

Thunder Basin National Grassland

Situation Assessment and Process Recommendations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Overview

In 2015, the Medicine-Bow Routt National Forests and the Thunder Basin National Grassland (USFS) requested assistance from the Ruckelshaus Institute of the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming to conduct a stakeholder assessment. The USFS had been deliberating prairie dog management issues for years with its constituents. In 2014, new Forest Supervisor Dennis Jaeger requested a situation assessment to explore all stakeholders' perspectives regarding prairie dog management on the Thunder Basin National Grassland (hereafter referred to as "TBNG" or "the Grassland"). The purpose of this stakeholder assessment is to assist the USFS in evaluating whether this issue is amenable to collaborative problem solving.

Description of the Assessment Process and Methodology

This assessment is based on confidential, voluntary interviews with 42 stakeholders who represent a range of interests and connections to the Grassland, its surrounding counties, and the State of Wyoming. These stakeholder groups consist of the livestock industry, local, State and Federal government, environmental conservation groups, and community members (see Appendix A). Each interview consisted of questions regarding participants' perspectives regarding prairie dog management on the Grassland, experience with collaborative processes, and perceptions on whether a collaborative process would be appropriate for the Grassland regarding prairie dog management and associated subjects.

The structured interviews were compartmentalized and organized according to key themes identified by frequency and significance. The results provide a reliable set of themes that emerge from each question from all the respondents. The results do not seek to find or represent a majority opinion. Rather, themes were chosen for their explanatory power regarding the current issue as expressed by the stakeholders.

Findings: Summary of Key Points

Results from the interviews showed that while many stakeholders have doubts that all individuals will participate in a collaborative process in good faith, they are still optimistic that a process can help the USFS determine a management solution to prairie dog management on the Grassland.

From the interviews, the Ruckelshaus Institute discovered there is a high level of distrust among the stakeholders and this may impact a process. A variety of scientific and technical information needs were also identified. Most stakeholders thought that if a process were either not convened or unsuccessful, the outcome would be maintaining a status quo which was perceived to negatively impact many stakeholders. The other outcome brought up by many respondents was the high probability that various parties would seek relief through the courts.

Recommendations

Based on our interviews and our analysis of this qualitative data, we recommend a collaborative solution-seeking process based on a number of criteria. The criteria include: building on what has already been learned, efficiency, transparency, inclusivity, a clear and realistic decision-making process, adaptive management, and a charter. Stakeholders will need to agree to their roles, the decision-making space, as well as a clearly defined decision methods and authorities. We recommend a two-phase process. First, all interested individuals and parties should be invited to three public meetings to explore issues, a field trip to the Grassland and options for solutions. Second, a working group/technical advisory group should be convened. This group should first seek agreement to a collaborative process charter. Then the group should use the public input from the first phase, and through a collaborative learning process provide recommendations to the USFS. This group should also create a workable and effective adaptive management protocol that will allow all stakeholders to learn over time what is effective for as many interests as possible. The first phase could be convened by the USFS, however, we recommend a different neutral convener initially for the working group. Ideally, a local organization takes over the coordination of the working group after a process has been established and first agreements have been made. The outcome of this working group may be a strategy or a habitat plan that is reviewed annually, similar to the Platte Valley Habitat Plan, or another framework. In this document agreements are documented and are used for continued collaboration with the USFS to learn and create solutions that address as many interests as possible.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Ruckelshaus Institute and the Purpose of this Assessment

In 2014, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) sought to explore the feasibility of using a collaborative, science-based, stakeholder-driven process to address prairie dog management on the Thunder Basin National Grassland. The USFS requested assistance from the Ruckelshaus Institute to conduct a situation assessment.

The Ruckelshaus Institute, a division of the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, advances the understanding and resolution of complex environmental and natural resources challenges and supports stakeholder-driven solutions to environmental challenges by communicating relevant research and promoting collaborative decision making. The Ruckelshaus Institute has experience and expertise in conducting stakeholder assessments, as well as convening and facilitating collaborative problem-solving processes.

The purpose of this stakeholder assessment is to provide detailed information about stakeholder perceptions of prairie dog issues, management and public participation. The USFS is contemplating the potential development of a long-term collaborative working group to help develop local, place-based options for prairie dog management. This assessment seeks to discover whether this is feasible. The assessment is based on information gathered from interviews with 42 stakeholders regarding their perspectives regarding this issue. Participants represented Federal and state government, private landowners, lessees, local and national grazing associations, environmental conservation organizations, and community members.

Situation assessments are not used to gather votes, but to discover the way people think about an issue. A situation assessment does not explore the quantity of similar perspectives but does explore the diversity of perspectives regarding a particular subject. Whether something is said 20 times or once is unimportant because the knowledge that even one stakeholder holds a certain belief is important to finding out, in this case, whether there are options that can be explored in relation to prairie dog management and whether a collaborative process to do so is possible.

Background

In the late 1930's the United States went through the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, both hitting farmers in dryland areas hard. The Dust Bowl resulted partially from using incompatible farming techniques on short grass prairies and other systems. The Land Utilization Program was set up beginning in the 1930's in part to buy lands that were sub-marginal for agriculture and to restore them to their most suitable use. The purpose was to decrease erosion, increase soil moisture, reseed or replant, improve or restore water storage and drainage and generally restore natural conditions and put them to their best use. This Program eventually culminated in the passage of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 and became Title 3 of this Act. Millions of acres were purchased under the Land Utilization Program and the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act and transferred to various land management agencies. The Thunder Basin National Grassland was retained by the Department of Agriculture as some of those millions of acres. With changes to the Act in the 1960's and the addition of laws over time (for example the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Forest Management Act) the uses on National Grasslands are multiple, including grazing, energy development, fish and wildlife, and recreation.

The Grassland in northeastern Wyoming contains approximately 547,499 acres of land in a mosaic of state, Federal, and private lands. The Grassland is under the management of the U.S. Forest Service, is joined with the Medicine-Bow Routt National Forests and is administered by the Douglas Ranger District. The Grassland contains a patchwork of mixed-grass grassland, sagebrush grassland, cottonwood, greasewood, and ponderosa pine/juniper vegetation in a rolling landscape with low buttes. The grassland contains one of the largest coal mines in the country. Wildlife in the Grassland includes burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, elk, pronghorn antelope, swift foxes, sage grouse and prairie dogs.

Prairie dogs are considered a keystone grassland herbivore by the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and are estimated to now exist on 2 percent of their historic range due to habitat fragmentation and lethal control efforts. The State of Wyoming considers prairie dogs a pest species because their populations fluctuate, in part in response to sylvatic plague. When the population increases quickly after a plague event and stays healthy for a while, they are considered competition with livestock for grass while their burrows create holes for livestock to fall

into. Their association with the plague is also considered a hazard to human health by the State and others.

Prairie dogs have many associated species on the Grassland including swift foxes, ferruginous hawks, burrowing owls and mountain plover. Many of these species are experiencing significant declines. There have been petitions in the past to list the black-tailed prairie dog for threatened species listing under the Endangered Species Act, however the FWS determined the listing was not warranted. During the 2000's there were multi-state efforts to create conservation plans to ensure the black-tailed prairie dog (hereafter described as "prairie dog") would not be listed, in which the U.S. Forest Service was a partner. Prairie dogs are considered a critically important prey species for black-footed ferrets, also a species in decline.

The black-footed ferret was listed under the 1966 Endangered Species Preservation Act in 1967 and later under the 1973 Endangered Species Act. It is one of the most endangered species in the United States. In 1988 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created the Black-footed Ferret Recovery Plan which was revised in 2013 to include a Programmatic Safe Harbor Agreement which provides opportunities for private and Tribal landowners to use their lands for reintroduction without affecting their land-use activities beyond mutually agreed-upon measures. The Grassland was identified as a site for potential reintroduction of the black-footed ferret.

In 2002 the USFS Regional Forester for Region 2 signed the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan's Record of Decision. Based on guidance the USFS had received from its Washington Office in 2000, prairie dogs were added as a management indicator species and the use of rodenticides was limited. In 2009 this Plan was amended when a Black-tailed Prairie Dog Management Amendment and Strategy (the Strategy) was completed. The Record of Decision regarding the LRMP Amendment was also signed in 2009. The Decision was upheld in 2010 after it had been appealed.

The Strategy was developed in 2009 to guide prairie dog management on the TBNG. It allowed certain actions to reduce impacts to private lands, while including management techniques to promote an increase in prairie dog populations in designated areas important for potential black-footed ferret reintroduction. However the Strategy was not considered by landowners and

permittees to be workable, provide enough room for lethal control methods, nor did they consider subsequent implementation to be effective. Although many felt that this Strategy and related Plan Amendment had been a collaborative process and created a compromise between the needs of livestock owners, residents and prairie dogs, dissatisfaction and controversy continued. This culminated in a letter from Governor Mead in April 2013 to the Regional Forester of the USFS Region 2 in Denver which requested a new Plan Amendment which would establish a ¼ mile buffer to all private and state lands and control prairie dogs within the buffer with expanded use and type of rodenticides. The USFS received a response in writing from environmental organizations objecting to this proposal and providing different solutions instead, including land exchanges. The USFS is now working on a 2015 Strategy which is framed as a working document that can be adapted to new information, monitoring data or changes in conditions.

In 2014 Dennis Jaeger became the new Forest Supervisor of the Medicine-Bow Routt National Forests and the Thunder Basin National Grassland. Mr. Jaeger and his staff requested a situation assessment by the Ruckelshaus Institute. This report outlines the methods used in this situation assessment, the results of the interviews, and provides recommendations. The Appendices provide more detailed information regarding sources of information and methods used.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

This situation assessment was initiated with a review of background information and reports obtained through an independent research process and information provided to us by members of the U.S. Forest Service, county sources and interviewees. Information gathered included documents produced by the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of the Interior, news articles, 2012 scoping comments, letters from various interests including the Governor of Wyoming and environmental organizations, information provided by interviewees and various maps. This review of background information provided the authors with a basic understanding of the issues and the stakeholders involved, enough to begin the formulation of an assessment strategy.

