identified in the Big Dry Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.

Based on comments from your agency, as well as the Montana Black-Footed Ferret Work Group, the proposal to make an area in Custer and Prairie Counties a Black-Footed Ferret Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) was dropped. However, after analyzing your comments as well as the comments of other affected interests, the decision was made to continue with the ACEC nomination. In addition, the Board of Directors of the Prairie County Cooperative State Grazing District was briefed on this decision.

In addition, all references toward allowing prairie dog expansion, provided the licensed AUMs of the grazing permittees could be met has been dropped. Although our goal is to not reduce a permittees AUMs, we felt this statement was not warranted.

All of the other management actions affecting threatened or endangered species or their habitat are the same as identified in the previously submitted Biological Assessment.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dale Tribby at the above address or telephone him at 406-232-7000.

Sincerely,

David D. Swogger
Area Manager
Big Dry Resource Area

**BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
BIG DRY
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

INTRODUCTION

This biological assessment evaluates the impacts associated with actions or activities proposed in the Big Dry Resource Area’s (BDRA) Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) on threatened and endangered (T & E) wildlife species. This assessment is in response to the requirements of Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as amended.

This assessment is a summary of the RMP/EIS, and a detailed description of the alternatives and other factors put forth in the document will not be extensively duplicated here. The wildlife values affected are described in Chapter 3 and the anticipated effects are presented in Chapter 4 of the RMP/EIS.

The planning area (Chapter 1, page 2) includes the majority of the BDRA. The planning area encompasses 15,210,177 acres, of which 1,703,830 surface acres (11.2%) and 7,329,400 acres of mineral estate (48.2%) are administered by the BLM. The majority of the landownership is private. Other significant landownership includes the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Station and the State of Montana (DSL).

The RMP/EIS provides a comprehensive plan for managing land and resources administered by the BLM. The RMP/EIS is primarily focused on resolving two resource management issues. These issues are:

1. Special Management Designation
2. Resource Accessibility and Availability

Four alternatives are presented for analysis within the RMP/EIS to resolve the issues. Alternative A, the “no action” alternative would continue present management direction. No special management areas would be designated, and accessibility and availability would remain the same; Alternative B, the “protection” alternative, presents management actions which designate special management areas with restrictive management actions, reducing resource accessibility and availability; Alternative C, the “development” alternative, presents management actions designating special management areas while allowing more resource accessibility and availability; and Alternative D is the “preferred” alternative. This alternative presents management actions which designate special management areas. Alternative D allows accessibility and availability to resources when no significant impacts are anticipated.

Management Common to All Alternatives (Chapter 2) discusses BLM management regardless of alternative. The preferred alternative (alternative D) combined with Management Common to All Alternatives will provide management direction for all resources.

AFFECTED SPECIES

Letters from the FWS, dated October 27, 1992 and March 25, 1993 listed the following T & E species which may be present in the planning area.

Listed Species	Status	Expected Occurrence
Bald eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)	Endangered	Year-round resident, Nesting, Winter Resident, Migrant
Whooping crane (<i>Grus americana</i>)	Endangered	Migrant

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Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>)	Endangered	Summer resident, Migrant
Piping plover (<i>Charadrius melodus</i>)	Threatened	Summer resident, Nesting
Least tern (<i>Sterna antillarum</i>)	Endangered	Summer resident, Nesting
Black-footed ferret (<i>Mustela nigripes</i>)	Endangered	Potential resident in prairie dog(<i>Cynomys sp.</i>) towns
Pallid sturgeon (<i>Scaphirynchus albus</i>)	Endangered	Year-round resident, Missouri & Yellowstone Rivers

A description of the occurrence of these species can be found in chapter 3 under “Wildlife” in the RMP/EIS. The following is a summary of that information.

