

Final Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives Plan

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Nov 2, 2006

**Final Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 6
Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution
Objectives Plan**

March 2006



Purpose and Need for Development of the “Plan”

- Assure the long-term conservation of sustainable prairie dog and associated species populations
- To comply with the requirements outlined in The Conservation Plan for Black-tailed and White-tailed Prairie Dogs in Montana
- Help FWP meet its statutory and regulatory requirements for management of Montana’s fish and wildlife resources

Development of the “Plan”

- **Statewide plan calls for formation of local working groups to facilitate the establishment of regional abundance and distribution goals**
- **Region 6 Prairie Dog Advisory Board**

Objectives of the Plan

- To define prairie dog abundance and distribution standards in Region 6 that dovetail with the statewide plan
 - Acreage objectives/standards
 - Complex objectives/standards
- Identify Key Considerations and an operational approach that will be used to define opportunities and constraints for where prairie dogs can be accommodated in Region 6 while considering the needs of landowners, agencies, wildlife, recreationists and Region 6 communities.

“Plan” Development

- The Final Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives Plan was developed as a collaborative effort through the Region 6 Prairie Dog Advisory Board that was comprised of individuals and organizations of local interest, non-governmental organizations, and state and federal agencies.

Development of Acreage and Complex Objectives

- The agreed upon purpose of the Board was to:
 - **Produce prairie dog abundance and distribution standards that dovetail with the statewide plan**
 - **Identify opportunities and constraints for how many prairie dogs could be accommodated in Region 6 while attempting to meet the needs of landowners, agencies, wildlife, recreationists and Region 6 communities**
 - **Deliver a package of recommendations for FWP Region 6 to analyze and put in the form of a FWP Region 6 plan for the Board's review, broader public comment and review, and the FWP Region 6 Regional Supervisor's signature**

Key Considerations for Prairie Dog Planning and Implementation

- **Work collaboratively**
- **Actively work with the “willing” to provide lasting conservation and stewardship of prairie dogs and associated species, including black-footed ferrets**
- **R6 Plan will provide a significant contribution to the goals of the observation plan for black-tailed and white-tailed prairie dogs in Montana**

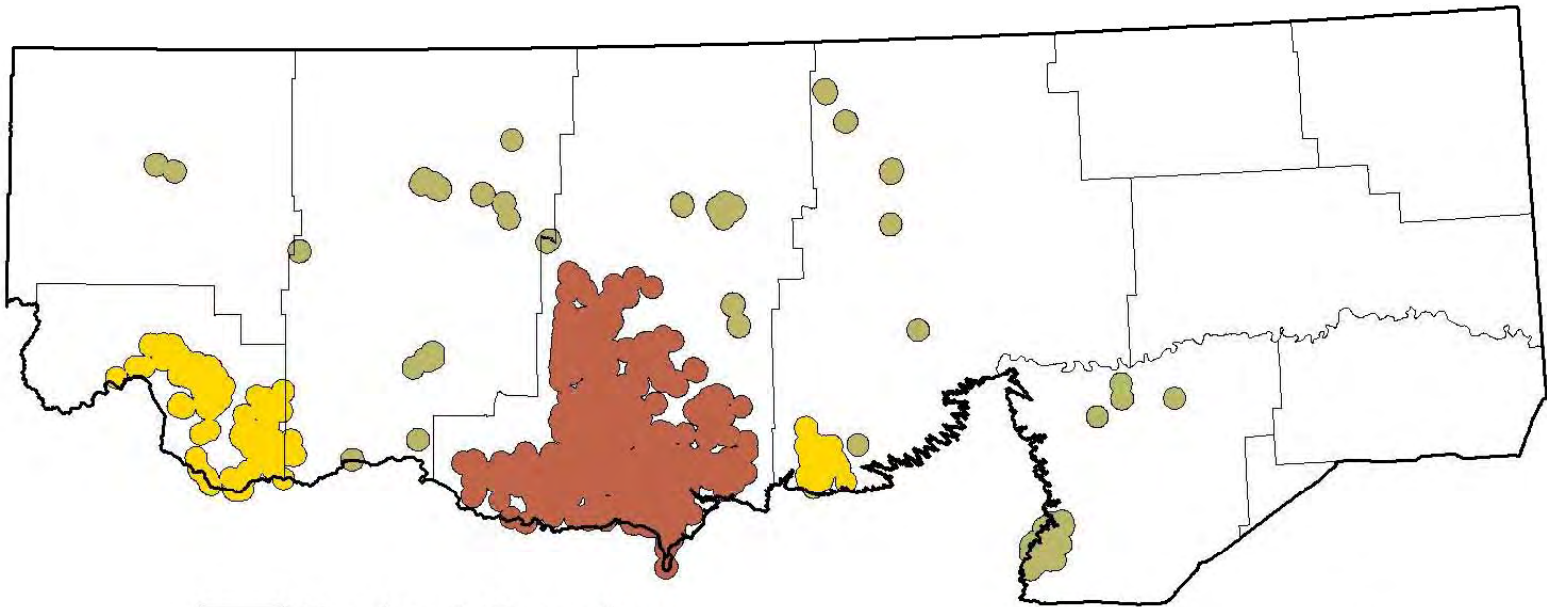
Key Considerations for Prairie Dog Planning and Implementation