The assessment conducted by the Ruckelshaus Institute is based on data gathered from in-person and telephone interviews of stakeholders in the counties and communities where the Grassland is located, and other stakeholders within and outside the region who had a demonstrated interest in Thunder Basin prairie dog management issues. With the assistance of members of the USFS, the Governor's policy staff, county commissioners and conservation district staff, the authors compiled a list of 79 individuals to interview. These individuals were sent letters of introduction followed by telephone calls to schedule interviews. Follow-up telephone calls were made a minimum of three times to find a convenient time for the interview. Not all stakeholders contacted successfully scheduled an interview. In some cases, the respondents referred the researchers to other individuals within their organization to interview, and sometimes respondents provided additional individuals who they felt were important to this issue. In total, 42 stakeholders were interviewed for this assessment. Shannon Glendenning, Kristen Blume, Mike Kolker, Danielle Messing and Jessica Clement conducted the interviews in April and May 2015. Jessica Clement is the Principal Investigator and lead for this project. Each interview took an average of 60 minutes. Table 1 provides a summary of the stakeholder groups and the number of respondents belonging to each group. A list of the individuals interviewed for this assessment is contained in Appendix A.

Table 1. Attributes of Stakeholder Participants

Profession		Gender	
Federal government employee	7	Female	11
State government employee	9	Male	31
Local government employee or official	10		
Energy	1		
Livestock industry	8		
Environmental conservation	4		
Legislator	2		
General public	1		

The assessment consisted of a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit information about prairie dog management, prior experience with collaborative processes, their assessment of the potential for common ground regarding prairie dog management issues, their use of information regarding prairie dog issues, and logistical details necessary to engage in a collaborative process. After transcription, the interview results were compiled in document analysis software NVivo (version 10) into separate documents, each containing all the responses to a separate question. A word frequency count incorporating all words over three letters long was conducted for the results of each question, and these counts were used to identify themes. A number of significant themes resulted for each question, which are described in the “Findings” section below. These results provide a cross-section of respondents’ views and are meant to convey the range of positions relevant to explaining the situation on the Grassland. This method was not intended to discover the majority opinion or predict the points of commonality that would result in a successfully negotiated outcome. Rather, this method focused on identifying the significant issues and determining the possibility for a collaborative process.

FINDINGS

Perceptions Regarding Prairie Dog Management

We have compiled the various types of responses to each question below. Our 42 respondents generally had a lot to say on an issue that was clearly very important to them and there was a wide diversity of opinions, but also a considerable amount of commonality. In order for the USFS and other readers to have a clear understanding of this diversity and commonality among perspectives, this section is inclusive, and therefore lengthy, for the sake of transparency, inclusiveness and clarity.

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself. Do you have an interest in prairie dog management on the Grassland? If so what is your interest?

The interests expressed were diverse. One main theme of interests was related to concerns regarding prairie dog management in relation to livestock operations, those who have grazing permits on the Grassland and/or those with adjacent private or State lands. In this theme concerns regarding encroachment of prairie dogs on private and State lands were locally pervasive, as well as the economic impacts that many feel arise from inadequate prairie dog management. In this theme there is also a desire to have all the tools on the table to manage prairie dogs, lethal and non-lethal. Another concern was that prairie dog plague will affect humans. Elected officials, including state legislators, generally expressed an interest to protect their constituents, which in all cases includes members of the livestock industry. Ranchers brought up long standing family ties to the location and their ranches.

Another interest was more conservation oriented. This ranged from a desire to conserve prairie dogs specifically, while others had a broader interest to look at the entire area in a more holistic manner in order to conserve prairie dogs, ferrets, ferruginous hawks, sage grouse, burrowing owls, swift foxes and other species, while conserving grasslands for livestock and wildlife grazing. Conservation organizations expressed these interests, as did a number of ranchers, permittees and elected officials.

The interest to find solutions that balance prairie dog populations with livestock needs and wildlife concerns was generally expressed by all stakeholders, including USFS staff. Additionally many mentioned the need to find solutions that were a) multi-stakeholder driven and b) sustainable for the long term and across staff changes in the USFS or any other stakeholder group.

2. In your opinion are there issues regarding prairie dog management on the Grassland? (if no, go to #4).

Encroachment and other effects of prairie dogs on the land

The issues directly related to prairie dogs included encroachment of prairie dogs onto private and state lands. Prairie dogs are perceived to compete with cattle for forage, denude landscapes and cause erosion. Some also mentioned holes prairie dogs make which are considered hazardous to livestock and wildlife. Related to these effects was the concern that prairie dogs will cause permittees to relinquish their lease due to degraded vegetative conditions, which causes a loss in rent income to the State or sell the ranch which would have negative repercussions for the local economy.

Two prairie dog plague-related issues that were raised include plague mortality in prairie dog populations and the worry that prairie dogs constitute a health hazard due to possibly carrying this disease.

Management generally

One main issue was the perceived lack of management of prairie dogs by the USFS to stop encroachment on private and public lands. This was often tied to the desire to use lethal means of prairie dog population control especially through poisoning and recreational shooting. Additional management issues that were raised were:

- Questions surrounding the number of prairie dogs and the number of acres for prairie dog habitat that are required to meet prairie dog and black footed ferret conservation goals.
- Questions regarding where prairie dogs should be distributed spatially with consideration to livestock production needs, soil type and sage grouse needs.
- Concern that focusing on just prairie dogs is not effective and creates more conflict. The issues are viewed within an ecosystem framework that includes livestock grazing, community needs, sage grouse, energy development and habitat for prairie dogs and other species.
- Concern that USFS parcels in the Proposed Action are not large enough to contain complete prairie dog colonies so prairie dogs move into State and private lands.

- Concern that (re)introduction of black footed ferret will interfere with management of prairie dogs on private land, and if a ferret is accidentally killed in the process, is held liable.

Political and Cultural factors related to Prairie Dog management

There is a strong belief among livestock producers that prairie dogs are an indication of overgrazing and inappropriate grazing practices, which conflicts with the intention to “grow” prairie dogs.

There is also a belief that the USFS has an obligation to provide permittees with AUMs and should provide permittees with alternate grazing options if prairie dog populations are a management objective on their allotments. Some question the legal purpose of a National Grassland, and feel there is legal precedence to indicate its sole purpose is for livestock grazing, and question whether the USFS has the authority to manage it.

Some felt that the State had interfered too much with the result that possible solutions could not materialize over time. One example mentioned by several respondents was related to the belief that the State had interfered with Forest Service research to explore non-lethal means of controlling prairie dogs through vegetation barriers. Another example was the 2013 letter which was believed to interfere with implementation of the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and the Strategy in general. It was felt that this had been done on behalf of a relatively small amount of people from one stakeholder group.

Prairie dogs are considered a pest by the State, and can be disposed of using lethal means. This was considered an advantage by the livestock interests and a disadvantage by those who believed that public lands should be a place where prairie dogs should be safe from poisoning.

Two science-related issues included 1) the lack of evidence that the Grassland provided black-footed ferret habitat in the past; and 2) competing science: landowners have collected data which is not trusted by some and peer-reviewed science is not trusted by others.

Trust

The issue of trust in relation to the USFS was often raised in relation to three points:

- That management actions would be implemented, particularly in regards to prairie dog population control in boundary areas.
- Regarding communication styles of some staff.
- That agreements are adhered to over the long run despite staff changes.

3. If no effort was made by the USFS to address prairie dog issues, what do you think would happen?

Populations of prairie dogs would change

Some responded that the prairie dog population would decline due to plague, shooting and poisoning. This would create an ecosystem collapse because it would impede the possibility of other wildlife species being able to survive on the Grassland. Alternatively some believe the prairie dog population would expand, contract plague and kill themselves off. Others believe nothing would change and prairie dogs would remain on the landscape as they always have been.

Lethal control measures would be implemented

Local residents would implement lethal control measures on prairie dog populations, which in their view would reduce the population and increase the quality of the habitat. The risk or advantage, depending on the stakeholder, of this population decrease was the resulting impossibility of introducing the black footed ferret. Another is that conflict would decrease and livestock producers would fare better economically.

Impacts to the land

Prairie dogs would remove enough vegetation and cause enough erosion that ranch permittees would be forced to sell their ranches. For the State Land Trust it would become a loss in revenue, which contradicts its purpose. The loss of ranches would affect the social structure of the community.

Lawsuits and continued conflict

Conflict would continue and litigation would happen, whereby the chance to conserve the area in an agreed manner, and to decrease the pressure on landowners, would be lost. Respondents from both the livestock industry and the environmental stakeholders groups said that they or others would instigate a lawsuit. If nothing happened, many were concerned relationships would be irrevocably broken. The possibility of civil disobedience was mentioned by one person who was not a member of either of the stakeholder groups mentioned above. On the other hand the US Forest Service was felt to be statutorily mandated to address prairie dogs. If the USFS did not follow that mandate, prairie dog populations would decline.

4. Have you been involved in prairie dog management on the Grassland? If so, in what way?

We found that “prairie dog management” means different things to different people. If respondents answered they were or had been involved, it was in one or several ways:

Management activities (reductions, and conservation work)

- Members of conservation groups had often conducted prairie dog conservation work on public land e.g. applied alpha dust as an anti-plague measure, translocations or other work.
- Landowners often mentioned participating in lethal prairie dog control methods on private land.

Meetings and interactions with managers

- Local government officials and staff talked about involvement in cooperator and ID Team meetings.
- All types of respondents also mentioned attending meetings, receiving updates, commenting on USFS NEPA documentation, and contributing to research and/or monitoring.

5. In your opinion, what has been working well with prairie dog management on the Grassland?

Some interviewees commented that nothing has been working well or that the only thing that is working is prairie dog expansion. Most interviewees had specific components that they identified as successful:

Prairie dog reduction strategies (lethal)

Lethal approaches are seen by many as working well. Poisoning around houses and the application of rodenticide is seen as successful in killing individual prairie dogs, but not in managing the towns and the species' population expansion. The plague was mentioned as an effective method that reduces prairie dog populations.

Communication/collaboration

Previous efforts by the Forest Service to include stakeholders were mentioned as working well. Inclusion of stakeholders with different interests and using collaborative approaches to work towards solutions was seen by several to be successful. People mentioned that the USFS works well with stakeholders individually. Some interviewees were positive about efforts for transparency in the decision making processes, translocation permitting, and decision screens that have been implemented.

Conservation activities and strategies (non-lethal approaches included)

Conservation strategies including the large amount of acres being managed and the strategies to prevent habitat fragmentation were mentioned as working well. Some identified the use of non-lethal control methods such as translocation of prairie dogs from boundary and conflict areas to the core management areas as successful strategies. The presence and increase of prairie dogs was mentioned as successful in improving habitat for the swift fox, plover, and other species.

The Plan that already exists

Plan components that were working well include the Plan's perceived balanced approach to the issue, the diversity of approaches and tools and designation of prairie dog priority areas.

Monitoring and learning

Monitoring the population numbers was considered beneficial including looking at the impact of prairie dogs on other species, and looking at various techniques to manage them.