Bald Eagle

Nesting bald eagles occur along the Yellowstone River in Rosebud and Custer counties. The Missouri, Yellowstone, Musselshell and Powder rivers provide habitat during spring and fall migrations, and during the winter months. Bald eagles concentrate around areas of open water where waterfowl and fish are available. Bald eagles are currently expanding their nesting territories down the Yellowstone River (Flath 1990). No bald eagle nests are known to occur on BLM land within the planning area.

Whooping Crane

Whooping cranes migrate through the planning area and are occasionally seen on reservoirs.

Peregrine Falcon

Peregrine falcons migrate through the planning area, but do not nest or winter here. A historical eyrie may have existed within the Terry badlands, but recent inventories of this eyrie have not revealed any peregrine falcons.

Piping Plover

Piping plovers, migratory shorebirds, nest in the northeastern portion of the planning area. High value habitat is associated with natural saline wetlands. Recent surveys have indicated one parcel of public land is used by nesting piping plovers.

Least Tern

The least tern nests on graveled islands on the Yellowstone River. High value habitat for this specie are the graveled islands associated with the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers and their tributaries. Inventories by personnel from the BLM and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) have shown least terns are somewhat nomadic when selecting islands for nesting, often selecting different islands each spring. During spring and fall migrations, least terns have been observed in the vicinity of stockwater reservoirs.

Black-Footed Ferret

There have been no sightings of black-footed ferrets in recent years. Ferrets are essentially obligate species in that their existence is closely tied to the occurrence of black-tailed prairie dog colonies. Prairie dog colonies occurring in the area could provide habitat for the ferret. BLM is cooperating in the black-footed ferret recovery program. Potential for reintroduction of the black-footed ferret occurs in the Custer and Hunter Creek drainages and adjacent to the Powder River in Prairie and Custer counties. Approximately 2,000 acres of prairie dogs occur on public land within this area.

Pallid Sturgeon

The pallid sturgeon is a large river fish known to occur in the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers and their tributaries. This species is endangered through habitat modification, lack of natural reproduction, commercial harvest, and hybridization in part of its range.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The primary objective of the wildlife program in the BLM is to maintain and enhance suitable habitat for all species of wildlife.

The emphasis for habitat maintenance and development will be directed toward present and potential habitat for sensitive, T & E species, nesting waterfowl, upland game birds, crucial winter ranges, non-game habitat and fisheries.

BLM will consult with the FWS when any action may affect a T & E species or their habitat.

No action will be initiated on BLM land which may jeopardize any candidate or federally listed T&E species. Impacts to designated state "Species of Special Interest or Concern" will be evaluated and applicable mitigation developed prior to the initiation of an action on BLM land. Chapter 3 under "Wildlife" lists these species of special interest or concern.

BLM will cooperate to recover T & E species, including reintroduction efforts.

Currently there are no known peregrine falcon, bald eagle or least tern nest sites or black-footed ferrets on BLM land in the planning area. However, if a nest site were discovered or a reintroduction proposed, BLM will adhere to the species specific approved recovery plan and guidance.

ISSUE ANALYSIS

This analysis is divided into two issue areas, as presented in the RMP/EIS. They are: Special Management Designations and Resource Accessibility and Availability.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT DESIGNATIONS

Proposed Action: The piping plover (16 acres) (map 27) would be designated an ACEC. The area would be managed to protect the habitat for the piping plover, as well as associated species.

Decision: Positive Impact.

Rationale: The BLM would provide habitat for the piping plover and associated species. This is a positive benefit.

Proposed Action: The black-footed ferret reintroduction area (11,166 acres) (map 23) would be designated an ACEC. Active prairie dog colonies on public land (1,151 acres) as well as future colonies within the ACEC would be managed for black-footed ferret reintroduction and recovery and for associated species. Prairie dogs would be allowed to expand within the ACEC.

Decision: Positive Impact.

Rationale: This area would be proactively managed for prairie dogs and associated species. This is a positive benefit.

