

## **PRAIRIE DOG PANEL - PERSPECTIVE OF THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT <sup>TWS</sup>**

Marc Whisler

USDI Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 36800, Billings, MT 59108

As a federal agency, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a trust responsibility to ensure that actions authorized on BLM administered lands do not contribute to the need to list any species under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In Montana, both the white-tailed prairie dog (a BLM Sensitive Species) and the black-tailed prairie dog (a Federal candidate species) fall under BLMs Special Status Species management direction. The BLM State Director is responsible for developing and implementing programs for the conservation of Special Status Species. As such, the State Director will coordinate with State and other Federal agencies, various private organizations, and BLM constituents. Pursuant to this direction BLM has been an integral partner of the Montana Prairie Dog Working Group since its inception in 1996. Prior to that the BLM was a primary partner in the Montana Black-footed Ferret Working Group and assisted with the development and publication of the Montana Prairie Dog Management Guidelines (Montana Black-footed Ferret Working Group, 1988). BLM also co-authored The Prairie Dog Ecosystem: Managing for Biological Diversity. BLM must insure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by the agency is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any federal endangered or threatened species. Given the extensive habitat for prairie dogs on BLM administered lands in Montana, the dependence of black-footed ferrets on prairie dogs, and the need for continued recovery efforts for black-footed ferrets, the BLM is an essential partner and cooperator for conservation of prairie ecosystems and their associated species.