

Appendix 1: Public Comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment

Public Comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment and Permit Application for the Experimental Reintroduction of Black-footed Ferrets in Logan County, Kansas

This appendix summarizes and responds to the comments received on the Draft Environmental Assessment and Permit Application. The 30-day public comment period for the DEA began on October 19, 2007, and ended on November 19, 2007, although we also accepted comments from meeting participants immediately following our public meeting in Logan County on November 28, 2006.

The sections below summarize the number and type of comments received, describe how those comments were incorporated into the Final EA, and respond to substantive issues raised in the comments. Included are tabular summaries of written comments, and a list of commenters and references to comments made. No comments were received from tribal governments.

Number and Type of Comments Received

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received 16,138 public comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment and the proposal to experimentally reintroduce the black-footed ferret to Logan County, Kansas (Table 1). From these, 20 substantive comments were identified (Table 2), which the Kansas Field Office reviewed and addressed. Issue statements were formulated and responses for those issues are presented below. Substantive comments are defined by NEPA as those that do one or more of the following:

Question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of the information in the EA;
Question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the environmental analysis;
Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the EA; or
Cause changes or revisions in the proposal. In other words, they raise debate or question a point of fact or policy.

Comments in favor of or against the preferred alternative or other alternatives, or those that only agree or disagree with Agency policy are not considered substantive.

Comments and Responses

1. Comment: The presence of endangered black-footed ferrets would restrict use of nearby private property. Specific examples of restricted activities that were provided included the ability to poison prairie dogs, aerial spray agricultural chemicals, or use or install irrigation systems.

Response: Although the ferrets to be reintroduced will be fully protected as endangered, the use of a Recovery Permit authorizes the Service to assume responsibility for incidental or accidental take of any ferret which dies as a result of human-caused activity. The Service's experimental approach, as outlined in our Draft Environmental Assessment and Intra-Service Section 7 Consultation, provides assurances that only the direct, purposeful take of a ferret would be

considered an illegal act. We will work with our Cooperators to ensure that any prairie dog poisoning on release areas conforms to practices that have been used safely on other reintroduction sites. We will encourage those same practices on neighboring lands, but they will not be mandatory. If a landowner outside the reintroduction sites plans to poison prairie dogs, and it is known that one or more ferrets has taken up temporary residence on that property, with landowner permission the Service will attempt to recapture those animals and return them to the reintroduction lands. Any ferret that cannot be captured in this way will be considered lost to the program. The legal use of any EPA-approved agricultural chemical according to label directions, whether ground or aerially-applied, will not result in an illegal take of any black-footed ferrets. It is unclear to us how irrigation systems and black-footed ferrets may interact in any way, other than the potential for impacting burrows when installing underground water lines. Only a direct, intentional killing of a black-footed ferret will be considered an illegal act subject to prosecution. Table 3 provides documentation that private interests are not impacted near other known ferret reintroduction sites in the U.S., and Figure 1 provides an example of how one local community benefited from hosting a reintroduction site.

2. Comment: Prairie dogs devalue land, making it more difficult to obtain property loans, reduce farm and ranch income due to the damage they cause, and are expensive to control or eliminate. These costs will increase as the reintroduction sites provide excess prairie dogs which disperse onto neighboring lands where they are not wanted.

Response: A bank official in Logan County indicated to us that he believes lands occupied by prairie dogs are considered of lower value, but could not quantify this as an actual percentage. Loan values are determined as a percentage of either the appraised value or the purchase price of the property in question, so as those factors are affected, so is the loan amount. A professional realtor in the area agreed that high prairie dog occupancy decreases land value, with this being based on the perception or desire of the buyer rather than any formula or data available to the real estate industry. With grazing land averaging approximately \$350/acre, he indicated that “depending on the level of infestation” the purchase price could be reduced by as much as \$25 to \$50 per acre (7-14%).

Various scientific studies have attempted to determine the extent of competition for forage between prairie dogs and cattle, and to determine whether the presence of prairie dogs results in lower market prices for producers. These studies have resulted in mixed conclusions with no clear definitive consensus. However, it is fact that trying to control prairie dogs can cost a great deal of money. One of our Cooperators, The Nature Conservancy, reports expenditures averaging approximately \$20 per acre for prairie dog control on their own property and those of neighboring landowners in recent years, and one of the Logan County Commissioners confirmed these figures are accurate. These costs are based on using zinc phosphide or chlorphacinone, the two primary toxicants of choice in a treated grain or pellet formulation. If fumigants such as gas pellets are used, the cost will increase.

It is our intent to minimize dispersal of prairie dogs onto neighboring properties where they are not desired. To that extent we and several of our partners are making financial and technical assistance available to control dispersal of prairie dogs off reintroduction sites and onto lands where they are not wanted. We are also currently coordinating with USDA to provide a

full-time APHIS-Wildlife Services person responsible for prairie dog control efforts around the reintroduction sites. There will be more resources available to these surrounding landowners for prairie dog control with a ferret reintroduction than there would be without it. The overall acreage of prairie dogs in the county should not increase as a result of our expanded efforts to assist neighbors with their dispersal problems. Our intent is to maintain sufficient acreages of prairie dogs on Cooperators properties without increasing them on the neighbors' properties.

