

Overview

Smoky Hill River Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Site – Kansas

Introduction

The Smoky Hill River reintroduction site is located in Logan County, Kansas. The site is managed by brothers Calvin Haverfield and Jay Haverfield, two of the primary owners and managers of the nearby Butte Creek Ranches reintroduction site as well. In fall, 2018 the Haverfield family approached USFWS to inquire on the possibility of enrolling Smoky Hill River into a Safe Harbor Agreement to aid the recovery of the black-footed ferret in Kansas. A site visit was completed the following summer and the site was deemed biologically suitable as a black-footed ferret recovery site. A Safe Harbor Agreement was drafted and signed in November 2019.

Site Characteristics and Overall Status

Smoky Hill River is comprised of two primary sections, a Northeast section totaling 1,260 acres and a Northwest section totaling 2,640 acres. The majority of this property is active black-tailed prairie dog habitat and is likely at the level to support multiple black-footed ferret families.

Black-footed ferrets have never been allocated for release onto Smoky Hill River. However, in 2011 and 2012 ferrets were observed on the property. It is presumed that the ferrets naturally emigrated from the nearby Butte Creek Ranches site (approx., 3.6 mile distance). County officials asked for ferret surveys to be halted on these lands and no surveys have taken place since, despite the possibility that ferrets persist on the property.

On February 8, 2021, the Haverfield family received a letter from Logan county officials demanding that they remove prairie dogs from this property. The family refused, citing the Safe Harbor Agreement as protection against the removal of black-footed ferret habitat. The county declined the validity of the Safe Harbor Agreement, entered the NE property on March 5, 2021, exterminated the prairie dogs with the use of Rozol, and billed the family for this expense. At this time the NW section has not been exterminated.

The family has reached out to USFWS officials to resolve this issue. Investigations are ongoing into the legality of this poisoning effort performed by the county. It is not known if ferrets continue to persist on this property because they have not been searched for since 2012. The site is within ferret dispersal distance from Butte Creek Ranches and a healthy BTPD colony has persisted, so it is believed ferrets could be on the site. This site can be classified as “too early to assess” (blue) as the current ferret status on the property is not known at this time.

Primary Author: _____

Date: _____