

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
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For Immediate Release

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Public Opinion on Draft Environment Assessment for Reintroduction of Black Footed Ferrets in Logan County, Kansas

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is asking for public comment on a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Application for an Enhancement of Survival Permit published today in the *Federal Register*. The Service is proposing reintroduction of black-footed ferrets on private lands in Logan County, Kansas.

The private land proposed for reintroduction of the black-footed ferret is currently used as grazing land, and is bordered by other private grazing and croplands. Each property supports several active prairie dog colonies which have been evaluated and determined potentially suitable for black-footed ferrets. The proposed reintroduction experiment would continue for 5 years, after which, it may be terminated or continued indefinitely depending upon success and cooperating landowner desires.

An open house public scoping meeting was held in Oakley, Kansas, in November 2006, to provide local residents details of the proposal, answer questions, and to receive verbal and written comments.

“The Service will certify, in writing, to all cooperating landowners and their neighbors that black-footed ferrets will not interfere with the rights of landowners to manage their property, including legal means of prairie dog control if ferrets leave designated release properties and enter nearby lands,” said Steve Guertin, Acting Regional Director for the Service’s Mountain-Prairie Region. “The Service is committed to maintaining property rights of neighbors and other landowners who do not desire ferrets or prairie dogs.”

Copies of the draft EA and application are available by visiting <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/mammals/blackfootedferret/>, or by calling the Service’s Mountain-Prairie Regional Office at 303-236-4256. Written comments must be submitted by November 19, 2007 to the Assistant Regional Director, Fisheries-Ecological Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 25486, DFC, Denver, CO 80225-0486, or by fax 303-236-0027.

Black-footed ferrets, one of the rarest mammals in North America, were once found throughout the Great Plains, from northern Mexico to southern Saskatchewan, Canada. Their range extended from the Rocky Mountains east through the Dakotas and south through Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The national goal to improve the status of the species from endangered to threatened is to establish 10 free-ranging populations of ferrets, spread over the widest possible area within their former range. To meet this delisting goal, it is hoped that 1,500 breeding adult ferrets will be established in the wild by the year 2010.

Black-footed ferrets are found almost exclusively in prairie dog colonies. Prairie dogs are their principal prey, and ferrets live and rear their young in prairie dog burrows. Black-footed ferrets have one litter each year, with an average of about three kits per litter. In the wild, kits do not come above ground until they are two-three months old. Mothers and young remain together until early fall. By October, the kits are able to take care of themselves.

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 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 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.

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