3. Comment: Commenters expressed support for the State law which allows mandatory eradication of prairie dogs.

Response: The Service's plan in no way attempts to circumvent existing State law. We disagree with the premise of prairie dog eradication, due to the ecological benefits of an active and healthy prairie dog ecosystem, but prefer to work with willing landowners to bring about conservation benefits. No one who opposes prairie dogs on their property will be expected to provide anything for ferret restoration in Kansas. It is our hope that some prairie dog acreage can be maintained for the benefit of ferrets and the myriad other wildlife species which utilize this unique ecosystem. Prairie dog eradication efforts have occurred for more than a century throughout the Great Plains, yet the species persists on the landscape despite these efforts. The overall goal of control efforts is to minimize prairie dog dispersal onto neighboring properties and financial burden on landowners who do not desire prairie dogs on their property, while maintaining sufficient prairie dog acres to facilitate a ferret recovery effort.

The Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and The Nature Conservancy have partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to provide a full-time staff person to be available to control prairie dogs on lands surrounding reintroduction sites. This person and expertise will be available by summer or fall 2008, providing prairie dog control services to neighbors who believe they are being impacted unnecessarily by prairie dogs emigrating from ferret reintroduction sites. The Service has provided grant research funds to Kansas State University to conduct prairie dog control and movement studies on lands bordering one of the proposed reintroduction sites. This study will include chemical control of prairie dogs out from the boundary of this reintroduction site. This project will continue through the fall of 2008, when the USDA program becomes operational.

4. Comment: The presence of an endangered species will cause property values to decline.

Response: Neither the local banker nor the local realtor who were consulted had any experience with this happening in Logan County or elsewhere. Both thought it was more of a perception on the part of individual landowners and/or prospective buyers.

5. Comment: There is uncertainty what will happen after the initial 5-year experiment concludes. Will the Service sign off on assurances of landowners' rights, and will these hold up in court?

Response: Annual surveys, usually during fall or winter, will monitor the ferrets' survival and reproduction, and will help identify if animals may need to be recaptured from neighboring lands and returned to the release area. If successful and with continued landowner support, the effort

may be continued beyond five years to try to establish a self-sustaining wild population. If ferrets are not successful at colonizing the release area, any that remain alive at the end of the experiment can be recaptured and moved to other release sites. But as long as this reintroduction effort is active, the Service, through our recovery permit, will retain responsibility for the incidental or accidental take of any ferrets in Logan County. The Regional Director's signature on this permit, as well as on the Findings document for the Environmental Assessment, provides the assurance to landowners that they will not be held liable for unintentional take of ferrets. Any activity which is legal at this time will continue to be legal in the presence of reintroduced ferrets and any future offspring. The intentional killing or taking of a ferret will continue to be illegal. A specific court case would be required to determine with certainty whether these assurances would survive a legal challenge, but no such challenge has occurred at any other ferret reintroduction site in any of the states in which they have occurred. No challenges are anticipated at this location.

Similarly, the financial and technical assistance that the Service, USDA, and others will provide to landowners surrounding the reintroduction sites for prairie dog control efforts, will continue as long as a ferret reintroduction area is active.

6. Comment: Agricultural interest groups were not provided an advance copy of the draft Environmental Assessment, as were elected officials and some governmental agencies.

Response: Elected representatives and some agencies were provided a copy of the draft EA (DEA) prior to the official opening of the public comment period. No special interest groups were included in this early mailing, nor would it have been appropriate to do so. We did hold a public meeting in Logan County on November 28, 2006, prior to the opening of the public comment period, and the DEA was made available to everyone who requested it. With the official opening of the public comment period on October 19, 2007, everyone was given equal access to the DEA and other information relative to this proposal.

7. Comment: The presence of ferrets will restrict energy exploration and development in the area, including oil and gas, electric powerlines, and wind power generation.

Response: Whenever Federal funding, permitting or authorization exists for a project, these activities will be reviewed by the Service's Kansas Field Office for impacts to fish and wildlife resources of concern to us, and that review will occur whether ferrets are reintroduced or not. Activities which disturb or alter the ground surface or subsurface on the reintroduction sites will be reviewed for their potential to impact species and habitats. For example, in November 2007 we reviewed a pipeline project which is proposed to cross property owned by one of our Cooperators. With only minimal recommendations regarding minimizing the width of the right-of-way, the project received no other objection from us based on the potential future presence of ferrets. Only projects with the potential to reduce habitat for the black-footed ferret on the reintroduction sites (e.g., significant reduction in prairie dog acres) or to result in direct mortality to individual ferrets will receive a negative review. Similar energy exploration, development and transmission projects occur at other ferret reintroduction sites in other states, and have had no identified impacts on ferret recovery. We do not anticipate the situation will be different at this location.

8. Comment: Prairie dogs can spread disease, including plague, monkeypox, hantavirus and tularemia.

Response: As of July 8, 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had received 71 reports of monkeypox in humans in the U.S., with one of these from Kansas. The Kansas case was among 35 which were laboratory-confirmed, all of which were traced back to domestic animals purchased from an Illinois animal distributor who had purchased infected rodents from Africa. Plague is another infectious disease which can be spread by fleas associated with prairie dogs and other small mammals. The CDC receives 1-40 plague reports in the U.S. each year, primarily from the southwestern U.S. There have been no reported cases in humans in Kansas. Both hantavirus and tularemia currently occur in wild animal populations in Kansas, but neither is associated closely with prairie dogs. There is no increased risk of exposure to either disease with the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret.