6. What has not been working well so far?

Collaboration/Communication

- Some believed the USFS-permittee relationship to be non-existent. It was suggested that USFS has not engaged permittees.
- Landowners perceive a lack of transparency on the part of the USFS, and a lack of knowledge about the Forest Service's own policies and procedures.
- Inconsistent communication by the USFS.
- The ID Team does not include any NGO's. NGO's are frustrated about this because they have dedicated time and money to the process and management implementation.
- The perception that there are USFS staff who do not have the ability to collaborate with landowners, NGO's, state officials, commissions and wildlife agencies. This was identified as the cause of many problems.
- One experience that was shared was "in the past the USFS would meet with producers, then with NGO's in separate meetings". This was considered ineffective because it was easier to demonize someone one doesn't know than when people are known and with whom there is some kind of connection.
- Conversely, meeting with everyone present was not considered successful by all because of high levels of emotion during the meetings and a perceived lack of agreement between parties.

Trust/broken promises and relationships

- Some mentioned that USFS employees are Federal employees, and on that basis not trusted by some. When these employees get caught in the middle of opposing interests or don't make decisions, it seems to reinforce this lack of trust.
- One stakeholder said "There were promises made to manage the Grassland as grazing lands for livestock and that promise certainly is not being followed through as we have a massive loss of vegetation on Thunder Basin with prairie dogs out of control."

- Landowners, permittees and the State are perceived as too impatient to give control strategies enough time to evaluate their effectiveness.

Management strategies (or lack of)

- A stakeholder said “Categorization of colonies may not work well because it becomes kind of messy.”
- Some landowners are emphatically opposed to trans-locating prairie dogs to more concentrated Federal prairie dog management areas and further away from private lands.
- Closure of some public areas is creating problems with land users.
- Putting powder on the prairie dogs so they don’t get sick is not seen as effective or worth the time and money for implementation.
- It was mentioned “The Forest Service is not being given time and space to figure out best management practices by outside forces, who should not be allowed to have the power to stop the Forest Service.”
- A perceived lack of integration of a multi-species management plan which looks critically at the number of prairie dogs and populated acres needed to sustain prairie dogs, and related species such as plovers. Some feel the issue needs to be looked at from a landscape perspective.
- The USFS budget is not big enough to allow them to implement what is in the Strategy and the Plan. Surrounding landowners then have the impression of unmanaged prairie dog populations. Where USFS is implementing management and is being deemed effective is perceived as negative by others.
- Some feel strongly there should be a shooting ban, others feel equally strongly there should not.
- Lack of ability to use lethal means to control prairie dog populations.
- One person commented that there have been few Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) yet as a result of the US Fish and Wildlife Service responsiveness.
- Vegetative barriers and fencing efforts have not worked, especially close to private property.

Information issues

- Some respondents understand the need to increase prairie dog numbers but do not believe they need as many acres as the USFS says it does with one commenting that “The fact that the USFS cannot pay for the personnel to implement on that scale underscores this point.”
- The plan’s assumption of an average of 8 prairie dogs per acre is considered by some as a considerable underestimate.

Black-Footed Ferrets

- Several stakeholders felt “this is not a black-footed ferret issue, there never have been black footed ferrets on the Grassland. This is a prairie dog issue.”

State vs USFS agency issues

- The fast rotation or turnover of USFS employees and decision makers creates a lack of continuity in negotiations and implementation.
- Several interviewees felt the USFS had not used its authority to allow the Strategy to have enough time for results to be observed: “There is a dictatorship by the State of the USFS. Because of the State there has not been the patience to stay the course through any management plan to see if management works or not. Long-term land use plans need 5 – 10 years to know if they work. Now there is an amendment rewrite in which NGO’s are not participating which is dissatisfying and yet of the group that has been meeting, some have walked away. Political forces have made it difficult to implement the current strategy”. These respondents added that in their view Thunder Basin prairie dog management is of national significance.

7. Is there a specific prairie dog management plan that you know of that is worth using as an example? Either on the Grassland or in another geographic location? If so, why is it a good example?

Two responses related to plans on the Thunder Basin Grassland itself: the historical management before the USFS put a focus on prairie dogs and the BLM 2001 Prairie Dog Plan on Thunder Basin Grassland.

Other grasslands, including National Grasslands, were also mentioned. These were the Conata Basin, Buffalo Gap National Grasslands in South Dakota. Here the use of fencing, shooting and closing schedules as well as buffers on a designated ferret recovery area were referred to.

Respondents also mentioned Pawnee National Grassland and an arrangement in Shirley Basin with a Section 10J agreement on private lands, but this is in relation to white tailed prairie dogs that have different behavior patterns that are considered less damaging by livestock operators. One respondent brought up prairie dog management plans that use non-lethal means in Santa Fe, Telluride, Boulder County and Broomfield.

Private land strategies included efforts in south east corner of Colorado where private land owners receive a small incentive to allow prairie dogs on private land and not raise as many cattle. Funding comes from NRCS, part of a wildlife program. Some private landowners maintain a small number of prairie dog towns to benefit other wildlife like burrowing owls. CCAA arrangements have also been made with USFWS on private lands, allowing private landowner to manage based on this agreement for grass for prairie dogs and livestock. A maximum amount of prairie dogs per acre are agreed to, any more are controlled by USFWS.

8. In your opinion, what does successful prairie dog management look like?

One respondent mentioned that it “looks like green grass waving in the wind every spring. And about one tenth of one percent of all acres covered by prairie dogs.” Another said it would entail three prairie dogs per acre, leaving enough forage for wildlife and livestock and that will provide for the plover, burrowing owl and the prairie dog. Another said a well distributed and viable population of prairie dogs throughout their historic range.

A successful prairie dog management plan to many respondents would only be achievable through an inclusive decision making process that included dialogue, transparency, all stakeholders involved, whereby no political forces influence the process or the management that results. As one stakeholder expressed, the management of prairie dogs would be assessed by “everyone getting along.”

Other criteria were defining the number of prairie dogs, habitat issues and other related subjects based on science. One respondent suggested the use of transects to explore how many dogs there are per acre.

Some felt it would include strategies that allow all tools on the table including shooting, poisoning and other management tools. Having an effective means of managing plague over long term to minimize temporal population fluctuations would be part of this. On the other hand conservation group members mentioned non-lethal management tools only, large contiguous habitat for prairie dogs and associated species to thrive such as black footed ferret and bison.

Boundary management and control measures were frequently mentioned. Keeping the prairie dogs away from private and state boundaries was a fundamental objective to many stakeholders, and at the cost of local residents and tax payers in those counties. Realistic buffers were needed in selected places where encroachment occurs. Others framed it as integrated management whereby there are areas with core population and areas more open to boundary control for people who aren't interested on having them on their private property. Because prairie dogs are susceptible to plague, use dusting and/or vaccines was identified as an acceptable strategy. It was important in this framework to hold on to some base population to replace lost prairie dog populations for ferrets.

Stakeholders on all sides said an indication of successful prairie dog management would be that landowners would be comfortable with their ability to manage their own land and also be able to graze their permits. Landowners would feel that a reasonable deal was made and be able to trust the USFS to stick to a plan stakeholders had agreed on.

A number of respondents said a successful plan would contain a long-term ecosystem management approach whereby the amount of prairie dogs on the landscape is guided by the needs of the species that are dependent on prairie dogs such as ferrets and mountain plovers. Using a single-species approach where a plan would focus on the prairie dog alone would not work because it would need to include ferrets, sage grouse, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk and mountain plover. They felt these species will see conservation pressures in the next few years because of declines range-wide in these species. In this approach effective boundary control by the USFS would be an important tool. It would also need to allow for density control instead of using acres as a surrogate and include

research that addresses what kind of weight cattle lose when grazing in a pasture with prairie dogs. Lastly it would include an understanding of how topography and soil types influence prairie dog reproduction and distribution.

Perceptions about Collaborative Processes

Collaboration was defined during the interview as follows to all respondents:

“Collaboration can often mean different things to different people. We want you to think about a process that will allow you to work with others in agreeing on the problems to be solved, developing options that can work to solve those problems, evaluating those options, and then reaching agreement on the best path forward. It is an inclusive process. Collaboration can be achieved even if other parties may or may not share your perspective on how the prairie dogs can and should be dealt with.”

1. Do you have experience in working with individuals from different backgrounds, values, or positions to find solutions on tough issues?

Thirty-three respondents said they had worked toward multi-party agreements related to conservation, land management and the livestock industry. Legislators discussed working with members from different parties. Six said they did not have much experience in this and ten said they had none.

2. Do you believe that it is possible for all of the parties in the issue of prairie dog management to work collaboratively and discuss the issues in good faith? Why or why not?

Yes

Most believed it was possible, including a number of landowners and permittees. A number felt it was the only option. It would require representatives of all stakeholder groups who were capable of working with other, very different stakeholders. One respondent said, “...with the right people, the right facilitators and the right process. This can’t be a technical solution but an adaptive one, in a way that includes humans, listening, engagement, joint solutions. It has to be collaborative.”

Some were worried that the USFS was incapable of compromise whereas others felt the USFS had been collaborative in the past. Others thought that people could negotiate in good faith but it would have to involve all stakeholders they would need to go into it without preconceived ideas about the outcome. All parties need to be professional, polite and understand other people's point of view. Several mentioned it was possible but it would be difficult. A number stressed that the Governor's office should not interfere and let a process run its course because "...people know what they are talking about and have good hearts even if they may differ in values."

No

There was a small number of landowners who felt people could only work in good faith "if the working group is tiered towards the people that are directly impacted by the decisions," which in their opinion were "the residents who make a living off the land, state reps, grazing association, weed and pest and maybe soil conservation". They felt that "...there's no openness or honesty. NGO's have to recognize our property rights which go back to 1880. USFS doesn't want to talk about laws, and the NGO's don't want to talk about killing cute furry critters. On Federal lands where the most affected stakeholders are the grazers, the NGO's have nothing to lose. Ranchers have everything to lose."

Maybe

Although wishing it to be feasible, a number of respondents raised doubts that it was because, as one respondent put it "people are worried of discussing things in good faith and then different decisions are made anyway by decision makers in Federal agencies" and only "if there is someone to keep order, some kind of structure". Due to the emotions on both sides it would be necessary to create a process that would separate people from the problem, have ground rules, discuss interests instead of positions, with very strong facilitation.

Others felt it would depend to a considerable degree on identifying the individuals within the groups who can be open to new ideas and negotiate in good faith. It was important to find people from all stakeholder groups who are not entrenched and can work from interests rather than position. There was doubt among some that such people could be found within all the stakeholder groups. They felt broad input would be necessary and compromise at the end but that not all stakeholders would be willing to do that.

