



# Resolution on implementation options

Thunder Basin Cooperative Working Group, December 7, 2017





# Original Option 1: Amend Current Black-tailed Prairie Dog Strategy

Regardless of whether the Forest Plan is amended, update Black-tailed Prairie Dog Strategy in 2018 so it is tied to State plans to not reintroduce Black-footed Ferrets in the short run. Create clear management goals and implementations of the current plan. Include issues raised in Option 2 and 3 to the extent possible without a Plan Amendment.



# Collaborative Learning Group (CLG)

## Comments on Option 1

- There's nothing to tie statewide plan to at this point in time
- Would like to take out language regarding short-term reintroduction
- Strategy doesn't differentiate between short and long-term ferret plans
- Would support change in strategy but not plan amendment
- Change language to introduction (not reintroduction)
- Rewrite to state that strategy should follow state plans
- Remove second part of first sentence about ferrets (after "plans")
- Like leaving ferret language in to make sure folks understand there will be no reintroduction in the short-term
- It's not clear what folks are voting on. Bullets appear contradictory.
- What does "short-term" mean? Would be good to define this.

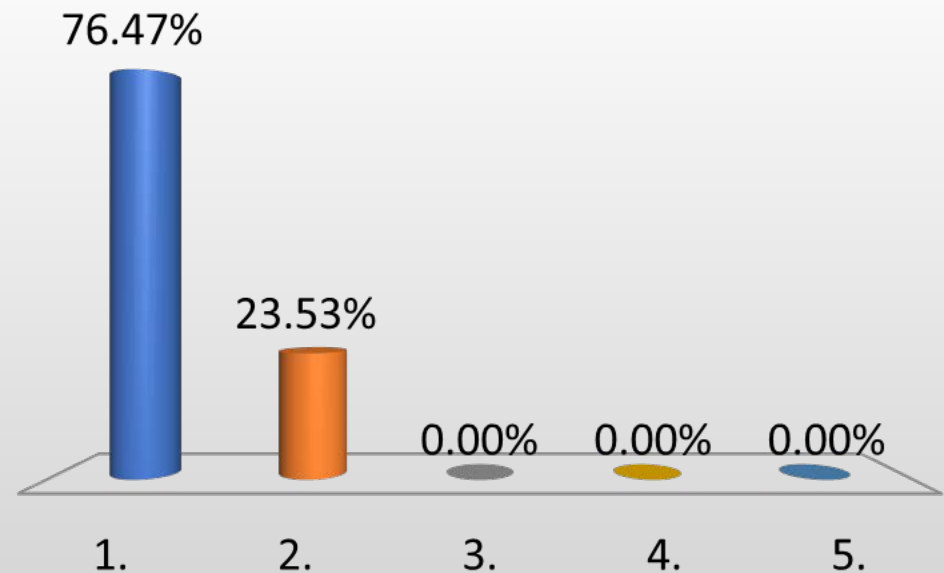
# Cooperative Working Group (CWG) modified Option 1: Revise the Current Black-tailed Prairie Dog Strategy



- 1) Create clear management goals and implementation strategies within the current Plan and Strategy.
- 2) Determine whether there needs to be an update to the Black-tailed Prairie Dog Strategy in 2018.
- 3) Determine whether the Plan needs to be amended.
- 4) Recognize that there are no plans to reintroduce black-footed ferrets in the short run.

Include the issues raised in Options 2 and 3 to the extent possible without a Plan Amendment.

1. Participant likes it.
2. Minor Point of Contention – Basically, participant likes it.
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4. Major reservations – Disagreement, but will not block the proposal/provision.
5. Disagreement – Participant will not support the proposal.





## Original Option 2: “Address Density Management in Strategy in 2018

Do strips throughout towns to keep numbers down, break up large complexes, continue to allow shooting, add more rodenticide options, make a decision of acceptable density/acres, create a set of protocols – use same standards across all lands, need definitions for complexes vs. colonies, use the same definition of “density/acre” across all lands, associated species counts – measure the same inside and outside categories”.



## CLG comments on Option 2

- Wildlife and associated spp need a spot without density control, okay to have density control in some areas, density is hard to measure
- There is a lot in here: need to talk about specific bullets and come up with agreed upon protocol
- Other species are managed for density, prairie dogs should be too
- Possible to measure density but resource intensive, hard to do at full scale
- ~4-5 days on 4,400 acres to measure density on CCAA (1% of each colony for UWFWS standards, transects on ATV, count active and inactive mounds, active burrow density used to infer prairie dogs per acre)
- Would like to see density studies in other areas as well
- Manage for rangeland health as an indicator (rather than focusing just on density)