Human health and safety are important considerations and should not be taken lightly. However, it appears that the threat of any disease resulting from contact with prairie dogs in Kansas is negligible. One of the reasons we are interested in reintroducing ferrets at this location in Kansas is because it has no documented occurrence of plague in prairie dogs. Prairie dogs and ferrets are very susceptible to plague and plague die-offs. The extent of prairie dog acreage (and, therefore, the potential for contacting prairie dogs and their fleas) should not increase in Logan County as a result of the proposed action.

9. Comment: The black-footed ferret is not an effective method of prairie dog control.

Response: We agree with this comment, and have stated on numerous occasions that the reintroduction of the ferret into Logan County is not for the purposes of controlling prairie dogs. Along with other predators of prairie dogs (coyotes, badgers, swift fox, golden eagles, ferruginous hawks, red-tailed hawks, and bobcats) ferrets can, in combination with control methods such as shooting and poisoning, reduce prairie dog numbers and may help control the spread and dispersal of prairie dogs off of reintroduction sites. However, this experiment is being proposed to facilitate the recovery of the black-footed ferret, not the control or eradication of the black-tailed prairie dog. Some level of prairie dog acreage will always be necessary to maintain a wild ferret population. Refer to the earlier discussion (Response #2) of how the Service intends to assist with control of prairie dogs which disperse off reintroduction sites onto nearby lands in Logan County.

10. Comment: Current habitat conditions in Kansas may no longer be suitable for support of black-footed ferrets.

Response: We recognize that the prairie landscape has changed dramatically in Kansas and the rest of the Great Plains over the past 150 years, with only a fraction of native prairie remaining of what once occurred. Landscapes occupied by tens of thousands of acres of prairie dogs no longer remain in any but a few places, and nowhere in Kansas. However, we have had some success already introducing ferrets into fragmented landscapes, especially where the incidence of sylvatic plague is low or has not been documented. The lands being targeted for this

experimental reintroduction represent the largest known prairie dog colonies in the state. During our July 2006 habitat assessment of these properties, it was calculated that individually and collectively they contained habitat of sufficient quality and quantity to potentially support a population of black-footed ferrets that could eventually become self-sustaining in the wild. However, these properties are still among the smallest ever attempted for a ferret reintroduction, and we recognize that the experiment could fail. Nonetheless, the opportunity to establish a wild population of ferrets in a new plague-free geographic location is believed worth the effort. Our purpose is to determine whether ferrets can survive and reproduce on smaller areas, as larger prairie dog colonies outside the plague zone are few in number and most are already being used as reintroduction sites. If successful, this project will significantly contribute toward overall black-footed ferret recovery.

11. Comment: If a reintroduction is successful, critical habitat may be designated in the future, resulting in further restrictions to the use of private property.

Response: At this time, there is no federally-designated critical habitat for the black-footed ferret anywhere, including the larger and more successful reintroduction sites which have been active for more than a decade. Because the ferret was first listed in 1967, prior to the 1978 amendments to the Endangered Species Act which required critical habitat to be designated at the time a species is listed, there is no legal requirement for the Service to designate critical habitat for ferrets. Therefore, there is no risk we could be legally compelled to designate critical habitat by other interests. Most importantly, the Service has not designated critical habitat at other reintroduction sites during the past 16 years, nor do we intend to do so on any lands in Logan County, or elsewhere in Kansas.

12. Comment: Federal tax money should not be spent on this reintroduction effort.

Response: The Service has been directed by Congress, through the Endangered Species Act, to conduct activities necessary to bring about the recovery of species listed as threatened or endangered. Some of these activities are costly, and others are relatively inexpensive. The Service currently spends approximately \$800,000 each year on recovery efforts targeting this species. There are also many partners involved in ferret recovery, including other state and federal agencies, zoos, Indian Tribes, and conservation organizations who help fund national ferret recovery activities. Actual reintroduction projects vary in cost and depend on the amount of monitoring and research that may be accomplished and whether positions are funded to assist directly in those reintroduction projects (e.g. on Tribal lands). Estimated individual reintroduction efforts could range in cost from less than \$50,000 to more than \$250,000. While some may find this expensive, actual ferret recovery costs are much less than many other endangered species programs, and the Endangered Species Act does not allow us to choose which species will be recovered and which ones will be allowed to go extinct. The federal government placed these species on the protected list, and federal funds, along with significant monetary expenditures from non-federal sources, will be used to attempt to bring about species recovery.

13. Comment: Discuss the potential for black-footed ferrets to be secondarily poisoned during prairie dog control efforts, and whether it is advisable to specify which toxicants are permissible on and around reintroduction sites.

Response: At this time, there are three toxicants labeled for prairie dog control in Kansas: zinc phosphide, chlorphacinone, and phostoxin. The first two of these are either in a pellet form or as treated grain bait, made to be eaten by prairie dogs to be effective. Phostoxin is typically in a gas pellet or cartridge form, and when used according to label directions, is expected to kill all living creatures within a burrow by releasing toxic phosphine gas which causes asphyxiation. This toxicant would be immediately fatal to any ferrets occupying a burrow being treated, and its use will not be permitted on any prairie dog colonies into which ferrets are reintroduced. The other two toxicants would not be expected to be ingested directly by black-footed ferrets, which are carnivorous and not granivorous, although this could inadvertently occur. However, secondary poisoning may be a risk if a ferret consumed a prairie dog which had recently eaten one of these chemicals.