3. What are the key issues you believe need to be discussed and resolved in order for this collaborative effort to be successful?

A number wanted all management tools, lethal and non-lethal, to be up for discussion. Specific issues raised included prairie dog encroachment on private and state lands, boundary control, plague as a human health concern, funding for management, the long-term management objectives of the USFS and USFWS, prairie dog population and habitat needs and land consolidation. Included were also the legal origins of National Grasslands and their ownership, management, decision making, governance.

From a grazing perspective, continued grazing on the Grassland was mentioned. This included allotment management and economics of grazing on Federal land, private land owner and permittee rights and number and spatial distribution of prairie dogs.

Some respondents expressed the need for assurances that there will be a plan in place for the long run, no matter who the USFS staff are, that is implemented through a working group. Some respondents felt there was a lack of trust in both directions: motives of both conservation community and landowners had been misrepresented and there are now misperceptions. It was important that everyone's interests were heard by all. Some respondents felt that prairie dog management was less a matter of issues but more a need for a process that facilitated effective communication and negotiation.

The last type of issues raised were about ecosystem and multi-species management. This would include the connection between ferrets and prairie dogs, sustainability of grasslands, the relationship between prairie dogs and other species, various multi-species approaches, protecting the sage grouse and a statewide 10J designation regarding black-footed ferrets.

4. Do you believe that these issues are negotiable?

Yes

Most respondents felt that the issues were negotiable. Some felt that the two stakeholder groups that would be least able to negotiate would be landowners and the USFS. The landowners were perceived to be less able to negotiate because “they see prairie dogs as dangerous to their enterprise” and did not always recognize the Grasslands’ management needing to provide for multiple uses including wildlife. Some felt the USFS was inflexible.

No

The respondents who felt the issues were not negotiable were concerned they would have to relinquish too much, thought science was not negotiable, that the USFS didn’t care enough about local enterprises or simply stated that a “large prairie dog plan is illegal”.

Maybe/Some Things

Some felt that a Section 10J strategy and boundary control were management strategies that should not be up for negotiation, but everything else was. Others felt it depended on whether the USFS would follow through on agreements and would have the funding to do so. Others said it was only possible if participants found a common understanding of what the biophysical properties are that determine how cattle, prairie dogs, and associated species interact. Without it they would not be able to find commonality on the outcomes and collaboration would be ineffectual.

One landowner said it might be possible with the USFS and the permittees but no one else. The landowner felt that it would behoove the USFS to do so because landowners will not sue but “the NGO’s will”.

5. What do you think might be the most significant barriers to collaboration regarding the prairie dog issue?

Lack of trust between ranchers and environmental groups was specifically mentioned and a concern about lawsuits between ranchers, USFS and NGO’s.

Respondents identified different sets of science and information that they consider to be reliable and valid information so there were questions about how to reach a common scientific understanding.

The belief that having prairie dogs on the landscape as an indication of an unhealthy functioning ecosystem was part of this. Another set of knowledge that was not equally understood, if at all, are policies such as NEPA, ESA and internal USFS policies.

A number of respondents identified the USFS as a barrier to collaboration. These respondents had little trust in the USFS due to their past experience, perceived the USFS to act without being interested in other stakeholders, having its own bigger agenda and/or also felt the decision makers were in Denver and Washington D.C. and were not familiar with local conditions.

Another barrier was perceived to be other stakeholders' behavior. These respondents mentioned behaviors tending to exhibit extreme positions on either side, an unwillingness to compromise, entrenched positions and hot tempers were mentioned. In general these respondents were concerned about stakeholders' willingness to openly communicate.

There were process related concerns that surfaced as well. Respondents worried that there would not be adequate representation from all stakeholder groups or that there would be too many people and interests at the table or that there would not be clarity of interests, objectives and goals. Some respondents brought up the concern that there is sometimes a disparity in communication skills between some of the local stakeholders and highly educated people from outside the area.

Other Barriers Mentioned:

- People not understanding issues with the loss of grasses on the Grassland and invasion of prairie dogs on private land.
- Interference from state entities.
- Pre-determined outcomes.
- USFWS: don't have flexibility or a good understanding of agriculture.

6. How can those barriers be overcome?

Communication: Bring in people with communication skills who can ensure all stakeholders can communicate their interests, knowledge and opinions in effective manners. Respondents felt that it was necessary to “sit down and hash it out” with real and honest communication. Several mentioned the need for a facilitator to help ensure language and concepts mean the same thing to everyone through clarification. One respondent felt communication needed to be face to face, not solely information gathering sessions, as with this assessment. Another respondent suggested small collaborative steps so people realize they have more in common with each other than they think.

The “right” people: A number of respondents said that there needed to be good representatives at the table who could represent their stakeholder group, but had different ideas of who the “right” people were to have at the table:

- Need to have the right government personnel involved.
- UWFWS has to be in the room with decision making authority.
- Not have too strong a tie between USFS biologists and NGO’s.
- Work with USFS, permittees and government agencies using coordination, based on law. NGO’s muddy the waters.
- One person mentioned “Private enterprise drives democracy and this is about local enterprises. So we need a small working group with a good balance of people who have the biggest stake out there, the landowners”.

A willingness to compromise and collaborate depends first on whether stakeholders were willing to sit down with each other in the first place and to put the past aside, said some respondents. A few felt that politics could form a barrier and felt that to encourage and facilitate collaboration, everyone needed to let collaboration run its course and not meddle in it.

Creating a structured process that would facilitate communication between all stakeholders. The structure was important, as was leadership through a good facilitator.

Some respondents identified a need for incentives to come together. Examples were land exchanges, land consolidation, payment to landowners to maintain prairie dogs in strategic areas and

a petition to list the prairie dogs as an ESA species. Other respondents felt that when over time agreements were reached, the resulting funding and implementation would show that collaborative prairie dog management could work, which would incentivize stakeholders to stay at the table.

Other

- Funding – need more money for USFS implementation.
- Dealing with the numbers not just acres.
- Look at those additional species, not just prairie dogs.

7. What would you consider to be a successful outcome from a collaborative process?

Generally, all stakeholders see an agreement as the most successful outcome of a collaborative process. The process to reach that agreement would have the following characteristics:

- Develop a common understanding of how the ecological and agricultural system works and understand what parts they don't agree on.
- Achieving some degree of consensus that 90% of folks involved can live with and agree to work towards together.
- Get all the stakeholders at the table and work through a process and come up with a plan that will be worked with, that identifies the tools.
- A short-term plan on where the treatment needs to happen on the TBNG boundaries and implement it. Long-term an adaptive model was needed to get through years with limited moisture and prairie dogs.

Whether stakeholders were landowners and permittees concerned about private property rights and income, or whether stakeholders were concerned about the well-being of prairie dog populations, most stakeholders indicated that the first and fundamental aspect of an agreement would define the sites of boundaries, and methods of prairie dog control in those areas. The agreement would allow private surface owners to manage their prairie dogs without having to conduct boundary control if they weren't part of the habitat enhancement area.

Other possible aspects of an agreement that were brought up were:

- Agreement would consist of a large-scale plan that allows for prairie dogs and prairie dog habitat, habitat of other low cover species where black-footed ferrets are reintroduced and landowners are appropriately protected from prairie dog encroachment.
- An agreement that balances the interests. A plan that looks at the management of various species, the livestock industry, energy development, recreation. An outcome where ranchers are not upset about USFS policies, and can do their business without having to worry about USFS increasing the density of the prairie dog population. And viable prairie dog populations that are well distributed on the other hand with viable and well distributed livestock.
- Create an agreement with an adaptive strategy and give it enough time to see if it's effective.
- The number and acres of prairie dogs are defined. Some people had specific numbers in mind e.g. 3 dogs per acre. One lessee wanted a lowering of the number of holes allowed per acre.
- Landowners would be appropriately protected from prairie dog encroachment. It would contain a population level of prairie dogs that sustains the health of prairie dogs and also habitat for other species and AUMs.
- A few local stakeholders saw a successful outcome as control of the prairie dogs and getting grass back on the grasslands. They felt the USFS should manage the grassland for the purpose "it was dedicated, and that is to raise grass for forage".

8. What might the potential consequences be to you and others if a collaborative process is not undertaken or is not successful?

More dis/mistrust and unwillingness to work together: Diverse stakeholders felt the result would be a complete loss of trust between all stakeholders, any management actions taken by the USFS and the situation would remain unresolved. Some stakeholders pointed out that this would be a disadvantage to local residents but also to the USFS itself.

Lawsuits and intervention from State: Respondents from widely different stakeholder groups said the result would be lawsuits, which no one thought would provide long term solutions, antagonism would increase and a money would be spent on lawyers rather than on Grassland issues.

Alternatively the prairie dog might get listed in which case the State would come under pressure from the Congressional delegation to provide the agricultural industry with some type of relief.

Nothing will change: Some respondents felt nothing would change, arguments would continue and nothing would get accomplished.

Loss of livelihoods: a number of ranchers and permittees were concerned that families would lose ranches because AUM's would be cut on the TBNG.

Several mentioned there would be ecological implications: if prairie dog populations were reduce, there might be an associated reduction in other species such as burrowing owls and mountain plover. Some ranchers were concerned the Grassland would be denuded by prairie dogs, others felt sure the plague would take care of the prairie dog populations but didn't feel that was necessary.

Some mentioned policy implications: the black-footed ferret would not be delisted and the prairie dog would be listed as an endangered species under ESA. Both would enhance antipathy and mistrust between landowners/permittees and environmental groups.

A number of stakeholders felt collaboration was not necessary; they could work with the USFS, counties and state entities alone and did not think collaboration, as defined, was needed.

9. Would you be interested in participating in a collaborative effort? If not, what would need to happen to encourage your participation? If "No", go to question 13.

Yes 37 Participants

Respondents who answered "yes" were from the following stakeholder groups: ranchers, all State agencies, County Commissioners from Niobrara, Campbell and Converse Counties, coal industry, all environmental groups, grazing associations, Campbell and Converse County Conservation Districts, USFS, Rochelle Community for Working Sustainability (RCOWS), Thunder Basing Grassland Prairie Ecosystem Association (TBGPEA), USFS and UW scientists, state Legislators, BLM and Weed and Pest. NRCS and WGFD were interested in providing technical support.

No 3 Participants: One person was going to retire but would find replacement and cheer the process on. Two ranchers preferred a conversation between USFS and ranchers only.