RESOURCE ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY

Proposed Action:

Prairie dogs and black-footed ferrets

Prairie dog management would be subject to the Miles City District Black-tailed Prairie Dog Management Plan (USDI-BLM 1986b). See wildlife appendix.

BLM would protect existing prairie dog habitat for black-footed ferrets, associated species, viewing, and recreational shooting.

Based on the 1991 inventory, the potential reintroduction area contains approximately 1,151 acres of active prairie dogs on public land.

Actions affecting prairie dogs or their habitat would be a cooperative effort among affected landowners, BLM, FWS, DSL, and FWP. Management actions could include, prairie dog expansion, reintroduction, management of the recreational shooting of prairie dogs, plague abatement, or prairie dog control.

Should the decision be made to reintroduce black-footed ferrets, a cooperative management plan covering the reintroduction of the ferret, future ferret management and prairie dog management would be developed in cooperation with the affected landowners, BLM, FWS, DSL, and FWP.

Oil and gas will be leased subject to the following “Controlled Surface Use” stipulations:

RESOURCE: Prairie dog towns within potential black-footed ferret reintroduction areas determined to be essential for black-footed ferret recovery.

STIPULATION: The “Draft Guidelines for Oil and Gas Activities in Prairie Dog Ecosystems Managed for Black-footed Ferret Recovery” (Fish and Wildlife Service, 1990) will be used as appropriate to develop site-specific conditions of approval to protect black-footed ferret habitat needed for reintroduction and recovery. Specific conditions of approval will depend on type and duration of proposed activity, proximity to ferret habitat, and other site-specific conditions.

OBJECTIVE: To maintain the integrity of potential black-footed ferret habitat for reintroduction and recovery of black-footed ferret.

EXCEPTION: May be granted by the authorized officer for activities determined, through coordination with the Montana Black-footed Ferret Work Group (MBFFWG) to have no adverse impacts on reintroduction and recovery of black-footed ferrets.

MODIFICATION: The boundaries of the stipulated area may be modified if the authorized officer, in cooperation with the MBFFWG, determines portions of the area are no longer essential for black-footed ferret reintroduction and recovery.

WAIVER: This stipulation may be waived if the authorized officer, in coordination with the MBFFWG, determines the entire leasehold no longer contains habitat essential for reintroduction and recovery of the ferret or if the ferret is removed from protection under the ESA.

RESOURCE: Potential black-footed ferret habitat (prairie dog colonies and complexes 80 acres or more in size and not designated as black-footed ferret reintroduction sites.)

STIPULATION: Prior to surface disturbance, prairie dog colonies and complexes of 80 acres or more will be examined to determine the absence or presence of black-footed ferrets. The findings of this examination may result in some restrictions to the operator’s plans or may even preclude use and occupancy that would be in violation of the ESA of 1973.

The lessee or operator may, at their own option, conduct an examination on the leased lands to determine if black-footed ferrets are present, if the proposed activity would have an adverse effect, or if the area can be cleared. This examination must be done by or under the supervision of a qualified resource specialist approved by the Surface Management Agency (SMA). An acceptable report must be provided to the SMA documenting the presence or absence of black-footed ferrets and identifying the anticipated effects of the proposed action on the black-footed ferret or its habitat. This stipulation does not apply to the operation and maintenance of production facilities.

OBJECTIVE: To assure compliance with the ESA by locating and protecting black-footed ferrets and their habitat.

EXCEPTION: An exception may be granted by the authorized officer for surface-disturbing activities determined to have no adverse effect on black-footed ferrets or their habitat.

MODIFICATION: The boundaries of the stipulated area may be modified by the authorized officer if portions of the leasehold are cleared based on current and/or past ferret surveys.

WAIVER: This stipulation may be waived if the entire leasehold is block cleared, permanently cleared based on current and/or past ferret surveys, or if the ferret is declared recovered and no longer subject to the ESA.

Least terns

Surface disturbance would not be allowed on least tern nesting habitat along the Yellowstone River.