## CWG modified Option 2: Address density management in 2018.

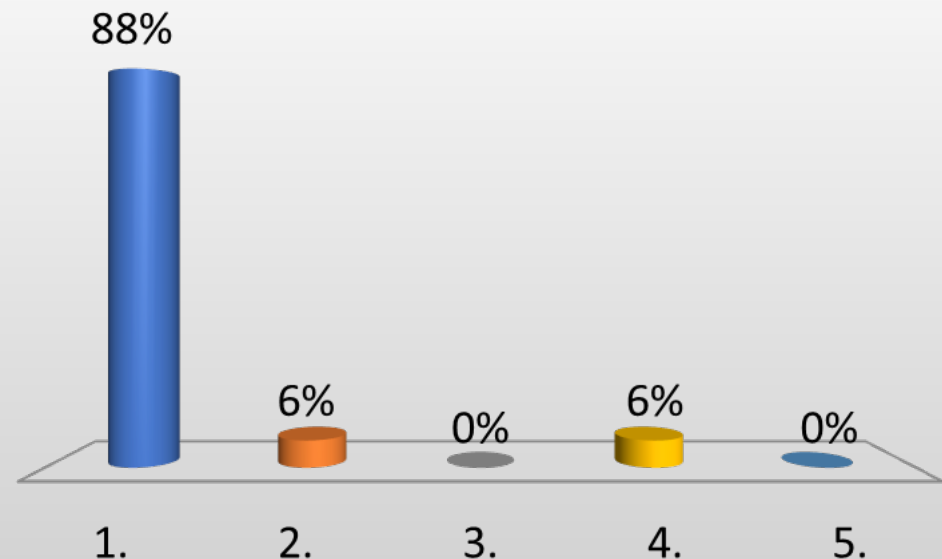
### Ideas for density monitoring include:

- Make a recommendation of acceptable level of density;
- Use the same definition of “density” across all lands;
- Create a standard set of protocols to be used across all lands;
- Conduct associated species counts consistently inside and outside categories.

### Ideas for density control include:

- “Do strips” throughout towns to keep numbers down;
- Break up large complexes;
- Continue to allow shooting;
- Add more rodenticide options.

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# Original Option 3: Location of Prairie Dog Towns

Under 2018 Strategy revision, new prairie dog core areas based on impacted land. If categories are being revisited, look at bottom-up approach.

Where we want prairie dogs: areas that are already impacted because we can't afford restoring them.

Where we don't want prairie dogs: preserve healthy lands and not accept prairie dogs.





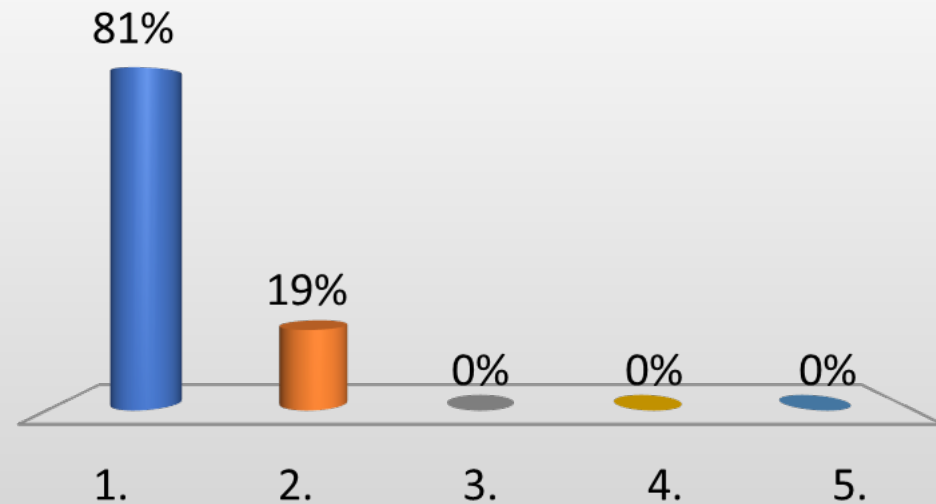
# CLG comments on Option 3

- Language is conflicting and confusing. What is the questions actually asking? (Core areas vs categories)
- Prairie dogs recolonize naturally without our help
- Change to “reestablish/determine category areas”, take out the word “new”
- Add language regarding buffer zones. Look at lethal and non-lethal tools for establishing buffers.
- Is this new areas within the category or outside the category?
- Change language to “complex”, no need to redetermine category designations
- Determine complexes within categories
- What is the definition of a complex versus a colony?
  - UWFWS has definitions the group can use



CWG modified Option 3: Under a 2018 Strategy review, determine whether the current category designations are appropriate. If not, adjust prairie dog category areas based on a combination of scientific evidence and social support. If categories are being revisited, use a collaborative approach.