- **Maintain historic distribution of prairie dogs within Region 6 as indicated in the statewide plan**
- **Acknowledge past commitments of public land and wildlife managers contained in the BLM's Judith, Valley, Phillips RMP (JVP), but realize there is flexibility to plan above JVP levels on allotments through voluntary and incentive-based approaches**
- **A diverse mix of incentives will help with implementation of the plan. The choice of a particular incentive would be left to each individual landowner**

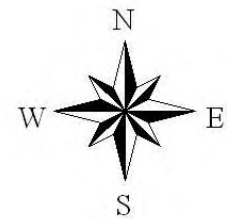
Current Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution

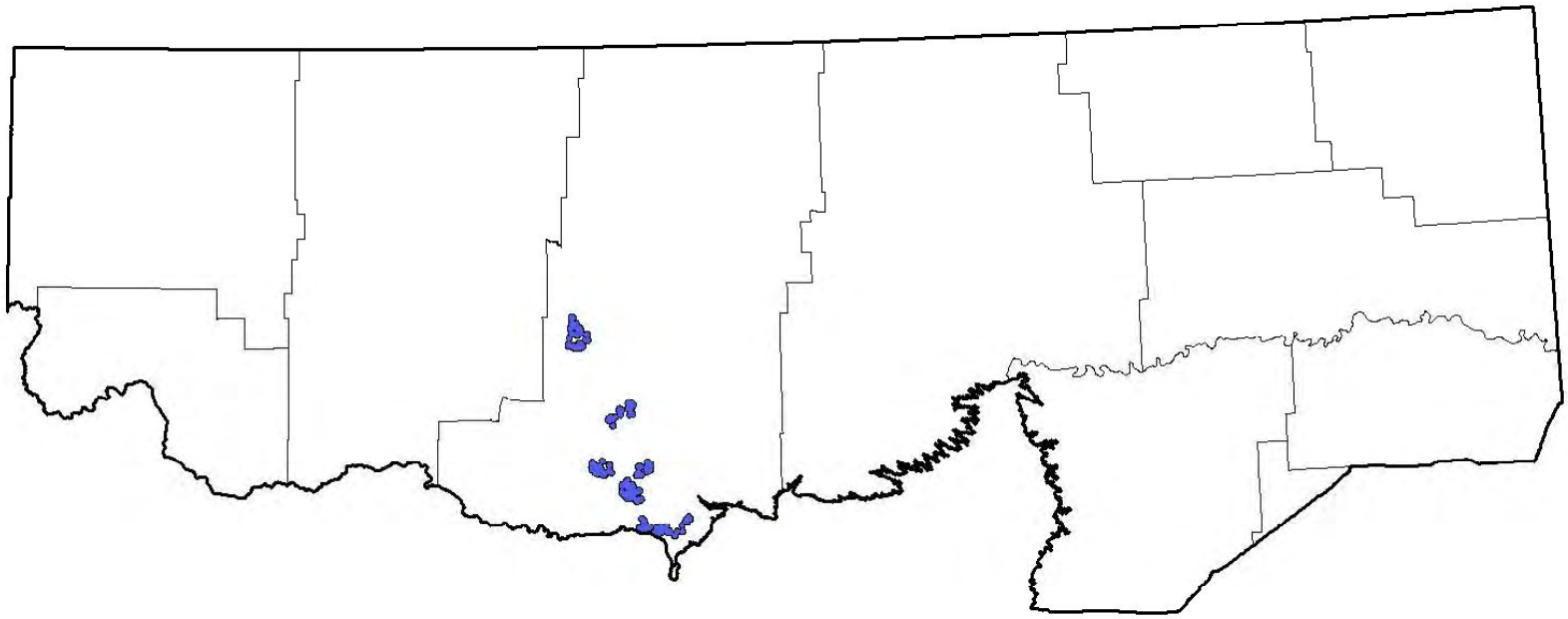
**Known Prairie Dog Acres in Region 6 in
2004, by complex category (as defined by 7
km rule).**