The following “No Surface Occupancy” stipulations, apply to oil and gas development only.

RESOURCE: Least Tern.

STIPULATION: Surface occupancy and use is prohibited within 1/4 mile of wetlands identified as least tern habitat.

OBJECTIVE: To protect habitat of the least tern, an endangered species under the ESA.

EXCEPTIONS: An exception can be granted by the authorized officer if the operator submits a plan which demonstrates the proposed action will not affect the least tern or its habitat. If the authorized officer determines the action can affect the least tern or its habitat, consultation with the FWS will be required prior to final determination on the exception.

MODIFICATION: The boundaries of the stipulated area can be modified if the authorized officer, in consultation with FWS, determines portions of the area are no longer essential to the least tern.

WAIVER: The stipulation can be waived if the authorized officer, in consultation with FWS, determines the entire leasehold no longer contains habitat essential to the least tern, or if the least tern is declared recovered and is no longer subject to the ESA of 1973.

Piping plovers

Sixteen acres of piping plover habitat would be designated an ACEC.

Locatable mineral entry would be withdrawn. Nonenergy leasable mineral leasing would be closed. Rights-of-way construction would be avoided. Mineral material sales and permits, livestock grazing and geophysical exploration would not be allowed. Off-road vehicle use would be designated as limited to existing roads and trails.

The following “No Surface Occupancy” stipulations, apply to oil and gas development only.

RESOURCE: Piping Plover.

STIPULATION: Surface occupancy and use is prohibited within 1/4 mile of wetlands identified as piping plover habitat.

OBJECTIVE: To protect habitat of the piping plover, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

EXCEPTION: An exception can be granted by the authorized officer if the operator submits a plan which demonstrates the proposed action will not affect the piping plover or its habitat. If the officer determines the action can affect the piping plover or its habitat, consultation with the FWS will be required prior to final determination on the exception.

MODIFICATION: The boundaries of the stipulated area may be modified if the authorized officer, in consultation with the FWS, determines portions of the area no longer are essential to the piping plover.

WAIVER: The stipulation can be waived if the authorized officer, in consultation with FWS, determines the entire leasehold no longer contains habitat essential to the piping plover, or if the piping plover is no longer subject to the ESA of 1973.

Peregrine falcon

The following “No Surface Occupancy” stipulations, apply to oil and gas development only.

RESOURCE: Wildlife - Peregrine Falcon

STIPULATION: Surface occupancy and use is prohibited within 1 mile of identified peregrine falcon nesting sites.

OBJECTIVE: To protect the habitat of the peregrine falcon, an endangered species under the ESA of 1973.

EXCEPTION: An exception may be granted by the authorized officer if the operator submits a plan which demonstrates the proposed action will not affect the peregrine falcon or its habitat. If the officer determines the action may or will have an

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adverse affect, the operator may submit a plan demonstrating the impacts can be adequately mitigated. This plan must be approved by BLM in consultation with the FWS.

MODIFICATION: The boundaries of the stipulated area may be modified if the authorized officer, in consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, determines portions of the area no longer are critical to peregrine falcon.

WAIVER: The stipulation may be waived if the authorized officer, in consultation with the FWS, determines the entire leasehold no longer contains habitat critical to the peregrine falcon, or if the peregrine falcon is declared recovered and is no longer subject to the ESA of 1973.

Bald eagle nest sites and nesting habitat

No surface disturbance would be allowed from March 1 to August 1 within one-half mile of all raptor nests, including bald eagles.

The following “No Surface Occupancy” stipulations, apply to oil and gas development only.

RESOURCE: Bald Eagle Nest Sites and Nesting Habitat.

STIPULATION: Surface occupancy and use is prohibited within 1/2 mile of known bald eagle nest sites which have been active at any time within the past 7 years, and within bald eagle nesting habitat in riparian areas.

OBJECTIVE: To protect bald eagle nesting sites and/or nesting habitat in accordance with the ESA of 1973 and the Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan (USDI, BLM 1986c).

