

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
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Fish and Wildlife Service to Conduct Status Review of the Black-tailed Prairie Dog

The black-tailed prairie dog may warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today, following an initial 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 black-tailed prairie dog to determine whether to propose adding it to the federal list of endangered species.

Today's decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, is based on scientific information about the black-tailed prairie dog provided in the petition requesting listing the species under the Act. The petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to give the black-tailed prairie dog federal 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.

To ensure this review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information from state and federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the black-tailed prairie dog and its habitat.

Comments and information will be accepted until February 2, 2009 and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2008-0111; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The Service will evaluate all information regarding the status and distribution of the black-tailed prairie dog, including the impacts or potential impacts to the species resulting from either human activities or natural causes.

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

In Arizona, the black-tailed prairie dog's range included parts of Cochise, Graham, Pima, and Santa Cruz counties in the southeastern portion of the state. The species had been extirpated from the state for the past 50 years until the Arizona Game and Fish Department released 74 black-tailed prairie dogs on public lands near Sonoita, Arizona last month. Such conservation efforts will be considered during the Service's 12-month review process for the species.

The Service is currently working with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to develop a candidate conservation agreement with assurances, or CCAA, that will implement conservation measures for the species while providing assurances that no additional measures will be necessary if the species is ever listed under the ESA.

In March 2008, WildEarth Guardians filed a complaint against the Service for failure to complete a finding on their August 2007 petition to list the black-tailed prairie dog. In a July 2008 stipulated settlement, the Service agreed to submit a finding on the petition by November 30, 2008.

The petitioners assert that several factors affect black-tailed prairie dog habitat, including conversion of prairie grasslands to cropland; urbanization; oil, gas, and mineral extraction; plague; recreational shooting; and livestock grazing.

For more information regarding the black-tailed prairie dog, please visit our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/btprairiedog/>

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.