According to EPA studies, zinc phosphide has a very low risk of secondary poisoning to carnivorous mammals, while chlorphacinone has a high risk of such secondary poisoning. For this reason, once ferrets have been introduced into a site, chlorphacinone will not be used for prairie dog control at that site. Only zinc phosphide, which is used successfully at other ferret reintroduction sites, would be used for prairie dog control on Kansas reintroduction sites.

At the same time, however, we have no authority to regulate or control the use of any of these legal toxicants for prairie dog control efforts on lands where we are not introducing ferrets and not paying for the control. We prefer that neighboring landowners use zinc phosphide, and any control activities conducted or financed with Service money will likely use zinc phosphide. If we suspect one or more ferrets have emigrated onto someone else's property, we will seek permission from the landowner to enter that land to recapture the ferret(s) for return to the reintroduction lands. The scientific permit under which this reintroduction will occur allows for a specified amount of "incidental take". Liability for this take is being assumed by the Service, as the federal agency proposing the action. We realize that some ferrets will be lost after reintroduction, and those which are killed as a result of legal activities will not result in a prosecution.

14. Comment: Discuss how the proposed action relates to the current Kansas statute authorizing prairie dog eradication. Could the County force eradication on cooperating landowners' property?

Response: We interpreted this comment to be the converse of comment #3. As indicated in that response, our plan is not an attempt to circumvent existing State law. At the same time, we are hopeful that sufficient prairie dog acreages can be maintained to support a ferret reintroduction trial, while recognizing that other landowners do not want prairie dogs on their property. Our plan proposes to work with willing landowners to provide them technical and financial support to minimize impacts that may result from the emigration of prairie dogs from one property to another. We believe that a compromise solution, involving boundary control of prairie dogs on reintroduction sites, and assistance with removal or control on neighboring properties, will

sufficiently address the concerns the County and surrounding landowners have with this proposal. We realize that, with the existing State law in place, Logan County has authority to request landowners to eradicate prairie dogs. In the event sufficient prairie dog acreage ceased to be provided for any reason, we would recapture remaining ferrets for translocation to another reintroduction site.

15. Comment: Discuss the likelihood of sylvatic plague occurring in Logan County.

Response: As discussed in the EA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documented plague-positive fleas in extreme western Kansas during the period 1945-1950, including Logan County plague-positive fleas in the late 1940s. No plague was detected in any Logan County mammals at that time. After 1950, plague went unreported in the State until its presence was detected on the Cimarron National Grassland in Morton County in the extreme southwest corner of Kansas, approximately 120 miles from the proposed reintroduction area. The private landowners in this project that we questioned have never observed a prairie dog die-off indicating possible plague within the project area or nearby property. So while plague is readily transmitted via fleas carried on mobile mammals, including some capable of long-distance movements such as the coyote, it appears at this time the targeted properties represent a plague-free site. If plague was discovered on or near any of our reintroduction areas, every effort would be made to recapture ferrets and, after a period of quarantine, relocate them to an alternate reintroduction site.

16. Comment: What is the size of the current free-ranging ferret population, and if the Logan County effort is successful, what proportion of the overall wild population (including the goal of 1,500 adults) would it contain?

Response: Although accurate counts are difficult to obtain due to the nocturnal and secretive habits of the black-footed ferret, it is believed there are between 600 and 800 animals currently dispersed among the thirteen reintroduction sites in the U.S and Mexico. Many of these are not yet considered self-sustaining populations. Those properties comprising the Kansas proposal were estimated in July 2006 to have a total carrying capacity of 197 ferret families. A ferret family is defined as 1 female, 0.5 male, and 3.3 kits, or roughly 5 animals. Under completely ideal circumstances, with all reintroduction properties supporting the maximum number of ferrets possible, the Logan County site could, therefore, support approximately 985 free-ranging ferrets. This total would represent 66 percent of the goal of 1,500 animals needed for reclassification from endangered to threatened.

We do not expect the Logan County sites to be able to support this number of ferrets. The largest and most successful ferret reintroduction site currently known is in the Conata Basin, South Dakota. This site contains 25,000 acres of black-tailed prairie dogs, an area much larger than the Logan County site. Ferrets were originally reintroduced into the Conata Basin in 1994, and this site currently supports 288 wild ferrets. This demonstrates the difficulties and obstacles in achieving ideal ferret survival and recovery. It is unknown whether the Logan County sites will ever be able to support a self-sustaining ferret population, but the experiment being proposed will attempt to answer that question.

17. Comment: No action should be taken until the resolution of any pending legal action between the County and the Cooperating landowners.