Maybe **2 Participants:** it depended on the time investment, and for one state agency it was important to know how the issues were framed in order to determine if it was appropriate for them.

What is your incentive/motivation to participate in a collaborative effort?

Duty as an elected official/ government employee/organization: although a number of respondents spoke from their professional capacities they also would add e.g. that “it’s the right thing to do”.

Protect livelihood/rights/interests: a number of respondents felt they needed to protect their interests and grazing rights on the Grassland because they were concerned that otherwise decisions would be made that would hurt their livelihood and families. As one respondent said: “It’s better to be at the table than on the menu”.

Others were motivated by wanting to do the right thing which was to find resolution and be able to move forward positively because “the price of doing it wrong is far too great”. One respondent wanted to find “...a long term solution that includes healthy wildlife populations, satisfied land owners and a working solution for the community”. Others spoke of the hope to not have to worry about prairie dogs anymore in the future.

Be helpful/offer experience and expertise: Some felt it was their job to help make the use of scientific information more feasible. Others wanted to help ensure that “folks up there don’t lose their place, and I want to see right done by the resource” or wanted to find a plan that can be implemented because it is supported by the people and move it forward. A plan with conservation goals in harmony with people on the landscape.

A few respondents wanted permission for expanded pesticide use.

10. Because the prairie dog issue is quite complex, it is likely that that a collaborative process could involve multiple meetings lasting several hours each. These meetings might also involve several hours of travel time. Would you be willing to commit to regular meetings over the course of several months?

Almost all who said they were willing to join in a collaborative effort, said they could do it. Some people have to drive long distances so that was a barrier, another was calving and haying seasons, bad weather. More feasible if they are full day meetings rather than 2 hour meetings, more productive. Some need permission from supervisors.

11. Will you have time or financial constraints that will prevent you from participating?

Very few respondents identified time or financial constraints as an issue for their participation in a collaborative process. Many said this was worth the time and money. Implementation increases money constraints.

12. Collaborative efforts as a general rule are inclusive. Who do you think needs to be at the table for progress to be created?

Some respondents said all the different stakeholders should participate which included: grazing associations, Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association, ranchers, USFS, USFWS, WGFD, WWF, Defenders of Wildlife, Humane Society, Prairie Dog Coalition, permittees, political officials, county commissioners, landowners, state agencies, county weed and pest offices, Governor's office, the University to provide expertise, local recreationists, conservation district, soil conservation districts, recreationalists, sportsman groups, and industry representatives. More than half the respondents include environmental/conservation non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in the list of stakeholders. Some felt legal support might be helpful.

Others felt "all the different stakeholders" included all of the above except NGO's because their representatives do not live in the area, and are not considered stakeholders who have much to lose. Stakeholders needed to include all organizations that have political authority or a vested economic interest. Groups of parties identified among these respondents include:

- USFS, landowners and a professional facilitator.
- Ranchers, WGFD, USFWS, BLM, USFS, State land office.
- State agencies, publically elected officials, the Governor's office, WGFD.

- Permittees, state land board commissioner, county commissioners, grazing associations, weed and pest, conservation districts, WGFD, USFS.

13. What components would need to be considered for a collaborative process to be successful, e.g. open public meetings, use stakeholder group representatives, facilitator, or other components?

Components mentioned include:

- Strong facilitator
- A neutral third party as a facilitator or convener
- Clear rules on how decisions will be made
- A decision on the need for a chair of the committee
- The process needs the right working group

14. What would be the best possible outcome of this process after the first year? After 5 years?

After 1 year

People coming together, talking, and finding middle ground: a large number of people want to bring a group together and start developing relationships. Coming together would also result in identifying the issues to be resolved, identifying people's interests in prairie dog management, and discussing possible tools for prairie dog management. Others want to see an open and inclusive group and see that the USFS is willing to provide flexibility in developing different management methods.

Identify areas of agreed upon science (boundaries, numbers) and data needs: Based on agreed science, key habitat could be defined as well as how prairie dogs would be controlled, and the number of prairie dogs.

Develop a plan: Some want to start developing a plan within the first year. Plan components identified would establish a boundary, develop new solutions, identify "a reasonable number of acres for a retention area," and find solutions agreeable to all parties. One idea was to develop a short term action plan, a mid-range plan, and long range plan.

Other: A few interviewees do not want to see the black-footed ferret, and others want to see less human intervention in the natural processes in the first year.

After 5 years

Implementation of agreements was seen as an ideal outcome after 5 years for many people interviewed. People identified the need for a formalized process which included an adaptive management approach with an implementation plan and active control of boundary issues.

Trust/people participating and happy with the process: if after five years people are still participating, there is trust between parties, and effective communication is still maintained, many people would be happy with the outcome of a collaborative effort. Others want to see permittees and land owners satisfied with the management strategies and their effectiveness.

Healthy Habitat/Ecosystem: For some, five years of management and monitoring will ideally result in a better understanding of the biophysical properties of the system. Several people want to see a “healthy, viable prairie dog population with healthy rangeland condition that allows for grazing and game and species.” Or as another put it “a habitat/ecosystem that would support ungulate wildlife, sage chickens, cows, people, prairie dogs, mountain plover, burrowing owl.” A few want to have enough prairie dogs on the grassland in five years to reintroduce ferrets.

15. What would be the worst possible outcome after one year? 5 years?

After 1 year

No implementation: The status quo or no decisions made for management of prairie dogs is considered a worst case scenario by many. One stakeholder responded “...no funding to manage the prairie dogs and they get out of control and move onto private land while the government is not wanting to use any tools to manage prairie dogs, and the program is being abused because there’s no leadership, no management.”

No willingness to work together, mistrust: A worst case scenario would be a planning process that doesn’t consider local concerns and/or no one wanting to work together, resulting in a failed process that lead to deeper divisions between groups, and at the extreme, civil disobedience.

Loss of livelihood: Concerns that after one year of work there would be a continued expansion of prairie dogs, especially onto private land. Many worry about “more bare ground” that destroys the livelihood of grazers and permittees. Another worst possible outcome that was mentioned was losing grazing permits.

After 5 years

No progress made: is a major concern. Many interviewees do not want to see a waste of time and money, communication failures between parties, and a process that “dead ends” with no common ground or willingness to work together.

Lawsuits: were mentioned several times as the worst possible outcome of a collaborative effort after five years. One respondent said the result of a lawsuit would be “Someone may have won and someone may have lost, but we haven’t fixed anything.”

Loss of livelihood: is also concern after five years.

Prairie Dog listed: as a threatened or endangered species through the Endangered Species Act was mentioned as a worst possible outcome.

16. Who would you recommend as a convener of this process other than the USFS?

Responses included:

- Professional facilitator generally
- A neutral party, without anything at stake
- Someone at the University of Wyoming
- Ruckelshaus Institute
- USFS
- County commissioners
- Thunder Basin Grassland Prairie Ecosystem Association
- State of Wyoming
- Conservation Districts
- Wyoming Game and Fish

- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Bob Budd
- The Governor's office
- The Pellatz family

When asked this question, people also noted people or organizations they thought should **not** convene a collaborative process, including:

- County Weed and Pest Boards
- Wyoming Game and Fish
- NGOs
- USFS
- A ranching organization
- State agency or the Governor's office
- Wyoming Department of Agriculture

Information Sharing

17. What technical information would you need in order to participate effectively in a collaborative process?

Process information (History and how decisions are made):

- A history of what's been done and how well it's working
- Information about the facilitator/whoever is running the meeting/ process information
- How the USFS makes decisions

Maps

- Land ownership maps
- Existing and historic prairie dog colonies
- Property boundaries
- Distribution and abundance of different species

Baseline of prairie dog and species population and natural history of the species

- Current population of prairie dogs
- Information on the needs of the other species present in prairie dog towns/habitat
- Prairie dog interaction with livestock
- Prairie dog science and management science

Current management (grazing and prairie dogs)

- Any existing monitoring data
- Information about each lease and how much they grazed
- Rangeland health information
- Agricultural production statistics for the area
- Average weights of cattle from different areas to compare to prairie dog numbers
- Current management strategies of prairie dogs

Experiences and information from people on the ground

- Stories and experiences of people on the ground, pictures
- Pictures from land owners

Other

- Economic impacts to stakeholders from prairie dogs and management strategies
- Examples from other areas where management has worked well

18. What studies or other sources of information do you believe are credible resources that should be used as a basis for discussion?

Scientific Literature

- Primary sources, i.e. research published in peer reviewed scientific journals.
- Secondary sources, i.e. monitoring data from Thunder Basin if methodology is adequately explained.

Ag Extension/ UW

- “Tex Taylor has done some research the amount of forage to sustain one prairie dog, converted to AUM basis.”
- There is a lot of Ag Extension information
- The Agricultural Research Station

Land Owner experiences and observations

- “There are some resources like Bob Harshbarger. His son has done a lot of scientific research in relation to prairie dogs. The science like that could be useful I’d like to see more credibility given to local information. Don’t use tallgrass prairie stuff when we are one tick away from being a desert.”

Other Sources

- Shirley Basin Revised Black-footed Ferret Recovery Plan as a case study
- People from other areas that have experienced similar issues

19. Do you believe that there are studies or other sources of information that are generally accepted by many people as reliable, but you feel are not reliable or are misleading? If yes, which studies, or what information do you feel is misleading?

General statements about data reliability

- Concerns regarding the reliability of grey literature.
- Misinformation about prairie dog breeding habits and plague.
- Any kind of data or information the USFS is currently using.
- How information is interpreted rather than the information itself.
- Information that is not specific to the Thunder Basin.
- Information from NGO’s.
- Information from local ranch monitoring efforts.

Specific papers mentioned as questionable:

- “Derner and Detling’s 2006 study talks about livestock gains and prairie dogs. The study doesn’t represent what we see on the grassland like Thunder Basin. It’s a misleading set of findings.”

- Derner, J. D., Detling, J. K., & Antolin, M. F. (2006). Are livestock weight gains affected by black-tailed prairie dogs?. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 4(9), 459-464.
- The paper, “The prairie dog story: do we have it right? Counteracts the USFS and their findings.”
 - Vermeire, L. T., Heitschmidt, R. K., Johnson, P. S., & Sowell, B. F. (2004). The prairie dog story: do we have it right?. *BioScience*, 54(7), 689-695.

Other:

20. Do you have any questions for me or other information you would like us to know?

Nothing was added that was different to what has already been provided.