Complex Category	Number of Complexes	Current Prairie Dog Acreage (ha)
1	1	24,720 (10,004)
2	3	6,383 (2,583)
3	22	3,415 (1,382)
Total		34,518 (13,969)

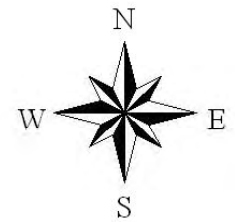


-  Region 6 Boundary
-  County Lines in Region 6
- Prairie Dog Complexes in Region 6**
-  1
-  2
-  3





-  **Region 6 Boundary**
-  **County Lines in Region 6**
-  **1.5 km Prairie Dog Complexes**



Alternatives

- Members of the Board Developed 3 Alternatives
- No Action Alternative
- Preferred Alternative developed through a collaborative process utilizing portions of the previous four alternatives

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Total Acreage
Current Situation	(1) 24,720 Acres 7 km Rule (0) 0 Acres 1.5 km Rule	(3) 6383 Acres 7 km Rule (6)* XXX Acres 1.5 km rule	(22) 3415 Acres	34, 518 Acres
Alternative A	(1) 5,000+ Acres 1.5 km Rule	(3) 1,000+ Acres 7 km Rule	Remaining Acres Distributed by County	26,785 Acres + CMR (6122 Acres) (32,907 Total)
Alternative B	(2) ± 10,000 Acres 1.5 km Rule	(9) 1,000+ Acres 1.5 km Rule	20,000 Acres Distributed by PDCU	Approx. 49,000 Acres
Alternative C	(1) 5,000 – 10,000 Acres 1.5 km Rule	(6) 1,000 – 2,000 Acres 1.5 km Rule	10,000 Acres Distributed Across R6	Approx. 30,000 Acres
Alternative D (No Action)	(1) 5,000 Acres 7 km Rule	Not Actively Managed	Not Actively Managed	Approx. 27,800 Acres
Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)	(1) 5,000+ Acres 1.5 km Rule	(6 – 8) 1000+ Acres (2-3) 1.5 km Rule (4-6) 7 km Rule	Maintenance of Existing Colonies Distributed in Category 3 Area	30,500 – 41,400 Acres** (36,000 +/- 15%)

* Some of the colonies within these complexes experienced a plague epizootic event in 2005. Therefore, it is not known exactly how many complexes and the total acreage of prairie dogs under the 1.5 km rule exist in Region 6 until mapping is completed.

**This alternative does not preclude the expansion of prairie dog acreage above the specified range nor control within, above or below the specified range.

Prairie Dog Conservation Tools and Resources

- Prairie dog mapping in Region 6
- Landowner incentive programs including a possible direct payment for conserving and/or allowing prairie dogs to expand
- Habitat suitability modeling
- BLM has some ability to provide “improvements” to help mitigate for prairie dog impacts
- BLM will eventually be able to use containment

Prairie Dog Conservation Tools and Resources (cont.)

- The South Phillips County Rancher Stewardship Alliance and other ranching provide resources for implementing Plan strategies
- Development of rodent control districts
- The possibility exists for a publicly funded prairie dog containment program through Wildlife Services (APHIS)

Prairie Dog Conservation Tools and Resources (cont.)