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# Original Option 4: Balanced forage management for livestock and wildlife

- Balance forage management and competition of livestock and wildlife through Leniency and flexibility for innovative approaches to vegetation treatments and
- \*Continued prairie dog control
- \*Invasive species control incl. cheat grass
- \*Use the plague situation to control prairie dog colonization and spread (buffer zones)
- Reduce erosion through prairie dog management
- Remove cactus, three-awn, cheat-grass, and mounds
- Reseed



## CLG comments on Option 4

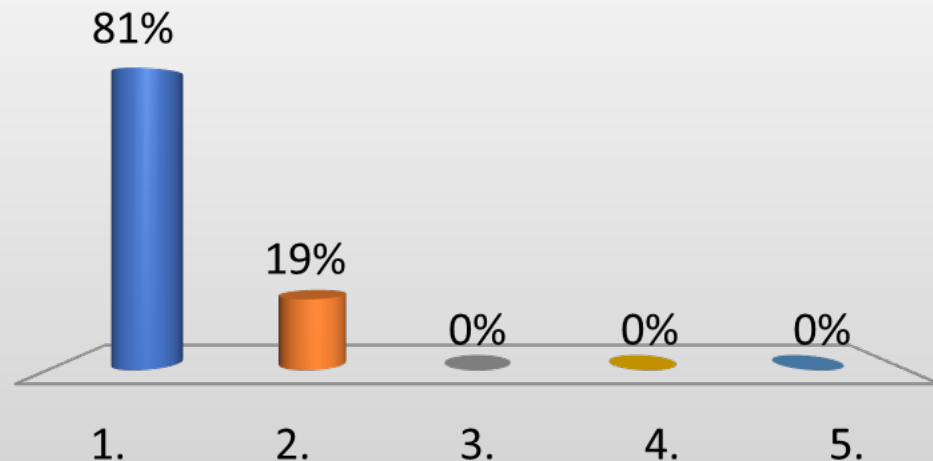
- Every colony is different, so methods can't be applied uniformly across all areas
- Cactus takes several years to disappear after being sprayed
- Specific projects will be determined on smaller scales. Option is a general statement about what the group conceptually agrees or does not agree upon.
- Sagebrush restoration is a lengthy process



# CWG Modified Option 4: Balance forage management and competition of livestock and wildlife through cooperation and flexibility. Use innovative approaches to restoration and vegetation management, including:

- Continued prairie dog control;
- Invasive species control, including for cheatgrass;
- Use the plague situation to control prairie dog colonization and spread (buffer zones);
- Reduce erosion through prairie dog management;
- Remove cactus, three-awn, cheatgrass, and mounds
- Reseeding.
- Monitor and inventory range conditions, ground cover

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# Original Option 5: Sagebrush Ecosystems

- Keep the sagebrush we have and not allow them to transition to riparian or mesic communities. Do this by doing the following:
- Identify species usage to determine areas that will use annual plant community
- Identify areas of erosion concern
- Control cheat grass
- Remove all prairie dogs within sage grouse core area



# CLG omments on Option 5

- Remove “remove all prairie dogs from sage grouse core area”
- There’s no science to show that there shouldn’t be prairie dogs in sage grouse core areas
- Conflicting management in core sage grouse areas. The standard for sage grouse is 7 inches of stubble height. Prairie dogs can decrease stubble height.
- Sage grouse take precedence over prairie dogs because of listing potential
- Some think all prairie dogs should be eliminated in core areas, others don’t
- Prairie dogs and sage grouse can coexist outside of core areas
- Perhaps both species can coexist if prairie dogs are maintained at low densities
- Three ongoing research projects regarding this topic

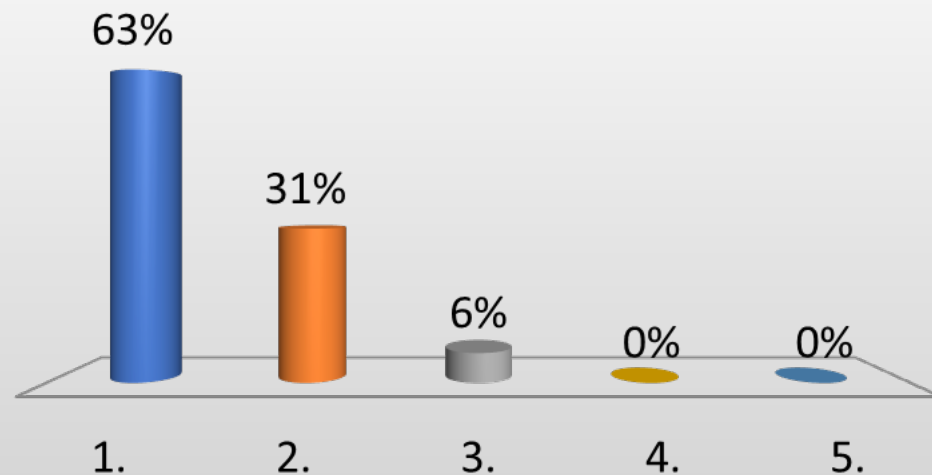
## CWG modified Option 5: Healthy Ecosystems



Maintain healthy sagebrush, riparian, and mesic communities. Do not allow prairie dogs to transition into these communities. Do this by doing the following:

- Identify species usage to determine areas that will use annual plant community;
- Identify areas of erosion concern;
- Control cheatgrass;
- Remove prairie dogs within sage grouse core areas.