DISCUSSION

When assessing whether a collaborative process is appropriate for a particular issue, there are a number of questions that must be addressed. In determining answers to these questions, the analyst can begin to outline the dynamics of the conflict, which will in turn help determine the current potential for collaboration as well as highlight what potential barriers to a successful collaboration might exist. These questions are outlined below, along with the conclusions the Ruckelshaus Institute has drawn regarding prairie dog management on The Grassland.

- *Are the issues clear?*

Yes, the issues underlying the Thunder Basin conflict are clearly defined and seemingly well understood by the majority of the interviewed stakeholders.

- *Is the timing appropriate?*

There is a clear sense of urgency expressed by the stakeholders that indicates the issues are ripe for discussion and the stakeholders eager to find a solution. There are several incentives for stakeholders to be interested in a solution-seeking process:

- To avoid listing of black-tailed prairie dogs
- To delist the black-footed ferret
- To find solutions so prairie dogs do not encroach on private and State lands
- To find solutions that allow livestock owners to optimize economic gains from their animals.
- To take advantage of the interest this situation assessment has created in an inclusive process that creates real progress for all stakeholders.
- To take advantage of a year that has benefitted from generous spring rains. This may help to temporarily take the edge off stakeholder concerns and allow them to find solutions in advance of less generous years.

- *Are the issues negotiable?*

There are some stakeholders who are entrenched in their positions. However, on a spectrum where solutions might arise between the Grassland being open and available for as many prairie dogs as possible, and a Grassland available for livestock only, there is no livestock related

stakeholder who has told us that they don't want any prairie dogs, nor have we spoken to a prairie-dog advocate who wanted all livestock grazing removed from the Grassland. Quite the opposite, even the most entrenched livestock owner allowed some space on their private land for a few prairie dog holes for the sake of a burrowing owl, and even the most ardent advocate for prairie dogs expressed the importance of livestock owners being able to make a satisfactory living.

- *Can the participants be identified? Will they participate in good faith?*

Interested and invested stakeholders are easily identified, and many have expressed willingness to participate in a dialogue on how the Thunder Basin prairie dog management areas should be managed.

- *What is the history of the situation?*

The history associated with Thunder Basin is extensive, spanning decades of conflict and controversy on how the Grassland should be managed, especially in relation to prairie dogs. This history is a significant contributor to the contentious and distrusting relationships among many of the stakeholders.

- *What is the level of trust among participants?*

The level of trust between certain stakeholder groups is very low. Differences in values have contributed to a longstanding distrust between the ranching community and the environmental conservation community. Additionally the USFS has lost trust with the ranching and local community due to past perceived inconsistent management and communication, perceived inappropriate communication, inaction and lack of funds for management. The willingness on the part of most stakeholders to be part of a process indicates a window of opportunity to regain trust.

- *What is the level of contention?*

Contention between certain stakeholder groups is high. Again, this can be attributed to the general differences in values and approaches taken in the past by the USFS.

- *Is there political support for resolution?*

There is local political support for a solution that will improve the relationships among stakeholders, reliable grazing for land owners and permittees, safety for residents and a sustainable prairie dog population on The Grassland. There is also support from the Governor's office, State agencies and Federal agencies.

- *Are resources available to support collaboration?*

Conversations with the USFS have indicated that there may be sufficient support within the agency to support a collaborative process.

- *Are key decision makers willing to use the process?*

Key decision makers have expressed an interest and willingness to engage in a collaborative process to seek solutions on the management of Thunder Basin. Whether key decision makers would be willing to use an adaptive management approach and take the time to learn whether agreements are reaching objectives would need to be confirmed between the USFS, the State and County Commissioners.

- *What are key issues that need to be addressed in a collaborative process?*

These include:

- Location and number of acres and prairie dogs required for a successful black footed ferret reintroduction process and to sustain other important species on the Grassland.
- The tools that can be relied on to keep prairie dogs from encroaching on private and State lands. Local residents want more tools than are available to them in the 2009 Strategy.
- The location of boundaries and the management of those boundaries.
- Grazing availability for permittees.
- A strategy that includes inclusive and flexible adaptive management based on measured and observed conditions of prairie dogs and vegetation and any other measures agreed upon.
- An inclusive approach to prairie dog management that includes available AUM's, other species, soil and vegetation conditions and other factors.

- Assurances that whatever management is agreed to, is conducted consistently even if staff members change within the USFS.
- A process that allows stakeholders, including the USFS, to discuss these questions, create a common understanding of the issues, explore options, reach agreement and adapt the agreement based on changes in learning and conditions.

Barriers to Collaboration

The criteria outlined above indicate a collaborative process is worth initiating however there are a few potential barriers to consider.

- *Will parties negotiate in good faith?*

One barrier to collaboration is the willingness and ability of parties to negotiate in good faith. As noted above, there is little trust among local landowners and permittees in either the conservation groups or the USFS. In addition, although a majority of diverse stakeholders were willing to participate in a collaborative process, past experiences have created a wariness based on a concern that positions will become more rigid, emotions will get out of control, and more damage will be done than progress will be created. The stakes are considered very high among especially local livestock interests, but also among conservationists. Past meetings and related emotional scenes have created some distrust that negotiations are possible, and that some stakeholders are able to negotiate based on interests rather than positions. Hence, a number of stakeholders have answered this question in the positive, but only if there is a clear process that all stakeholders support, and a facilitator to create a positive environment.

- *Better Alternatives to Negotiated Agreement*

Another aspect of parties' willingness to negotiate in good faith is related to Better Alternatives to Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). Collaboration is a learning and negotiation process, and if stakeholders have strong BATNA's they may not be willing to negotiate because they believe there are alternative approaches that may be more effective in meeting their interests. Understanding these alternatives is important to take into consideration when evaluating the feasibility of a collaborative process. BATNA's that were brought up in the interviews included working with the Governor's Office and the Wyoming County Commissioner Association and going through the courts. For the USFS to decide whether to engage in a collaborative process, it will need to know that it will be

worth all stakeholders' time and effort, including for the Forest Service itself. If stakeholders use their BATNA's instead of going through a collaborative learning and negotiation process, this could mean for example that court decisions would determine prairie dog management rather than place-based solutions. This is something that the USFS and all other stakeholders will need to consider because the opportunity we believe now exists for collaborative problem-solving in relation to prairie dog management on the TBNG would be lost if those alternatives were chosen.

- *The proposed amendment to the 2009 Prairie Dog Management Strategy*

As noted above, agricultural and local interests have been working together with the USFS to create an amendment to the 2009 Amendment and Strategy that they think would better address private landowner and State interests. Although this approach is very understandable considering the management and funding inconsistencies that the State, private landowners and agricultural interests are deeply concerned about, this may also create a barrier to sustainable solutions that do not involve lawsuits. In our interviews we have found landowners and USFS permittees, county commissioners and State agency representatives who want to avoid listing of the prairie dog, do not aspire to a Grassland devoid of all prairie dogs just not on their lands or allotment, have no objection to black footed ferrets in the area if there is a 10J designation under ESA, and are cognizant of the need to address a sustainable prairie dog population on the Grassland. Many wish to pursue these objectives in more articulated manner in an amendment. However we have also found in our interviews not only conservation and environmental stakeholders who were frustrated with this “amendment to the Amendment” process that does not allow different value orientations into the discussions, but ranchers, county commissioners, State representatives and others. The concern was expressed that within the context of the long and contentious history of prairie dog management on the Grassland, the exclusion of these different value orientations and interests will lead to law suits and more distrust, halting all prairie dog management on the Grassland and increasing acrimony. While the landowners and agricultural interests felt that their needs were not adequately met with the 2009 Amendment, other interests feel the same about the current amendment process. This could lead to the type of extreme polarization that might make collaboration even more difficult because stakeholders will not trust any process other than a legal one.

- *Will an agreement be implemented?*

Part of the history of prairie dog management in the Grassland is that a Strategy had been agreed to after years of discussion and work by many stakeholders. However after the 2009 Amendment and Strategy Decision had been signed, landowners and permittees became deeply concerned that the Strategy was not being implemented, especially when USFS staff had informed them that the funding was not available to do so. In order for parties to have an incentive to engage in a solution-seeking process, be able to negotiate in good faith and for trust to be rebuilt, all stakeholders need to commit to implementation of an agreement. This will require the following:

- The USFS can marshal the necessary funding, staff time, and resources.
- Landowners, ranchers, county, local and agricultural interests allow results to become evident over time if an agreement is reached.
- This is a complex situation that will not be resolved quickly. All stakeholders will need to monitor the situation together and use their agreed adaptive management process to continue learning what will work best under varying conditions.

Alternatives to a Collaborative Process

Alternative solutions to an inclusive solution-seeking process in stakeholders' minds appear to be the following:

1. A lawsuit initiated by either agricultural interests or environmental interests. Although some stakeholders were sure and almost enthusiastic about this possibility, no stakeholders voiced confidence this would create sustainable solutions, voiced a preference for court-decided management of the Grassland, or thought this would create better relationships.
2. Continued amending of the Strategy and the LRMP under NEPA with cooperators and an ID Team. The interviews with interests who are currently involved in this effort expressed a desire to seek assurances from the USFS regarding a consistent, long-term, binding and sustained management strategy regarding prairie dogs, and access to all prairie dog management tools, including all lethal control methods.
3. No change to the present situation which was perceived as being damaging to landowners and permittees, relationships with the USFS, Grassland conditions and the prairie dog population. This in turn would be damaging to the habitat of other species on the Grassland.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of options if the USFS decides to proceed with a collaborative process. In order for the process to have the best likelihood of success it would need to meet the following criteria:

1. It would need to build on what has already accomplished. Through the years that the USFS and its stakeholders have been through the LRMP and the Strategy processes, an enormous amount of learning has already taken place. What is needed is a process that allows that information to become effectively transferred and owned by stakeholders because it appears that some stakeholders understand the information, others do not or do not agree with the premise behind the information. This requires a process where adult learning methods and deliberation is applied for transference to take place. Part of this process needs to include a method for dealing with uncertainty when there is conflicting or a lack of information.
2. A process that is efficient. Considering the complexity of the issues at hand, this does not equal a quick process. But a process that builds on what has already been accomplished, allows all stakeholders to have meaningful and equal input, a clear decision-making space with firm guidelines and sidebars provides an opportunity for stakeholders in the most efficient manner possible, with a reduction of the likelihood of lawsuits after their hard work. There is no guarantee of this, but the chances that stakeholders don't feel forced to take the lawsuit route can be reduced compared to the current situation.
3. As mentioned above, inclusiveness is critical. However, not at the cost of effectiveness or efficiency. A process that is not considered inclusive and fair by all will not be considered legitimate. Bearing in mind how high the stakes are considered to be by both agricultural and environmental interests, and their expressed alternative solution of a lawsuit, we recommend a process that is as inclusive as possible. Although there are some stakeholders who will object to this based on past experience, we believe that with structure, facilitation and clear decision-making methods there is a better chance of reaching firm agreements between stakeholders, including the USFS.
4. Transparency. The material that stakeholders will be using in their deliberations will need to be available to other interested individuals who cannot attend the meetings. It will also

be incumbent on all stakeholders to share their interests and information when attending meetings.

