Peer Review Plan: Retrospective Analysis and Modeling Evaluating Colony Persistence of Utah Prairie Dog (*Cynomys parvidens)*

Timeline of the Peer review (estimated):

Draft documents to be disseminated: May 2020

Peer review to be initiated: May 2020

Peer review to be completed by: September 2020

Conclusions available for use is expected: The information from this modeling analysis help will inform a state-led conservation strategy and has potential to inform future species status review. The State of Utah plans to complete the conservation strategy in 2021.

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information in the Retrospective Analysis and Modeling Evaluating Colony Persistence of Utah Prairie Dog (*Cynomys parvidens)*.

Via an outside contractor, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will request peer review from three or more independent experts. To further enhance the objectivity of the review, the Science Applications program, rather than the Ecological Services program, will serve as the point-of-contact for the contract. The Contractor will consider the following criteria when selecting reviewers:

- Expertise: The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with Utah prairie dogs or similar species biology.
- Independence: The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- Objectivity: The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- Conflict of Interest: The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the contractor will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to status information for the Utah prairie dog. The Service will not be providing financial compensation directly to peer reviewers. The Contractor will solicit reviews

from at least three to five qualified experts. After completion of the peer review, we will make the peer reviewers' comments and conflict of interest forms available to the public.

The Contractor will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the draft analysis, and a list of citations, as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the conservation strategy and species status reviews when they occur. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts.

Specific questions put to the reviewers include the following:

1. Does the description and analysis included in this retrospective include accurate species' information, biology, habitat, population and colony data, andif not, what information is missing and how isit relevant?
2. Does the retrospective analysis provide adequate review and analysis of the factors relating to the overall viability of Utah prairie dog, colony persistence factors, habitat, and other information and, if not, what information is missing and how is it relevant?
3. Does the analysis provide accurate and adequate statistical analysis and review? If not, what information is missing and how is it relevant?
4. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in the analysis?
5. Are the statements and summary information provided by the author about Utah prairie dog, their colonies, life history and status logical and supported by the data provided?
6. Did the author include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support assumptions/arguments/conclusions?
7. Are there demonstrable errors of fact or interpretation? Please provide the specifics regarding those particular concerns.

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Contractor, who will relay them to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, may: (1) be included in any decisional record of our determinations using this species' analysis (i.e., final rules or withdrawals); and, (2) be available to the public once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our recommendations.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by May 1, 2021, in order to allow enough time

for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan throughout the review process. This information may help inform a conservation strategy and potential future status reviews for Utah prairie dogs.

Contact

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