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## Original Option 6: Full and Transparent Communications

- \*Improve and develop more consistent communication and distribution between meetings.



# CLG comments on Option 6

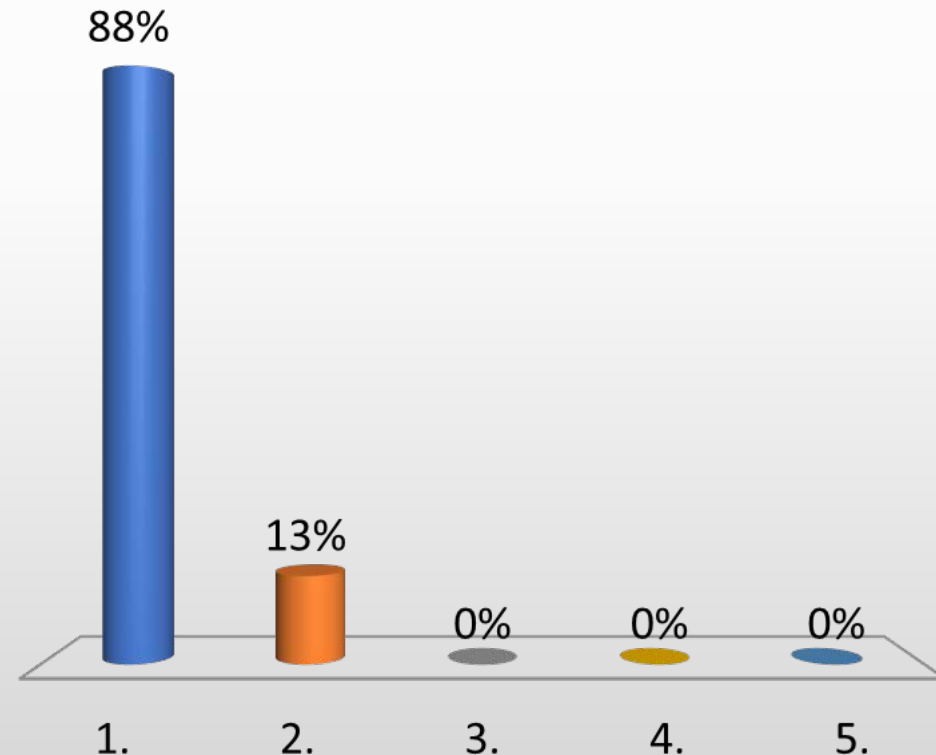
- Will this effort continue in 2018?
  - This is up to the group
  - Jess is contracted for one more year
  - USFS is looking for input on next steps
  - USFS committed to a collaborative process
- Should the CWG continue?
  - Process has been slow, but starting to see results
  - Made a mistake switching to 1-day meetings
  - Not adequate conservation representation on CWG (can format/structure be changed to address this?)
  - Need better representation of constituents on CWG
  - Need to understand that USFS has final decision-making ability
  - Permittees and landowners should have a voice at the table
  - Suggestion: have an open meeting, but members of CWG are allowed to “vote” at those open meetings while public is not
  - Another (non-federal agency) group can convene so that they can have an open group
  - USFS can create MOUs that speak to their ability to commit to recommendations, etc.
  - USFS can't funnel money to other organizations to convene (but USFS can check on this)
  - Could several organization contribute money to convene these meetings?
  - Would like to see county commissioners convene



## CWG modified Option 6: Full and Transparent Communications.

Improve and develop consistent communication and information distribution between meetings. Explore other convening options to enhance participation from all interested stakeholders.

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# Original Option 7: Full and Transparent Communications

Create data-sharing clearinghouse regarding associated species and prairie dogs.

- Include TBGPEA, private landowner and USFS data
- Monitor and inventory range conditions, ground cover



## CLG comments on Option 7

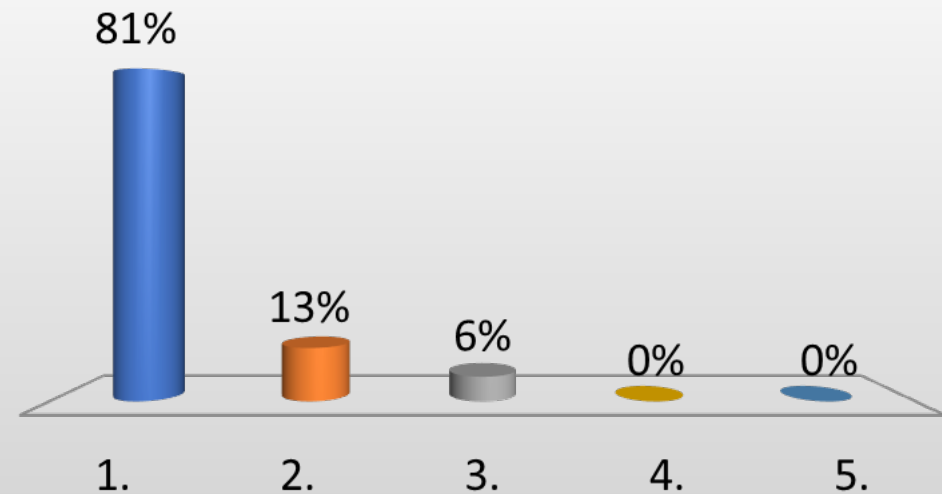
- Include UW.
- It's important to share data, and it should be provided at each meeting
- Take into consideration legalities of sharing private landowner data