- Livestock grass banking on The Nature Conservancy's Matador Ranch
- Potential for grazing incentives on CMR for existing permittees
- Key Considerations
- Development of a multi-interest implementation committee

Prairie Dog Conservation Tools and Resources (cont.)

- Translocation
- Land Exchange
- Conservation Easements

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Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution
Objectives Plan**

---Final Environmental Assessment---

Montana Environmental Policy Act



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

Rev. 03/14/2006

Environmental Assessment

Scope of Analysis

- Potential impacts of five separate alternatives
- Involves only FWP actions
- As federal agencies consider implementing related prairie dog conservation activities on agency-administered lands, these agencies will require separate analyses as per federal statutory requirements.

Decisions to be Made

- Region 6 Regional Supervisor will make a Record of Decision
 - may adopt one of the alternatives
 - modification of one or more of the alternatives
- Decision will be based on:
 - the efficacy of the proposed action(s) to achieve distribution and abundance objectives
 - the environmental impacts described in this EA
 - comments received through public review of the Plan and this EA.

Public Involvement Process

- Development of the Plan represents a collaborative effort involving a wide spectrum of stakeholders.
- Region 6 Prairie Dog Advisory Board
- South Phillips County Rancher Stewardship Alliance
- Area landowners

Issues Identified Through Public Involvement

- Ecological Values
- Associated Species
- Vegetation and Wildlife
- Livestock Grazing
- Recreation
- Control

Environmental Consequences

- Physical/Biological Environment
 - Land Resources – Soil, Water, Air, and Vegetation
 - Fish and Wildlife
- Human Environment
 - Noise/Electrical Effects
 - Risk/Health Hazards
 - Community Impact
 - Public Services/Taxes/Utilities
 - Aesthetics/Recreation
 - Cultural/Historical Resources

Public Involvement

- The Draft EA and Draft Plan were released for public review on November 21, 2005
- Comment Period Closed Dec. 19, 2005
- A total of 26 public comments were received for both the EA and the Draft Plan
- Over 150 individual points were identified and organized into 15 issue-types
- In response to comments received, FWP developed the Final EA, Final Plan and Record of Decision
- Record of Decision was signed on April 17, 2006.

Acreage and Distribution Objectives

- The abundance objective calls for managing active prairie dog acreage between 30,500 acres to 41,400 acres.
- The Region 6 distribution objective provide acreages within 3 complex types as follows:
 - **One Category 1 complex of at least 5,000 acres of active dog towns spaced no more than 1.5 km (1mi.) apart. This Category 1 complex will not be actively managed to exceed 10,000 acres; and,**
 - **Six to eight Category 2 complexes of 1,000 or more acres of active dog towns. Two or three of these complexes would follow the 1.5 km rule and the remainder would follow the 7 km rule; and,**
 - **Category 3 prairie dog towns would be scattered throughout the historic prairie dog range in Region 6.**

Plan Implementation

- **Execution of this Plan will be overseen and coordinated by an implementation committee. The implementation committee will be assembled with assistance from FWP. This committee will include agency personnel from FWP, BLM, and USFWS, representatives from interested non-governmental organizations, and interested landowners or representatives from landowner organizations. The initial objectives of the implementation committee will be determination of members, establishment of meeting schedules, timelines, and work plans. The first priority of this committee will be to begin the process of establishing a Category 1 complex.**
- **The committee is not intended for “the scheduling of more meetings” but instead assuring implementation of the Plan will be done in a coordinated and biologically based manner within Region 6. Using a voluntary, incentive-based approach, the roles of this committee will be to: 1) identify priority focus areas for assuring conservation of prairie dogs and associated species; 2) help develop strategies and solutions in response to issues; and 3) to appoint one or more point persons to work directly with landowners and lessees to ascertain interest and customize an approach for working on a particular area or property.**

Plan Implementation

- FWP Region 6 will be releasing a RFP for facilitation of the implementation of the Plan
- Organization and coordination of an Implementation Committee
- Contacting and working with landowners, federal and state agencies
- Conducting field reviews of potential prairie dog complexes
- Mapping potential prairie dog complex areas and prairie dog distribution
- Development of a present day comprehensive list of prairie dog conservation incentives to be used during implementation