

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region

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For Immediate Release

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Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Utah Prairie Dog Released for Public Review

Public Comments Will Be Accepted Until Nov. 16, 2010

A draft revised recovery plan that outlines steps to recover the threatened Utah prairie dog was released today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for public review and comment.

The Utah prairie dog (*Cynomys parvidens*) was listed as an endangered species on June 4, 1973. The species was downlisted to threatened status on May 29, 1984 due largely to increasing population numbers in portions of its range. The Utah prairie dog is the western most member of the genus *Cynomys* and has the most restricted range of the four prairie dog species in the United States, occurring only in southwestern and central Utah. Utah prairie dogs are found in portions of Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, Piute, Sevier, and Wayne Counties.

Utah prairie dog population trends appear to be relatively stable, although the species remains vulnerable to several serious threats. Primary threats are habitat loss from urban development and loss of prairie dog colonies from plague outbreaks.

A recovery plan for the species was approved in 1991. The plan's primary recovery criterion was to establish Utah prairie dog populations on public lands across three recovery areas: West Desert, Paunsaugunt, and Awapa Plateau.

Increasing and securing populations of the Utah prairie dog on Federal lands is still an important component of the draft revised recovery plan. However, the draft revised recovery plan also emphasizes conservation of the species on non-Federal lands through programs with willing landowners.

"The majority of the Utah prairie dog's known population occurs on private lands," said Laura Romin, assistant field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Ecological Services Field Office in Utah. "We believe that recovery of the species will be achieved more rapidly if we increase conservation of the species on these lands in a way that benefits private landowners and Utah prairie dogs simultaneously."

The draft revised recovery plan also emphasizes research and management of plague in Utah prairie dog colonies. Plague is caused by a bacterium (*Yersinia pestis*) not native to North America. Fleas are the most common vectors. Plague occurs across the entire range of the Utah prairie dog and has the potential to result in complete loss or severe reduction in prairie dog

colonies across the landscape. Management measures to control plague outbreaks (i.e., vaccines, insecticides) are being studied and their success may influence long-term prairie dog conservation. There are no reported incidences of humans contracting plague from Utah prairie dog colonies. However, successful management of plague in prairie dogs should continue to minimize the disease risk to humans.

Examples of proposed recovery actions include continuing Utah prairie dog annual surveys and population monitoring; conserving prairie dog habitat on non-Federal lands by purchasing conservation easements and establishing voluntary conservation agreements (e.g., safe harbor agreements) with willing landowners; protecting and improving habitat on Federal lands by implementing vegetation treatments and minimizing impacts of proposed land use activities; minimizing impacts of disease such as plague; continuing the translocation of Utah prairie dogs to establish new colonies in suitable habitats; and developing a more comprehensive public outreach effort to promote a better understanding of the biological and habitat values of the Utah prairie dog.

“The 1991 recovery plan was based on the best available information at the time,” said Laura Romin. “Since that time, research and monitoring efforts of state, Federal, and non-governmental entities have provided us with a better understanding of the habitat requirements of the Utah prairie dogs and available conservation strategies. We believe this species is very recoverable, and we look forward to expanding partnerships with private landowners to help us reach our goals.”

For more information regarding the Utah prairie dog, please visit our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/UTprairiedog/index.htm>.

The availability of the draft revised recovery plan for a 60-day public comment period is published in today’s *Federal Register*. Copies of the draft recovery plan are available through the Fish and Wildlife Service’s website or by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Utah Ecological Services Field Office in West Valley, Utah at (801) 975-3330. Written comments may be submitted until November 16, 2010 and should be sent to Larry Crist, Field Supervisor, Utah Ecological Services Office, 2369 West Orton Circle, West Valley, Utah 84119.

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