5. A clear understanding of the decision-making process. The USFS is the decision-maker in this case, and it will need to be made clear how the USFS will use those recommendations. Ideally, the USFS will report back in person to stakeholders what recommendations can be used or not used, and the reasons for those decisions.
6. As a way to address points of uncertainty in the science, a process that allows stakeholders to use adaptive management and monitoring to keep learning what is meeting stakeholders' interests over time, what is not and explore new options if necessary. One of the results of this assessment is that the effectiveness of some solutions takes more time to become evident than is practicable for some stakeholders. Part of a solution-seeking collaborative process will need to include creating an adaptive management process that is simple, doable and effective.
7. Agreement to a charter that outlines roles, responsibilities, purpose, decision making methods and other process characteristics. It needs to be clearly articulated that the opportunity that is created by the USFS to engage in this process can only be realized by the stakeholders themselves in a manner that will allow them to maximize it.

Options for Collaborative Processes

There are several options in terms of types of collaborative processes. The options are:

Federal Advisory Act Committee (Forest Service lead)

The Forest Service could convene a Federal Advisory Act Committee under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) which governs the operation of Federal advisory committees and emphasizes public involvement through open meetings and reporting. Except in certain statutorily defined circumstances, all FACA committee meetings must be open to the public. Meetings must be announced in the "Federal Register". Reports, transcripts, working papers, and other materials made available to or prepared for or by the committees must be made available to the public. FACA calls upon Federal agencies to carefully consider the necessity of a new committee before establishing it. Under FACA a discretionary committee is terminated after two years unless the agency renews the committee's charter prior to the two year expiration date.

Advantages with this option are that they are very organized, with clear records, there is an assurance of balanced and diverse membership and it would be able to develop consensus recommendations.

Disadvantages are that they are difficult to establish and maintain and must meet the following minimum requirements/clearances:

- Determined to be in the public interest by the Secretary or appropriate under or Assistant Secretary.
- Purpose of the committee has been clearly defined; proposed membership represents a balance in terms of the points of view of highly qualified individuals. Special emphasis to be taken to assure ethnic/diversity minority are adequately represented, including women and the disabled.
- Proposed budget of the committee reflects anticipated costs and the funds to support the committee's proposed activities are available within Congressional limitations.
- Clearance through Office of Regulatory and Management Services, Washington Office – Chief, USDA Committee Management Officer.

Host Unbounded Public Meetings Convened by the Forest Service

The Forest Service can also convene public meetings that are open to the public. Considering the concerns by some regarding past meetings with little progress and high emotions this may seem counter intuitive. However open public meetings can be organized using ground rules, break out groups, third party facilitation and a website where the agenda and results of each meeting are posted. Such meetings have been convened successfully in the Wyoming Range and the Platte Valley regarding contentious mule deer issues. The meetings were extremely productive and contributed to regaining trust and sustained public engagement for the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission.

Formulate a Working Group/Technical Advisory Team Convened by a neutral party

Once formed, a working group/technical advisory committee would:

- Recommend monitoring protocols, changes/updates to the Prairie Dog Management Strategy, and facilitate continued communications with affected landowners and interest groups.
- Cooperate with state and county agencies to recommend appropriate responses to concerns of unwanted colonization on adjoining private and State lands using a spectrum of management tools considered on a site-specific evaluation.
- Annually recommend priority areas for Federal treatment to control expansion onto private/State lands.
- Recommend a financial strategy for Federal treatments and management of prairie dogs.

Working Groups are used as an integral part of a decision-making process but they do not have decision-making authority. They may influence agency policy but they do not have the authority to change policies mandated by State or Federal law. They can be set up formally with a charter (Sage Grouse Working Group) or less formally using ground rules and a collaborative process among the members (Platte Valley Habitat Partnership).

Advantages here are that a working group can set the agenda/topics/issues of meetings, and the neutral party can ensure meetings are balanced with participants assigned to specific seats, but meetings are still open to a broader public. Participants can gain a great deal of support and buy-in into the information and recommendations the working group produces. Disadvantages are that a different party than the USFS would carry the burden of the working group which would cost money. Expectations need to be clear that the group's input is still a recommendation to the process and not advice. The selected working group members need to be willing and able to work collaboratively and have authority with their local interest groups to 'make decisions' and move the issue forward.

Collaborative Learning Approaches

As a public participation or planning team approach, collaborative learning encourages people to learn actively, to think systemically, and to learn from one another about a particular problem

situation. Throughout the process, participants talk with and learn from one another in groups of various sizes. Within these discussions, active listening, questioning, and argument are respected. People clarify and refine their improvements through dialogue. Collaborative learning emphasizes "talking with" rather than "talking at." The initial objective of this process should not be to reach agreement on a management strategy, but rather to evaluate available information and determine what the remaining research needs are. The process of seeking out and evaluating information may also result in stakeholders discovering potential areas of agreement that expand the currently perceived options for improving navigation safety while protecting the natural landscape.

Recommendations

The Ruckelshaus Institute recommends a two-step process that combines two approaches mentioned above:

1. Offer three public meetings that are unbounded, facilitated by a neutral party and open to everyone with clear guidelines, objectives and process. These types of meetings produced beneficial results for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in relation to the Wyoming Range and Platte Valley mule deer herds. These meetings would be hosted by the USFS. The three meetings would explore the issues, the field conditions and options for solutions.
2. Convene a working/technical advisory group that has representatives from all stakeholder groups, consisting of individuals who seek to find solutions, represent their interests with integrity and work from an interest rather than a positional approach. This working/technical advisory group (working group) would be assembled by the USFS, and could be convened initially by the University, the Ruckelshaus Institute, a consultant or another neutral convener who would provide legitimacy and coordination to the process. This working group would take the issues and options provided by the public, work their way through a collaborative learning process of the existing material, studies and information, identify the areas of uncertainty and provide recommendations to the USFS for prairie dog management on the Grassland. The group would create an adaptive management process that delineates monitoring procedures and intervals when the group would reconvene to consider the results and provide the USFS with amended recommendations when necessary. The working group would create

opportunities to report back to the larger public and maintain a continued dialogue with all interested individuals and parties. In order to achieve all this, the working group would have a charter that outlines objectives, process, decision making methods, integration with the public, and roles. Ideally the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association, a group that many of the stakeholders have identified as being neutral and able to facilitate such a process and is willing to do so, would take over from the original convener once a process is established, initial agreement is reached and implementation of the first recommendations has started. The initial outcome of this working group's efforts should be some type of documentation of the agreements reached, with an implementation plan, and an adaptive management protocol. The ongoing result of this working group would be continued learning from monitoring and other information regarding what works, what does not and change agreements as necessary. This document could be a Strategy, a Habitat Plan or another document that serves the stakeholders and the USFS.

Rationale for Recommendations

A number of stakeholders identified a FACA group as an option for a process. FACA processes have a number of advantages that are described above. However, we feel that momentum has been created by doing this situation assessment in the first place and stakeholders will be impatient for demonstrated follow-up. The time it would take, with no guarantee of approval by the Department, to convene, budget and seek approval from Washington D.C., with no guarantee of its receipt, could cause frustration, and the opportunity that has been created for dialogue may be lost. Another timing consideration, is precipitation levels and vegetation conditions. This year we are enjoying generous amounts of rain and vegetation conditions are good for livestock and other species. This creates a time when stakeholders may be able to think through a complex issue such as this from all perspectives easier than if it were a drought year. If the USFS and other stakeholders are interested in convening a prairie dog management collaborative process, we suggest the time is now.

Additionally, FACA processes have a two-year limit to them. In this case, stakeholders need to find ways to work with the USFS on prairie dog management issues over the long run. More time will be needed than two years to address the complexity in this issue, allow for experimentation if necessary, and adapt to find solutions that meet as many interests as possible. Adaptive management is an

important conflict resolution tool that can help stakeholders decrease uncertainty, but more time than two years will be required.

Considering the lack of trust that currently exists, a new type of communicating and deliberating is needed where all voices have a chance to be heard in a meaningful and practical manner. Hosting three public meetings will offer all stakeholders a chance to voice their opinions in a constructive manner (given a facilitator, guidelines, etc.) and following this up with a working group will allow those opinions to be used in recommendations to the USFS. For trust to be built it is not necessary for all parties to agree, but to find ways to create some common understanding, some common ground and a constructive way to disagree that can be used toward future solutions.

A combined process such as this will require money, time, patience and commitment. It will not be easy or quick and stakeholders will not agree on all aspects. There is no guarantee that it will work. That will be dependent on the stakeholders themselves. If ranchers, permittees, the USFS, county institutions, State and Federal institutions and non-governmental organizations are willing to engage in a process such as is described, we believe this will increase the probability for effective prairie dog management far more than is currently feasible. This collaboratively informed management will allow landowners and permittees to actualize their economic livelihoods and their communities while maintaining a sustainable population of prairie dogs and an ecosystem that has as much integrity as possible for the use and enjoyment of all species and all users.

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- USDA Office of the General Council. 1997. National Grasslands Management A Primer.
- U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service: www.USFWS.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/black_footed_ferret. Accessed: June 7, 2015.