Response: We are well aware of measures being taken through the courts by both the County and our Cooperators. While this issue can have an effect on how many acres of prairie dogs, if any, remain on the landscape within our proposed reintroduction area, it has been ongoing for several years with no clear resolution at this time and perhaps none forthcoming in the very near future. We currently have several private properties with good potential for supporting black-footed ferrets, and the landowners have offered the use of these properties for this purpose. We have worked through the process of identifying opportunities and obstacles to any planned ferret reintroduction, and it is our intent to move forward at such time as it is feasible to do so. Having all prairie dogs removed from proposed reintroduction sites would eliminate the opportunity for reintroduction, but until such an event occurs we will proceed. If habitat becomes unsuitable at any time after a reintroduction is attempted, we will recapture as many remaining ferrets as possible for relocation to another site. Any ferrets not able to be captured will be considered lost to the program with no implications for landowners.

18. Comment: Impacts from this action are significant and NEPA requires the Service to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

Response: The Service followed all NEPA requirements, and the EA we prepared fully evaluates the likely impacts of the proposed action. This process has been completed at other reintroduction sites, and the Service has fully met its obligations pursuant to NEPA. An EIS for this project will not be required.

19. Comment: The Service should not deviate from its precedence of reintroducing ferrets as “experimental non-essential” populations under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act.

Response: The Service has adequate precedence for using the Section 10(j) “experimental non-essential” population designation, and also for using a Section 10a(1)A scientific recovery permit, to reintroduce black-footed ferrets into the wild. Three other reintroduction sites have used a scientific recovery permit, prior to the Kansas proposal. The use of a scientific recovery permit allows the ferrets to be reintroduced as fully protected animals, yet we retain liability for any incidental take of ferrets associated with this activity. This provides landowners adequate legal protection should ferrets be injured or killed as an accidental result of any legal activity. All typical farming and ranching practices are legal activities, including legally-approved methods of prairie dog poisoning.

In the event this experimental reintroduction succeeds, and it appears the population may be able to sustain itself with minimal additional inputs from us, we may seek permanent non-essential status if this is determined the most appropriate method for continuing the population with minimal impacts on surrounding landowners. If, however, the decision is made to continue to conduct activities through a scientific recovery permit, our incidental take provisions would provide sufficient protections to non-participating individuals.

20. Comment: Since there are no historic records of black-footed ferrets from Logan County, this is an “introduction” rather than a “reintroduction” and ferrets may not belong here.

Response: As noted by Choate et al. (1982), a male black-footed ferret was collected near Oakley in Logan County on November 2, 1901. Numerous other ferret specimens originated from other northwestern Kansas counties. This species is well-documented historically from this region of the state, and our proposal represents a reintroduction effort.

Table 1: Summary of Responses to the Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) for the Proposed Experimental Reintroduction of Black-footed Ferrets into Logan County, Kansas

Comment #	Type	From	Issue #
1	Letter	Individual	1A, 2, 2C
2	Letter	Individual	1A, 2, 2C
3	Letter	Individual	1A, 2, 2C
4	Letter	Individual	2, 3
5	Letter	Individual	1A
6	Letter	Individual	2, 3
7	Letter	Individual	opposed
8	Letter	Individual	1A, 2B, 4, 5
9	Letter	Kansas West District Weed Directors' Association	1A
10	Letter	Logan County Farm Bureau	2A, 2B, 2C
11	Letter	Logan County Commissioners	1A, 2
12	Letter	Gray County Commissioners	1A
13	Letter	Rep. Virginia Beamer	1A, 2, 7
14	Letter	Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer	1A, 2, 2C
15	Letter	Individual	supportive
16	Letter	Individual	supportive
17	Letter	Individual	5, but not opposed
18	Letter	Individual	unopposed
19	Letter	Decatur County Commissioners	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
20	Letter	Sherman County Farm Bureau	1A, 5, 6
21	Letter	Thomas County Farm Bureau Board of Directors	1A, 5, 6
22	Letter	Thomas County Farm Bureau President	1A, 5, 6
23	Letter	Individual	supportive
24	Letter	Gove County Farm Bureau	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
25	Letter	Gove County Farm Bureau	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
26	Letter	Individual	1A
27	Letter	Individual	supportive
28	Letter	Individual	supportive
29	Letter	Individual	supportive
30	Letter	Individual	supportive
31	Letter	Sherman County Commission	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
32	Letter	Thomas County Commission	3
33	Letter	Individual	supportive

34	Letter	Sheridan County Farm Bureau	1A, 5, 6
35	Letter	Thomas County Conservation District	9
36	Letter	Individual	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
37	Letter	Individuals	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
38	Letter	Individuals	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
39	Letter	Individuals	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
40	Letter	Individual	supportive
41	E-mail	Individual	supportive
42	E-mail	Individual	supportive
43	E-mail	Individual	supportive
44	Letter	Individual	1D, 2, 2B, 2C, 3, 4, 8
45	E-mail	Individual	supportive
46	Letter	Individual	supportive
47	Letter	Individual	supportive
48	E-mail	Individual	supportive
49	Letter	Individual	supportive
50	Letter	Cheyenne County Farm Bureau	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
51	Letter	Individual	supportive
52	Letter	Individual	supportive
53	Letter	Sherman County Farm Bureau member	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
54	Letter	Sherman County Farm Bureau member	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
55	Letter	Sherman County Farm Bureau member	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
56	Letter	Sherman County Farm Bureau member	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
57	Letter	Sherman County Farm Bureau member	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
58	Letter	Sherman County Farm Bureau member	1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 2B, 2C, 5, 6
59	E-mail	Individual	supportive
60	Letter	Individual	supportive
61	Letter	Individual	supportive
62	Letter	Individual	supportive, 13, 14, 15, 16
63	Letter	Individual	1, 2, 5
64	Letter	Individual	2
65	Letter	Individual	2, 9
66	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 9
67	Letter	Individual	1, 5, 7