EXCEPTION: An exception can be granted by the authorized officer if the operator submits a plan which demonstrates the proposed action will not affect the bald eagle or its habitat. If the authorized officer determines the action can affect the bald eagle or its habitat, consultation with the FWS will be required prior to final determination on the exception.

MODIFICATION: The boundaries of the stipulated area can be modified if the authorized officer, in consultation with the FWS, determines portions of the area can be occupied without adversely affecting bald eagle nest sites or nesting habitat.

WAIVER: The stipulation can be waived if the authorized officer, in consultation with the FWS, determines the entire leasehold can be occupied without adversely affecting the bald eagle nest sites or nesting habitat, or if the bald eagle is declared recovered and is no longer subject to the ESA of 1973.

Decision: Positive Impact

Rationale: BLM would protect habitat for black-tailed prairie dogs and associated species. The acreage and distribution of existing prairie dog towns may provide an opportunity to release and study reintroduction of black-footed ferrets. A management plan would be prepared in cooperation with the affected parties which would help alleviate negative impacts of a reintroduction.

Prairie dogs, least terns, piping plovers, Peregrine falcons and bald eagles would be provided some protection from surface disturbing activities. Oil and gas leases would be issued with stipulations attached.

Management actions initiated by this agency would not impact the pallid sturgeon.

DETERMINATION OF EFFECT (SUMMARY)

It is our opinion that we have a “may affect-beneficial” with regard to piping plover habitat. With regard to all of the other listed species in the planning area, we feel the proposed actions associated with this RMP/EIS will have a “Not Likely to Adversely Affect” on these species or their habitat.

CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS

Dennis Christopherson, Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Personal Communication

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG MANAGEMENT PLAN MILES CITY DISTRICT

Introduction

This plan is primarily an analysis of the current status of prairie dog populations within the boundaries of the Miles City District and a statement of the approach that will be used to manage these populations.

Included is a brief discussion of the current prairie dog situation in each of the four Resource Areas that comprise the district, including the use of prairie dog colonies by associated wildlife species. A statement of management policy regarding the circumstances under which management actions may occur will be made under the "Management Policy" section.

This plan is not intended to be a programmatic environmental assessment regarding prairie dog management/control in the district. It is anticipated that actual control efforts in the district will be minimal and a site specific environmental assessment will be written for all individual control proposals. The plan recognizes prairie dogs as an integral component of the rangeland ecosystem.

Background

Historically, black-tailed prairie dogs, *Cynomys ludovicianus*, were widely distributed over the grasslands of the central plains and adjacent areas to the west. At one time extensive prairie dog colonies occurred along the Powder and Tongue Rivers, as well as along other heavily grazed river drainages within the district. During the 1920s and 1930s intensive poisoning efforts were conducted in eastern Montana and prairie dog populations were reduced significantly. Prairie dogs have never reoccupied all of the areas they occupied prior to the intensive poisoning programs. Prairie dogs today, in the Miles City District, occur for the most part in small scattered colonies.

Prairie dog management has, at times, become an emotional issue among special interest groups. Prairie dogs are considered pests by some interest groups and destructive to range resources. Public health, range degradation and competition for livestock forage have been the primary rationale for reducing prairie dog populations in the past. Nationally, there is as strong a voice for maintaining prairie dogs as there is for eliminating them. Ecological importance, scientific study, casual observation/photography and recreational shooting have been used to justify the preservation of prairie dog towns. The local agricultural faction largely favors extermination or significant reduction and control of prairie dogs because of their competition with livestock for forage.

Prairie dog towns are an important habitat component of the plains ecosystem. At least 50 species of wildlife are, to some degree, associated with prairie dog towns (Appendix). Perhaps the associated species of most concern is the federally endangered black-footed ferret. Black-footed ferrets are protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and the regulations, policies and guidelines developed to protect them affect the management of prairie dog towns. The Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Plan sets forth guidelines to reestablish their population numbers above threatened and endangered levels. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has listed several of the 50 species with prairie dog towns as species of special interest and concern. Six of the associated species are migratory birds of high federal interest.