## CWG modified Option 7: Data sharing

Create data-sharing clearinghouse regarding associated species and prairie dogs. Include TBGPEA, private landowner, University of Wyoming, USFS, and other relevant data.

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## Original Option 8: Funding

- Work with partners to find and manage a point person to find long-term and consistent funding.



## CLG comments on Option 8

- More comfortable with everyone working together to find funding, rather than having just one person
- Language is regarding one person to coordinate the money, not just to find the money
- Look at Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative model for securing funds
- Transparency regarding where money comes from
- This would allow the group to have matching funds
- What are funds being gathered for? Implementing the plan?



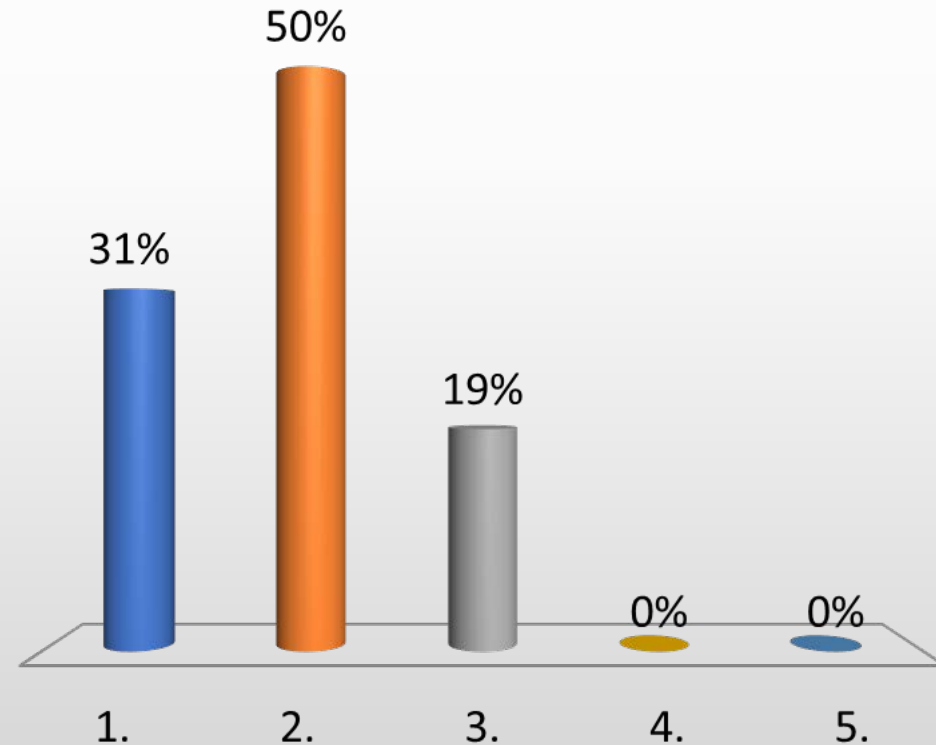
## CWG modified Option 8: Funding



Consider options for long-term and consistent project funding such as:

- creating a full-time position for a “Prairie Dog Manager”;
- creating a group to do this;
- working with a bridge organization
- using the Wyoming Land Conservation Initiative model.

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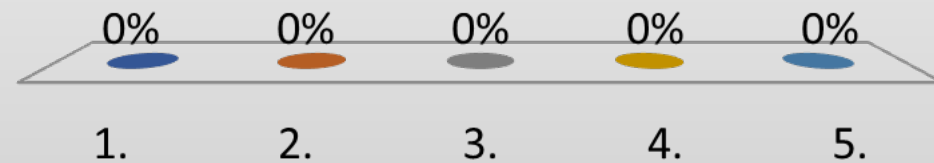
## Option 9: Thunder Basin Collaborative Goal

“Prairie dog management to a level that supports healthy landscape and permittees, while supporting associated species through personal relationships and a respect for all goals and viewpoints”.