68	Letter	Individual	1, 5, 7
69	Letter	Individual	1, 2
70	Letter	Individual	1A, 1D, 2C, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9
71	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12
72	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12
73	Letter	Individual	3
74	E-mail	Individual	supportive
75	Letter	Audubon of Kansas	supportive
76	E-mail	Individual	supportive
77	E-mail	Individual	supportive
78	E-mail	Individual	supportive
79	E-mail	Individual	supportive
80	E-mail	Wichita Audubon Society	supportive
81	E-mail	Individual	supportive
82	E-mail	Individual	supportive
83	E-mail	Individual	supportive
84	Letter	Individual	13
85	Letter	Defenders of Wildlife	supportive
86	E-mail	Individual	supportive
87	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 8
88	Letter	Kansas Livestock Association	1, 2, 3, 5, 17
89	Letter	Mountain States Legal Foundation	18, 19
90	Letter	Kansas Farm Bureau	1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 18
91	Letter	Individual	supportive
92	Letter	Individual	supportive
93	Letter	Individual	supportive
94	Letter	Louisville Zoological Garden	supportive
95	Letter	Individual	supportive
96	Letter	Individual	supportive
97	Letter	Individual	supportive
98	Letter	Individual	supportive
99	Letter	Individual	supportive
101	Letter	Individual	supportive
102	Letter	Turner Endangered Species Fund	supportive
103	Letter	Individual	supportive
104	Letter	Individual	supportive
105	Letter	Individual	supportive
106	Letter	Individual	1A, 2B, 2C, 3, 5, 12
107	Letter	Individual	1A, 2B, 2C, 3, 5, 12
108	Letter	Individual	1A, 2B, 2C, 3, 5, 12
109	Letter	Individual	1, 2, 3, 9
110	Letter	Individual	2, 3, 8, 11
111	Letter	Individual	2, 3, 8, 11
112	Letter	Individual	1A, 9

113	Letter	Individual	3
114	Letter	Individual	1A, 2B, 2C, 3
115	Letter	Individual	2C, 9
116	Letter	Individual	2, 3
117	Letter	Individual	9
118	Letter	Individual	1D, 3
119	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 8
120	Letter	Individual	3, 9
121	Letter	Individual	1A, 2B, 2C, 7
122	Letter	First National Bank of Scott City	2A, 5, 13
123	Letter	Individual	1A, 5, 7, 9
124	Letter	Individual	1A, 2C, 13
125	Letter	Individual	1A, 1D, 2, 2C, 3, 7
126	Letter	Individual	1D, 2C
127	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
128	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
129	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
130	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
131	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
132	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
133	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
134	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
135	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
136	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
137	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
138	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
139	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
141	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
142	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
143	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
144	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
145	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
146	Letter	Lane County Farm Bureau	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
147	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
148	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
149	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
150	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
151	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
152	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
153	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
154	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
155	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
156	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
157	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20

158	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
159	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
160	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
161	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
162	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
163	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
164	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
165	Letter	Individual	2B, 2C, 3, 5, 11, 12, 20
166	E-mail	Kansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy	supportive
167	E-mail	Individual	supportive
168	E-mail	Individual	supportive
169	E-mail	Individual	supportive
170 through 16,138	E-mails	15,969 individual comments from members of Defenders of Wildlife	supportive

Table 2: Summary of Written Comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) for the Proposed Reintroduction of Black-footed Ferrets into Logan County, Kansas

Issue #	Comment Description
1	Reintroducing black-footed ferrets will restrict the use of private property, including the ability to A) poison prairie dogs, B) conduct aerial spraying, C) utilize irrigation systems, as well as D) general dislike of government regulations on private property.
2	Prairie dogs devalue land due to the damage they cause, and increase costs to the producer, including A) making property loans more difficult to obtain, B) reducing farm and ranch income, and C) they are very expensive to control.
3	Supportive of the State law authorizing mandatory prairie dog eradication.
4	The presence of an endangered species lowers property values.
5	Uncertainty as to what will happen on reintroduction sites and surrounding land after the initial 5-year reintroduction experiment ends.
6	Agriculture advocacy groups were not provided an advance copy of the draft EA before the formal public comment period.
7	The presence of ferrets would limit or restrict energy exploration and development.
8	Prairie dogs can spread disease, including plague, monkeypox, hantavirus and tularemia.
9	Black-footed ferrets are not an effective method of control of prairie dogs.
10	Current habitat conditions in Kansas may no longer be suitable for support of black-footed ferrets.
11	If a reintroduction is successful, critical habitat may be designated in the future, resulting in further restrictions to the use of private property.
12	Federal tax money should not be spent on this reintroduction effort.
13	Discuss the potential for black-footed ferrets to be secondarily poisoned during prairie dog control efforts, and whether it is advisable to specify which toxicants are permissible on and around reintroduction sites.
14	Discuss how the proposed action relates to the current Kansas statute authorizing prairie dog eradication. Could the County force eradication on cooperating landowners' property?
15	Discuss the likelihood of sylvatic plague occurring in Logan County.
16	What is the size of the current free-ranging ferret population, and if the Logan County effort is successful, what proportion of the overall wild population (including the goal of 1,500 adults) would it contain?
17	No action should be taken until the resolution of any pending legal action between the County and the Cooperating landowners.
18	Impacts from this action are significant and NEPA requires the Fish and Wildlife Service to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.
19	The Service should not deviate from its precedence of reintroducing ferrets as "experimental non-essential" populations under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act.
20	Since there are no historic records of black-footed ferrets from Logan County, this is an "introduction" rather than a "reintroduction" and ferrets may not belong here.