Recent grazing permittee requests in Montana have indicated some demand for prairie dog control on BLM-administered public lands. In contrast, advocate groups strongly favor maintaining prairie dog towns. Conflicting interests have focused attention upon the need for a planned approach to prairie dog habitat management. The most current guidelines for Montana BLM requires a regional prairie dog analysis as a prerequisite to future management actions (Instruction Memorandum MT-83-217, Change 1).

Analysis of Resource Area Situations

The location and assessment of additional prairie dog towns is an ongoing annual effort in the resource areas in the Miles City District. The following is a brief statement of the known situation in each Resource Area:

Powder River Resource Area

There are 115 black-tailed prairie dog towns totaling approximately 3,200 acres that are known to occur on public lands in the Powder River Resource Area. In the recent past these prairie dog towns have been managed primarily for wildlife and recreational values. In 1978, a confirmed sighting of a black-footed ferret was recorded in this resource area. No subsequent sightings of ferrets have been made. Burrowing owls as well as other associated wildlife species are known to occur on prairie dog towns in this resource area.

Big Dry Resource Area

There are approximately 3,000 acres of known black-tailed prairie dog towns on public lands in the Big Dry Resource Area. Historically, black-footed ferrets occurred on prairie dog towns in this resource area, but none have been sighted in recent years. Burrowing owls as well as other associated wildlife species are known to occur on prairie dog towns in this resource area.

Billings Resource Area

There are approximately 2,000 acres of prairie dog towns known to occur on public lands in the Billings Resource Area. Seven hundred acres of these prairie dog towns in the extreme southern end of Carbon County are occupied by white-tailed prairie dogs, *Cynomys leucurus*. An intensive control effort in the 1960s, directly primarily at Yellowstone and Musselshell counties, Montana, significantly reduced the total population of black-tailed prairie dogs in this resource area. Since that control effort, many of the abandoned prairie dog colonies have been reinhabited by Richardsons ground squirrels. Historically, there have been reported sightings of black-footed ferrets in this resource area but there have not been any confirmed sightings in recent years. Burrowing owls as well as other associated wildlife species are known to occur on prairie dog towns in this resource area.

South Dakota Resource Area

There are 15 known black-tailed prairie dog towns on public lands in the South Dakota Resource Area. Five of these towns occur in Butte County, six in Meade County, two in Harding County and two in Fall River County. These towns range in approximate size from 5 acres to 150 acres. Historically, black-footed ferrets have been known to occur in South Dakota, but there have been no confirmed ferret sightings on public lands in the resource area in recent years. Burrowing owls, as well as other associated wildlife species are known to occur on prairie dog towns in this resource area.

Management Policy

In keeping with the State Director's policy regarding prairie dog management and to clarify Miles City District policy, all future prairie dog control/management activities within the District will conform to the following guidelines:

It shall be the district policy that prairie dog towns that occur entirely on public land and are not causing significant adverse impacts to soil and vegetation resources will be managed for their wildlife and recreation values. The BLM does not anticipate getting into a large-scale prairie dog control program as most public lands within the district do not support high enough prairie dog densities to warrant major damage concern, nor will we have the manpower or funding capability to support such an effort in the foreseeable future.

First priority for prairie dog management actions will be given to areas that have an Allotment Management Plan or some similar activity plan. The plan will integrate any proposed prairie dog management or control actions into the overall objective of upgrading range conditions (particularly on "I" category allotments). Follow-up treatments such as plowing and seeding may be done after prairie dogs are removed, in areas where this is necessary to ensure the restoration of range productivity in a reasonable period of time (i.e. lack of on-site seed source). Resource area range and wildlife personnel will provide on-the-ground documentation to substantiate that actual degradation of public lands is occurring before control measures will be considered. Resource area wildlife personnel will provide black-footed ferret clearance surveys as needed.