## Option 9: deleted

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## Comments on Option 9

- Switch word order of permittees and healthy landscape



# Option 10: Role of the USFS in Prairie Dog Management

Request that the USFS commits to following through on management and regulatory obligations including:

- Following USFS plans
- Any new plans must be fiscally responsible 2012 FS planning regulations
- LRMP revision is long overdue
- Providing an answer regarding whether there will be a USFS Plan amendment.
- Allowing ground-ready projects to move forward and provide reasons when they cannot.
- Adhere to the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960
- Reduce impairment of productivity of the land as per the Bankhead-Jones Act of 1937.



# CLG comments on Option 10

- Likes the part about following through on plans, especially those that were made collaborative
- Add: “Making decisions in a timely manner and notifying parties in advance of implementation”
- Need clarification on who’s the lead on issues and concerns
- Have equal representation of viewpoints on field trips
- Squeamish about LRMP revision; work backwards through strategy and then take it back to plan to see what’s needed
- USFS revisit regulations
- Stick to LRMP revision 15-year schedule
- Amendment process pulls resources from on-the-ground efforts
- Want to assurances that strategy will be fully implemented
- Identify what has and hasn’t been implemented in current strategy
- USFS perspective: plan revision not on table, amendment possible

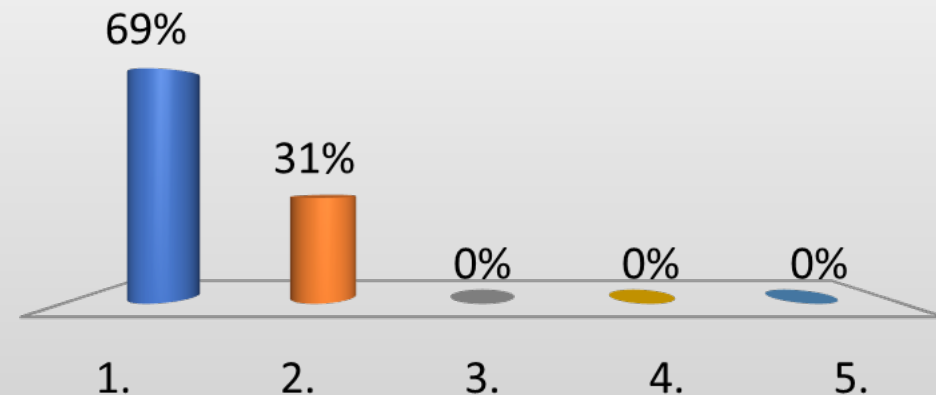


## Modified Option 10: USFS accountability in Prairie Dog Management

The USFS will follow through on management commitments and regulatory obligations and will collaborate on an improved Strategy that includes definitive triggers and associated actions. A Land Resource Management Plan revision is long overdue. Additional requests include:

- Provide updates and rationale for implementations (or lack thereof) of the Plan and the Prairie Dog Strategy;
- Ensure that any new plans are fiscally responsible;
- Provide an answer regarding whether there will be a USFS Plan amendment;
- Allow ground-ready projects to move forward and provide reasons when they cannot;
- Have equal representation of viewpoints on field trips;
- Make decisions in a timely manner and notify parties in advance of implementation.

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## Option 11

- Seek clarification of prairie dog as pest or sensitive species at state and federal levels and comply with State Weed and Pest laws (i.e., prairie dog is a pest) accordingly.





# Comments on Option 11

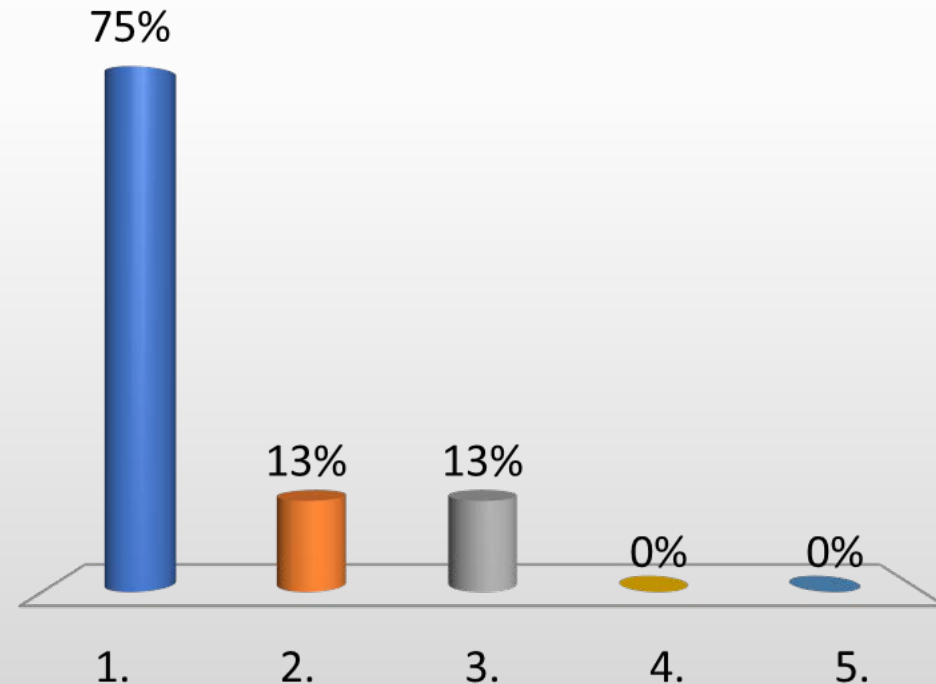
- Need to avoid additional federal listings
- USDA Wildlife Services not a regulatory agency: does prairie dog removals and plague mitigation
- WGFD designates p dogs as Species of Greatest? Conservation Need, State considers a pest
- No Rozol per Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA)
  - Others want Rozol
- Thinks we can find solutions despite conflicting designations
- Discuss or allow the use of burrow fumigants in control efforts
- Break option into two parts. Have a separate statement about using most effective method to control prairie dogs. Move this to Option 13