TABLE 3. BLACK-FOOTED FERRET REINTRODUCTION SITES IN THE U.S.

SITE	CONTACT	PRAIRIE DOG POISONING	PRAIRID DOG SHOOTING	ENERGY DEVELOPMENT	COMMENTS
Aubrey Valley, AZ	Bill Van Pelt 602-789-3573 bvanpelt@azgfd.gov	Allowed to occur both on and adjacent to the reintroduction sites.	Statewide seasons unaffected by ferret reintroduction area.	No restrictions either on or off reintroduction sites.	ESA flexibility allows recovery without affecting property rights. Public participation and ecotourism have developed. There is no federal land on or around this site.
Wolf Creek, CO	Brian Holmes 970-878-3820 brian_e_holmes@blm.gov	Not done on BLM land, no restriction on private land.	Seasonal statewide closure on public land; no restriction on private land.	No restrictions on public or private land.	Primary use of ferret area is big game hunting, which is not restricted in any way due to ferrets.
Fort Belknap, MT	A.J. Bigby, Biologist 406-353-4801 aj_bigby@yahoo.com	No restrictions on private portions of the reintroduction area.	Licensing and guiding required on Reservation. No restrictions on private land.	No restrictions on private land.	Released 167 ferrets from 1997-2000. Plague problems resulted in few if any ferrets thought to remain.
Beauchamp Creek, MT	Fritz Prellwitz, Biologist, 406-654-5118 fritz_prellwitz@blm.gov	None done in recent years on BLM, but being considered. Phillips County has established a rodent control district under which poisoning has occurred on private lands during 2005 and 2006.	Shooting permitted seasonally on BLM lands under MFWP (State) regulations, except on release sites. No shooting restrictions on any private land.	Permitted, active lease program on-going, though it is temporarily suspended pending completion of a Resource Management Plan. No restrictions on any private land.	Released 95 ferrets from 2001-2004, participated in plague research with dusting and vaccine through 2005. Plague impacting release sites and only ~ 600 acres of an original 1,700 acres remain. Only 1 ferret observed since September, 2006. No current plans for any future activities Prairie dog populations are now managed by State with willing participation of private landowners.
UL Bend NWR, MT	Randy Matchett, Biologist 406-538-8706 randy_matchett@fws.gov	No poisoning on FWS land, but no restrictions on private land.	No shooting on FWS land, but no restrictions on private land.	No energy development underway on FWS land. No restrictions on private land.	Released 229 ferrets and observed a minimum of 224 wildborn kits from 1994-2006. Recently completed 4 year plague research effort with dusting and vaccine. October 2006 population estimate of 15. No plans for future releases and will monitor existing ferrets that are expected to all die out within a few years (poor

SITE	CONTACT	PRAIRIE DOG POISONING	PRAIRID DOG SHOOTING	ENERGY DEVELOPMENT	habitat, existence of plague). COMMENTS
Conata Basin, SD	Travis Livieri 970-219-1659 tlivieri@prairiewildlife.org	Remove ferrets prior to poisoning upon landowner request.	No restrictions on any shooting on private lands.	None ongoing in the Conata Basin, but not a result of ferrets.	Largest and most successful current ferret reintroduction area in the U.S.
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, SD	Shaun Grassel 605-473-8000, ext. 48250 smgrassel@gmail.com	Prohibited in ferret area except where prairie dogs encroach on private land.	Discouraged by Tribe, but decision is up to individual lessee.	Not an issue on Tribal Land; gravel mining does occur and is unaffected by ferrets.	All private land is unaffected by ferrets, as are Tribal lands outside reintroduction areas.
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, SD	Michael Claymore 605-964-8966 wildbio@lakotanetwork.com	Prohibited on Tribal land, no restriction on private land.	Prohibited on Tribal land, no restriction on private land.	No restrictions on private land.	Cooperate with private landowners adjacent to reintroduction area to remove ferrets if they move onto property where landowner does not want them.
Rosebud Sioux Tribe, SD	Greg Jackson 605-747-2289 buffaloca@hotmail.com	No poisoning within the ferret area; no restrictions on private land.	No shooting within ferret area; no restrictions on private land.	No restrictions on private lands.	Off-site adjacent areas, mostly non-private, are completely undisturbed by the ferrets and associated activities.
Coyote Basin, UT	Brian Maxfield 435-781-9453 brianmaxfield@utah.gov	Not allowed on federal and state land. Private landowners in the area are allowed to poison.	One small portion of reintroduction area is closed due to ferrets.	Seasonal restriction on surface disturbance in areas with known female ferrets.	Prairie dogs on private land can be controlled and shot year-round. If ferrets are found on private land where they are not wanted, they can be captured and released in another part of the reintroduction area.
Shirley Basin, WY	Bob Oakleaf 307-332-2688 bob.oakleaf@wgf.state.wy.us	No restrictions due to ferrets.	Voluntary closures during plague outbreak; no mandatory restrictions.	There are no restrictions on public or private lands.	55% of management area is private land; no restrictions have been imposed due to ferrets.