Though of a lesser priority, prairie dog control projects may be proposed for “M” and “C” category allotments if a comprehensive control plan is written to support the proposal. Documentation of range degradation will be required just as an AMP area control proposals. A black-footed ferret clearance survey will also be required.

The only time it is really justifiable to eradicate prairie dogs is when they are seriously degrading public range lands, and it is necessary to remove them in order to restore vegetation productivity to protect the soil from accelerated erosion. Control proposals that do not meet this criteria will not be undertaken.

From a cost-benefit standpoint, where control is deemed necessary, it is most cost effective to completely eliminate a given prairie dog population. However, there may be instances where it would be feasible or desirable to consider partial control to limit the expansion of a specific prairie dog town. A decision to undertake a partial control effort carries with it an obligation to provide maintenance funding on a continuing basis, as it will likely be necessary to repeat the control effort periodically. If control is really necessary, first consideration should be given to complete eradication. Funding liability for control projects on public land will be with the range program.

In situations where a problem prairie dog population originates on public land and spreads on to private land, control will only be undertaken if the adjoining landowner is willing to enter into an agreement to control the prairie dogs on his land at the same time that they are being controlled on public land. In instances where a prairie dog population originates on private land and spread onto public land, the primary obligation for control (particularly funding) will be the responsibility of the private landowner. In cases where a prairie dog town occurs on both private and public land and the public land portion is currently supporting a wildlife species that is threatened or endangered or of special concern to a state or federal agency, (i.e. nesting burrowing owl, etc.), the portion of the prairie dog town that occurs on public land will not be controlled. In all cases, regardless of the source of funding, it will still be necessary to conduct the appropriate vegetation condition and black-footed ferret surveys prior to any control activities.

All approved control plans will be fully coordinated with appropriate state and federal agencies and with range permittees and adjoining private landowners.

Interagency Coordination

All prairie dog management and control proposals will be coordinated with the appropriate state and federal wildlife management agencies. This would include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has contracted with a private consulting firm to determine whether or not black-footed ferrets still occur in eastern Montana. At this time, no black-footed ferrets have been located. The consulting firm has generated two important publications dealing with black-footed ferrets. One publication deals with methods of locating black-footed ferrets and the other publication deals with management and reintroduction consideration for black-footed ferrets. Eastern Montana, including the Miles City District, will be analyzed regarding the suitability of existing ferret habitat and the potential for the reestablishment of a black-footed ferret population through reintroduction from an existing population such as the one that occurs at Meeteetse, Wyoming. Periodically, wildlife personnel from the Miles City District meet with biologists that are on the black-footed ferret recovery team to update strategy regarding the ferret recovery program in eastern Montana. New inventory information is exchanged at these meetings and time frames for current objectives or goals of the program are agreed upon.

While the Miles City District may not currently contain a prime ferret reintroduction site, the future discovery of an existing black-footed ferret population in the district, however small, would warrant a reevaluation of the feasibility of reintroducing ferrets in the district.

/s/ Bruce G. Whitmarsh	4/22/86
Acting District Manager	Date

Note: Currently, only zinc phosphide may be used to control prairie dogs on public lands.