APPENDIX A – LIST OF COMPLETED INTERVIEWS

Federal Agencies

David Augustine, *USDA*
Jack Butler, *USFS*
Jessica Crowder, *State of Wyoming, Office of the Governor*
Misty Hayes, *USFS*
Bob Mountain, *USFS*
Julie Schaefer, *USFS*
Tim Shroeder, *NRCS- Douglas*
Jim Wright, *USDI Bureau of Land Management, Casper Field Office*

State Agencies

Ryan Amundsen, *WGFD*
Ben Bump, *Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments*
Joe Budd, *Department of Agriculture*
Senator Ogden Driskill, *Senate*
Slade Franklin, *Wyoming Weed and Pest Council*
Scott Gamo, *Wyoming Game and Fish Department*
Tyler Linholm, *House District 1*
Doug Miyamoto, *Wyoming Department of Agriculture*
Scott Talbott, *WGFD*
Zach Walker, *WGFD*

County and Local Agencies

Matt Avery, *Campbell County Commissioners*
Major L. Brown, *Board of Commissioners, Converse County, Wyoming*
Greg Cowan, *Wyoming County Commissioners Association*
Jennifer Hinkhouse, *Campbell County Conservation District*
Michelle Huntington, *Converse County Conservation District*
Greg Stark, *Niobrara County Commissioner*

Lenard D. Seeley, *Weston County Board of Commissioners*
Quade Schmelzle, *Campbell County Weed and Pest District*
James H. Willox, *Converse County Board of Commissioners*

Non-Profit Organizations

Kristy Bly, *World Wildlife Fund*
Frank G. Eathorne, Jr., *Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association*
Steve Forrest, *Defenders of Wildlife*
Taylor Jones, *WildEarth Guardians*
Dave Pellatz, *Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association*
Lindsey Sterling-Krank, *Humane Society of the US*

Grazing Interest Groups

Ty and Becky Checklit, *Fiddleback Ranch*
Jim Darlington, *Inyan Kara Grazing Association*
Norma Jean Grant, Permitee, *Rochelle Community for Working Sustainability*
Robert and Jean Harshbarger, *4W Ranch*
Gary and Cheryl Jacobson, *Rochelle Community for Working Sustainability*
Denise Langley, *Rochelle Community for Working Sustainability*
Joan Neumiller, *Sunshine Valley Ranch, Rochelle Community for Working Sustainability*

Industry

Laurel E. Vicklund, *Peabody Powder River Operations*

University of Wyoming

Gary Beauvais, *WYNDD*

APPENDIX B – LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Date
Name
Address
City

Dear -----,

The Ruckelshaus Institute at the University of Wyoming is conducting a situation assessment regarding prairie dog management in the Thunder Basin Grassland on behalf of the U.S. Forest Service. We are requesting your assistance in this to identify stakeholder perspectives regarding this issue and to assess the opportunities for stakeholder dialogues on prairie dog management options. You are receiving this letter because of your knowledge and interest in this issue. The study will provide valuable data that can be used to provide an explanation regarding how and why stakeholders view the tradeoffs associated with prairie dog management.

The study will be conducted in person or by phone and involves an interview. This one-on-one interview will explore your beliefs and values, and will assess the potential for a collaborative process to help develop options for prairie dog management on the Grassland. All responses will remain confidential and any personal identifying characteristics will be removed to ensure your anonymity. This project complies with human research protection guidelines set out by the University of Wyoming's Office of Research and Economic Development. For more information or concerns, please contact the office at (307) 766-5322.

Shannon Glendenning will be contacting you soon to schedule a date, time, and location for an interview if you are interested in participating. The interview should take no more than one hour, and will be conducted by Kristen Blume, Michael Kolker, Shannon Glendenning or myself. If you are interested in participating in this study, we will send you more information on the study prior to the interview.

We would greatly appreciate your participation in this project. Please feel free to contact me at (307) 766- 5048 or jessica.clement@uwyo.edu if you have any questions about this project. Thank you for your time and consideration in participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Jessica Clement, Ph.D.
University of Wyoming
Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources
Ruckelshaus Institute

APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Intro:

Thank you for taking time to participate in our interview. I am XXX with the Ruckelshaus Institute at the University of Wyoming. We have been contracted by the USFS to gather information about stakeholder perceptions of prairie dog issues.

The USFS is seeking assistance on understanding current stakeholder perceptions on the issues and public participation process around prairie dog management. We are gathering information from a wide range of interested parties to better understand their perceptions of the issues and to understand whether and how they are willing to work together. We expect to interview about 40 people. First I would like to read you our consent form to get your consent:

This interview is expected to last up to about an hour. Information gathered from this interview will be compiled with all the other interviews and be included in a written report to the Forest Service and its stakeholders.

This study is being paid for by the Forest Service. Expected risks to you for helping us with the study are minimal. The only risk to you might be if your identity were ever revealed. We will take precautions to protect against that. Your comments will be kept anonymous. We will not use any information that would make it possible for anyone to identify you in any notes, presentation, or written reports about this study. In the report, rather than attributing quotes directly to you, we will attribute them to a general affiliation such as: “one landowner said...”, or “one citizen reported that...” The notes from our conversation will be kept for five years. The only people who will have access to these notes are Ruckelshaus Institute staff and only in compiled form.

There are also no expected direct benefits to you for participating in this study. Indirect benefits to you and others in the Thunder Basin area may include a stakeholder-driven process and strategies for prairie dog management.

You may stop the interview, or shorten it, at any point. Refusal to participate will not affect your participation in USFS public processes, nor involve any other loss of benefits related to this project. If we get interrupted, we can complete the interview at another time.

My name is (Your Name). If you have questions regarding this assessment you can call the Medicine-Bow Routt National Forest or Dr. Jessica Clement. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Wyoming IRB Administrator at 307-766-5320. Your participation in the interview will serve as your informed consent. Do I have your permission to begin asking you questions?

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PRAIRIE DOG MANAGEMENT SO FAR:

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself. Do you have an interest in prairie dog management on the Grassland? If so what is your interest?
2. In your opinion are there issues regarding prairie dog management on the Grassland? (if no, go to #4)

3. If no effort was made by the USFS to address prairie dog issues, what do you think would happen?
4. Have you been involved in prairie dog management on the Grassland? If so, in what way?
5. In your opinion, what has been working well with prairie dog management on the Grassland?
6. What has not been working well so far?
7. Is there a specific prairie dog management plan that you know of that is worth using as an example? Either on the Grassland or in another geographic location? If so, why is it a good example?
8. In your opinion, what does successful prairie dog management look like?

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

Views about Collaboration in the context of prairie dog management on the Thunder Basin Grassland:

The next set of questions is related to working collaboratively with other stakeholders. Collaboration can often mean different things to different people. We want you to think about a process that will allow you to work with others in agreeing on the problems to be solved, developing options that can work to solve those problems, evaluating those options, and then reaching agreement on the best path forward. Collaboration can be achieved even if other parties may or may not share your perspective on how the prairie dogs can and should be dealt with.

9. Do you have experience in working with individuals from different backgrounds, values, or positions to find solutions on tough issues?
10. Do you believe that it is possible for all of the parties in the issue of prairie dog management to work collaboratively and discuss the issues in good faith? Why or why not?
11. What are the key issues you believe need to be discussed and resolved in order for this collaborative effort to be successful?
12. Do you believe that these issues are negotiable?
13. What do you think might be the most significant barriers to collaboration regarding the prairie dog issue?
14. How can those barriers be overcome?
15. What would you consider to be a successful outcome from a collaborative process?
16. What might the potential consequences be to you and others if a collaborative process is not undertaken or is not successful?

17. Would you be interested in participating in a collaborative effort? If not, what would need to happen to encourage your participation? If “No”, go to question 13. What is your incentive/motivation to participate in a collaborative effort?
18. Because the prairie dog issue is quite complex, it is likely that that a collaborative process could involve multiple meetings lasting several hours each. These meetings might also involve several hours of travel time. Would you be willing to commit to regular meetings over the course of several months?
19. Will you have time or financial constraints that will prevent you from participating?
20. Collaborative efforts as a general rule are inclusive. Who do you think needs to be at the table for progress to be created?
21. What components would need to be considered for a collaborative process to be successful, e.g. open public meetings, use stakeholder group representatives, facilitator, or other components?
22. What would be the best possible outcome of this process after the first year? After 5 years?
23. What would be the worst possible outcome after one year? 5 years?
24. Who would you recommend as a convener of this process other than the USFS?

Information Sharing

25. What technical information would you need in order to participate effectively in a collaborative process?
26. What studies or other sources of information do you believe are credible resources that should be used as a basis for discussion?
27. Do you believe that there are studies or other sources of information that are generally accepted by many people as reliable, but you feel are not reliable or are misleading? If yes, which studies, or what information do you feel is misleading?

Other:

28. Do you have any questions for me or other information you would like us to know?

Thank you very much for your time and this useful information. Again, you will not be identified in the final report, which we estimate will come out in June. Have a great day.

APPENDIX D – STAKEHOLDER ASSESSMENT IMPLIED CONSENT FORM

University of Wyoming Stakeholder Assessment Implied Consent Form

I. General purpose of the study:

The purpose of this Stakeholder Assessment is to gain an understanding of stakeholder perspectives of Thunder Basin issues. In addition we are gathering information about how best to structure and conduct a collaborative process that will assist state and local government in identifying strategies for creating a sustainable and reliable navigable channel through Thunder Basin.

II. Procedure:

This study will be conducted through individual interviews of people with knowledge of issues related to Thunder Basin. Elizabeth Spaulding of the Ruckelshaus Institute will conduct these interviews. Participants will first be asked to sort a list of statements that reflect perspectives associated with navigation, economic development, sand management, and environmental integrity in order of agreement and importance. Participants will then discuss their reasoning behind the rankings with the interviewer. The interviewer will then ask participants about their perceptions of various aspects of collaborative problem solving. This should take approximately 90 minutes per interview. Interviews will be tape-recorded.

III. Disclosure of risks

Risks associated with this study are minimal. The interview is completely voluntary and can be terminated at any point. Questions solely pertain to opinions on issues related to Thunder Basin, and responses are kept anonymous and confidential. There is a slight risk to participants if this confidentiality were to be breached. Ruckelshaus Institute will take measures to safeguard the confidentiality of each participant in order to protect against this risk.

IV. Description of benefits:

The primary benefit of participating in this study is the opportunity for participants to share their opinions on issues related to Thunder Basin. There are no other forms of compensation associated with this study.

V. Confidentiality:

Participants will not be identified by name, appearance, or nature of data in any report or material generated from the interviews. Tape recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be identified by a number only. The Ruckelshaus Institute will have a secured list with these numbers attached to participant names. Anonymous interview records will be kept within the Ruckelshaus Institute for 3 years. Only Ruckelshaus Institute staff will have access

to these records and the list of participants. There is always a risk that these records could be accessed by non-authorized personnel. This risk is being mitigated through security measures such as password-secured files and destruction of the content after three years. Results from these interviews will not be used to support other studies.

VI. Freedom of consent:

The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. Participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time. If you would like to withdraw from this study please inform the interviewer at this time. If for any reason you choose to withdraw your participation during or after the interview, please communicate this withdrawal to Ruckelshaus Institute staff. Ruckelshaus Institute will then destroy any record of the interview.

VII. Questions about the research:

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Jessica Clement of the Ruckelshaus Institute at (307) 766-5048 or jessica.clement@uwyo.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Wyoming IRB Administrator at 307-766-5320.