*NOTE: All reintroduction sites are used for cattle grazing, and there is no reduction in stocking rates due to the presence of ferrets.

FIGURE 1

Seligman Chamber of Commerce

Post Office Box 65 • Seligman, Arizona 86337

Violet Searles, President
Seligman Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 65
Seligman, Arizona 86337
(928) 308-8210



December 19, 2006

Black-footed Ferret Recovery Implementation Team Executive Committee
United States Fish and Wildlife Service, National Black-Footed Conservation Center
P.O. Box 190
Wellington, Colorado 80549

Re: Effects of the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret in Seligman

Dear Executive Committee:

The purpose of this letter is to discuss how the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret in Seligman, Arizona affects the community, economy, and attitudes towards endangered species management. In March of 2006, the Arizona Game and Fish Department's black-footed ferret team was asked to join the Seligman Chamber of Commerce to represent the black-footed ferret project.

The Chamber has noticed the black-footed ferret project has increased tourism and revenue over the last several years and has brought a new sense of environmental awareness to the community. The staff's skills in grant writing, their involvement in local politics, and their ability to provide community outreach and education are also invaluable assets.

The black-footed ferret project has been based out of Seligman for the past 10 years. When the reintroduction effort began in 1996, the project staff, as well as the project itself, was viewed with some ill will and animosity. It has since evolved from an unfamiliar, misunderstood program, to an integral part of this community. The project has not only helped to positively change local attitudes towards endangered species management but has brought many benefits to this small town. The following examples will highlight some of the ways the black-footed ferret project has impacted the town of Seligman and the surrounding areas.

In recent years, the black-footed ferret team began hosting large spotlighting events twice a year, which bring in many volunteers from all over the state and the country. These events generate revenue since many of the volunteers stay at local motels and eat at local restaurants. I understand the biologists are planning to host a spotlighting effort just for locals this spring before the large spotlighting event, which is open to the public.

Since 2005, the black-footed ferret project has participated in a cooperative effort with the Northern Arizona Council of Governments (NACOG) and provides internships at the local high school. The program is designed to provide rural young adults with job skills and to recruit potential candidates into conservation. These internships benefit the community by providing summer employment to high school students and increasing their job skills.

NACOG and the black-footed ferret project also have an adult internship program aimed at providing rural people, getting back into the work force, with job skills and acts as a stepping-stone for obtaining full time, permanent employment. One member of the community who started out as an adult NACOG intern, went on to acquire a full-time position with Agency on the black-footed ferret project.

The black-footed ferret project gives PowerPoint presentations throughout the local community and presents the project's results annually at Chamber meetings. The biologists explain what they do, why they do it, and why it is important. This outreach effort has gone a long way in helping the project to gain acceptance into the community and clear up any misunderstandings or misconceptions the locals have had regarding endangered species management.

Because the staff interacts with the people of Seligman and the surrounding areas, they have helped the project gain acceptance. The black-footed ferret team is now sought after by local businesses and organizations to give presentations or represent the Agency during community events. Each year, the town of Seligman hosts events to attract tourists. Some of these highlights include Seligman Days, the Route 66 Fun Run, bike rallies, and classic car shows. At the Chamber's request in 2005, biologists on the black-footed ferret project have run interactive educational wildlife booths at Seligman Days.

Recently, a local wildlife artist donated a painting of the black-footed ferret in the reintroduction area to the project. Proceeds from the sale of limited edition prints recreated from her painting will be split between the black-footed ferret project and the art program at the Seligman Schools, where the artist currently teaches.

Besides spotlighting events, other volunteer opportunities to the local community have also been made available. County prison crews, community restitution individuals, special interest groups, and many college students from universities volunteer on the project. These volunteers contribute to the economy of the town by supporting local businesses.

Although the black-footed ferret project provides many benefits to area, there are aspects of the project that do not have an affect on the community. For example, the Seligman area is known for its hunting and fishing opportunities. Many outdoor enthusiasts come to the area to hunt, fish, hike, and enjoy other outdoor endeavors. The reintroduction of the black-footed ferret in this area does not adversely affect hunting or any other land use practices.

The intention of this letter is to highlight some examples of how the project provides, and continues to provide, many benefits to Seligman and the surrounding areas. The reintroduction of the black-footed ferret has helped instill a sense of pride in the community because this endangered species is being released in their own "backyard." In conclusion, the Seligman Chamber of Commerce finds the black-footed ferret project to be a positive addition to both the community and local commerce. We are proud to continue our relationship and to benefit from the black-footed ferret reintroduction program in Seligman.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Violet Searles, President
Seligman Chamber of Commerce
(928) 308-8210

cc: Arizona Game and Fish Commission

Appendix 2: Intra-Service Section 7 Consultation