**APPENDIX
WILDLIFE SPECIES ASSOCIATED WITH BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG TOWNS**

Species	Species of Special Concern to State of Montana	Migratory Species of High Federal Interest
BIRDS		
Golden eagle (<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>)	X	
Ferruginous hawk (<i>Buteo regalis</i>)	X	X
Red-tailed hawk (<i>B. jamaicensis</i>)		
Swainson's hawk (<i>B. swainsoni</i>)		
Marshhawk (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>)		
Prairie falcon (<i>Falco mexicanus</i>)	X	X
American kestrel (<i>F. sparverius</i>)		
Burrowing owl (<i>Speotyto cunicularia</i>)	X	X
Great horned owl (<i>Bubo virginianus</i>)		
Sage grouse (<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>)		
Mourning dove (<i>Zenaidura macroura</i>)		
Killdeer (<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>)		
Common nighthawk (<i>Chordeiles minor</i>)		
Mountain plover (<i>Eupoda montana</i>)	X	X
Horned lark (<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>)		
Western meadowlark (<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>)		
Chestnut-collared longspur (<i>Carcarius ornatus</i>)		
McCown's longspur (<i>Rhynchophanes mccownii</i>)		X
Vesper sparrow (<i>Poocetes gramineus</i>)		
Lark bunting (<i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>)		
Western kingbird (<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>)		
Magpie (<i>Pica pica</i>)		
Loggerhead shrike (<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>)		X
Brown-headed cowbird (<i>Molothrus ater</i>)		
Savannah sparrow (<i>Passercules sandwichensis</i>)		
Barn swallow (<i>Hirundo rustica</i>)		
Cliff swallow (<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>)		
Snow bunting (<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>)		

**APPENDIX
WILDLIFE SPECIES ASSOCIATED WITH BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG TOWNS**

Species	Species of Special Concern to State of Montana	Migratory Species of High Federal Interest
AMPHIBIANS		
Leopard frog (<i>Rana pipiens</i>)		
Tiger salamander (<i>Ambystoma tigrinum</i>)		
Western toad (<i>Bufo boreas</i>)		
REPTILES		
Eastern short-horned lizard (<i>Phrynosoma douglassi</i>)		
Sagebrush lizard (<i>Sceloporus graciosus</i>)		
Red-sided garter snake (<i>Thamnophis sirtalis</i>)		
Prairie rattlesnake (<i>Crotalus viridis</i>)		
Bullsnake (<i>Pituophis melaneleucus</i>)		
MAMMALS		
Coyote (<i>Canis latrans</i>)		
Striped skunk (<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>)		
Mink (<i>Mustela vison</i>)		
Long-tailed weasel (<i>M. frenata</i>)		
Badger (<i>Taxidea taxus</i>)		
Raccoon (<i>Procyon lotor</i>)		
Red fox (<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>)		
Mule deer (<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>)		
Pronghorn (<i>Antilocapra americana</i>)		
White-tailed jackrabbit (<i>Lepus townsendi</i>)		
Desert cottontail (<i>Sylvilagus auduboni</i>)		
Deer mouse (<i>Peromyscus maniculatus</i>)		
Thirteen-lined ground squirrel (<i>Citellus tridecemlineatus</i>)		
Pocket gopher (<i>Thomomys</i> sp.)		
Least chipmunk (<i>Eutamias minimus</i>)		
Grasshopper mouse (<i>Onychomys leucogaster</i>)		



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ecological Services
100 North Park, Suite 320
Helena Montana 59601

IN REPLY REFER TO:

ES-61130-Billings
M.02 - BLM (I)

July 20, 1994

MEMORANDUM

To: Area Manager, Big Dry Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management,
Miles City, MT

From: Field Supervisor, Montana Field Office, Ecological Services, Fish
and Wildlife Service, Helena, MT

Subject: Revised Biological Assessment for Big Dry Resource Management
Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), based on information in the July 14, 1994 revised biological assessment for the Big Dry Resource Management Plan, concurs with the "may affect - beneficial" finding for the piping plover and with the "is not likely to adversely affect" finding for bald eagle, whooping crane, peregrine falcon, least tern, black-footed ferret, and pallid sturgeon. If this program's final decisions are further altered so as to have effects on threatened or endangered species other than those described in draft Big Dry Resource Management Plan, the Bureau of Land Management will need to reinitiate informal consultation with the Service.

We appreciate your efforts to consider endangered species in your project planning.

DMC/jf

Donald Palawski

cc: Suboffice Coordinator, Ecological Services (Billings, MT)