

**Peer Review Plan
For the
Draft Proposed Revision of a Nonessential Experimental Population of Black-footed
Ferrets (*Mustela nigripes*) in the Southwest**



About the Document

Title: Draft Revision of a Nonessential Experimental Population of Black-footed Ferrets (*Mustela nigripes*) in the Southwest

Dissemination Date: November 29, 2021

Purpose: This proposed rule would allow the reintroduction of ferrets across a larger landscape as part of a nonessential experimental population and include the AVEPA within a larger “Southwest Experimental Population Area” (SWEPA), which includes parts of Arizona and identified contiguous Tribal land in New Mexico and Utah. This proposed revision was prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and provides a framework for establishing and managing reintroduced populations of ferrets that will allow greater management flexibility and increased landowner cooperation. The best available data indicate that reintroduction of the ferret into suitable habitat in the proposed SWEPA is biologically feasible and will promote the conservation of the species.

About the Peer Review Process

Date of Peer Review: The peer review will be conducted during from November 29, 2021 through January 14, 2022.

Reviewers: The Service will solicit external peer review of the scientific background information used in the draft revision from at least three or more independent scientific reviewers with expertise in conservation biology, with emphasis in black-footed ferret and prairie dog demography and ecology.

Criteria for Reviewer Selection: Peer reviewers will be selected based on the following criteria:

- **Expertise:** Reviewers should have knowledge in one or more of the following areas: black-footed ferret and/or prairie dog expertise, conservation biology, species specific threats, predator-prey interactions, and land management activities and their effects on grassland ecosystems.
- **Independence:** Reviewers should not be employed by the Service. Academic and consulting scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service or the Department if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** Reviewers should be recognized by their peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. Reviewers should be comfortable sharing their knowledge and identifying their knowledge gaps.
- **Advocacy:** Reviewers should not be known or recognized for an affiliation with an advocacy position regarding the protection of this species under the Endangered Species Act.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Reviewers should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts with or that could impair their objectivity.

About Public Participation: A 60-day public comment period for the proposed rule was conducted from June 25, 2021 to August 24, 2021, during which time the public had the opportunity to review and provide input to the draft plan. The availability of the proposed rule was made public through news releases, newspaper articles, and mailings, and was be posted on Service websites with solicitations for public comment.

Both the draft and final plan are available at the following website:
<http://www.regulations.gov> in Docket No. FWS–R2–ES–2020–0123.

This peer review plan is made available on this website to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget’s Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

Contact: Jessica Miller, jessica_miller@fws.gov