## CWG modified option 11:

Recognize in a revised strategy the conflicting classifications of prairie dogs. Acknowledge that prairie dogs are considered a pest by some people.

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## Option 12: Prairie dog Monitoring

- Continue monitoring prairie dog towns and plague



# Comments on Option 12

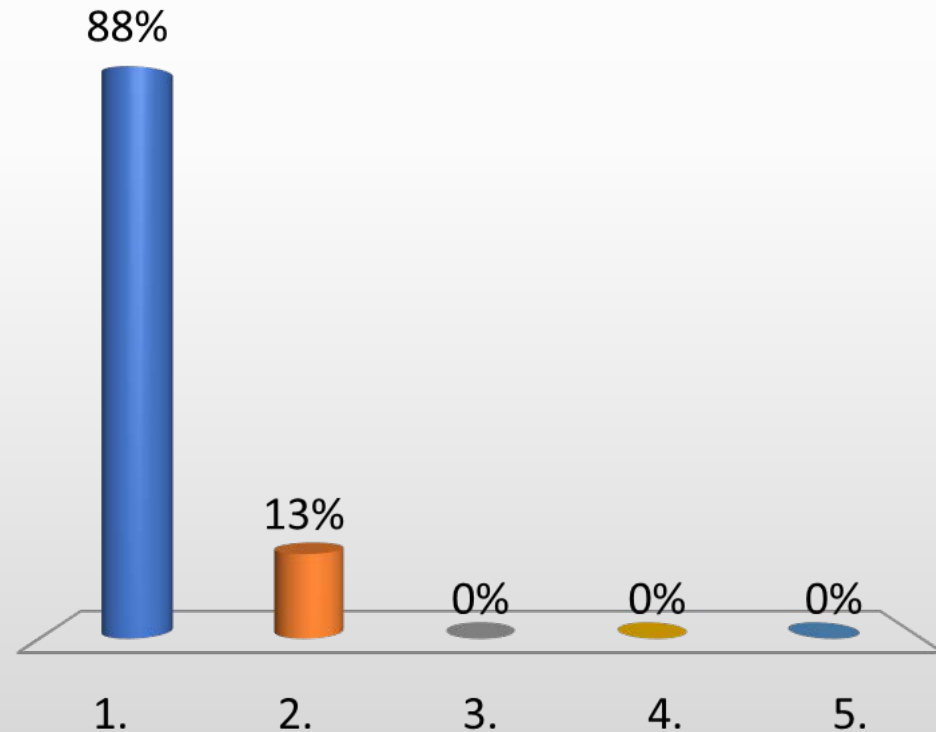
- none



# Option 12: Prairie Dog Monitoring

Continue monitoring prairie dog towns and plague.

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# Option 13: Prairie Dog Boundary Management

- \*Manage 3.63 area's boundaries
- Eliminations of prairie dogs outside the boundary
- Prevent prairie dogs establishing outside the boundary.

# Comments on Option 13

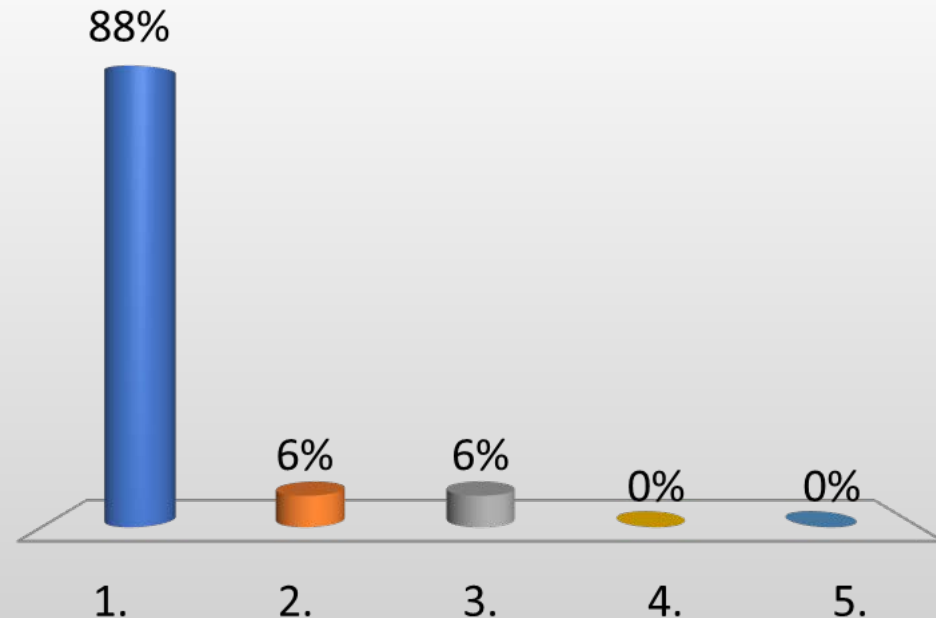
- Statement should be about Category 1, not 3.63
- Want boundaries managed, but not eliminating p dogs outside of boundary
- Better management of boundaries to minimize the number of p dogs outside of boundary
- Would like to incorporate density into this statement. Need density control within boundary
- Get rid of 3.63 so we can manage p dogs everywhere
- Need to maintain two complexes with no control, can do experiments with density control in other areas of category one (southeast portion: Lone Crow)
- Want to see some management within Category 1
- Possibly move lessee to a different pasture or compensate; consider the landowner
  - There could be economic incentives for these landowners (conservation groups working on this)
- Focus on healthy rangelands, diversity of animals, look at ecosystem level

## Option 13: Prairie Dog Boundary Management

Manage boundaries in conflict areas. This may include:

- Eliminating prairie dogs outside the boundary;
- Preventing prairie dogs from establishing outside the boundary
- Conduct density control within the colony using best available science;
- Allow lethal control within Category 1 and its boundaries, regardless of acreage, or change acreage objective.

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## Option 14: Prairie Dog Shooting

- Permanently drop no shooting ban starting Fall 2017.  
Recreational shooting should remain everywhere (compare lead versus steel bullets)



# Comments on Option 14

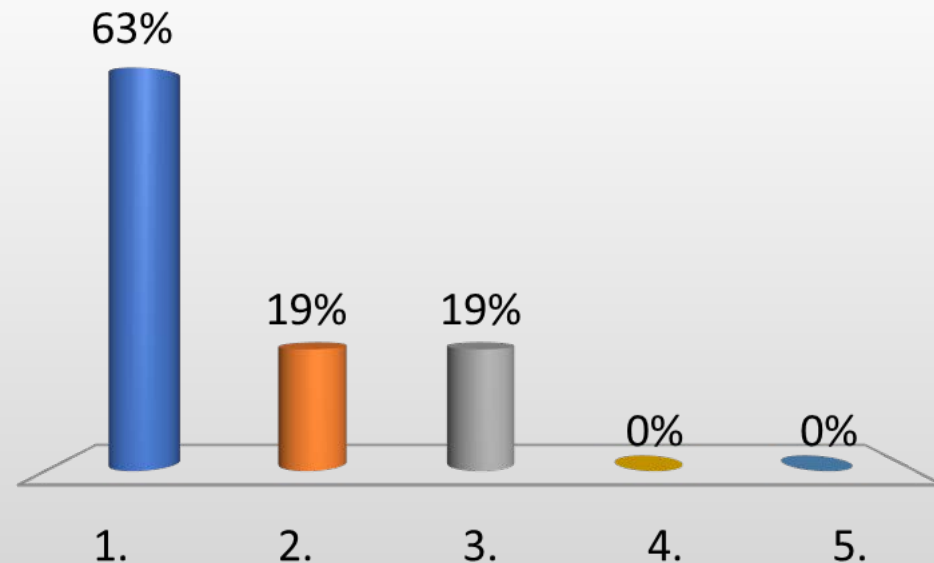
- Change “steel” to “non-toxic”
- No shooting within Category 1 areas (this would be consistent with the current plan)
- Ban shooting in Category 1 if/when it becomes possible to reintroduce ferrets
- Don’t require or ban specific tools, be flexible and adapt management tools
- There is some “bycatch” of associated species in areas that allow shooting
- Shooting is especially attractive if there are lots of prairie dogs
- Shooting is one form of recreation use on the grassland
- Want triggers put in place regarding when and where shooting is and isn’t allowed
- How many p dogs do recreational shooters kill each year? Is there any harm in shooting if there are ferrets (since they’re nocturnal)?
  - On 4W, one shooter shot 450 p dogs in a day



## CWG modified option 14: Prairie Dog Shooting

As long as black-footed ferrets are not being reintroduced on the TBNG, drop the shooting ban in Category 3.63.

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**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from  
the Ruckelshaus Institute.**