

PRAIRIE DOG PANEL - PERSPECTIVE OF THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ^{TWS}

Lou Hanebury

USDI Fish & Wildlife Service, 2900 4th Avenue North, Room 301,
Billings, MT 59101-1228

On February 4, 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a 12-month Administrative Finding for a petition to list the black-tailed prairie dog. The Service believed, at that time, that sufficient information was currently available to support a decision that listing the black-tailed prairie dog as threatened is warranted, but that a proposed rule was precluded by work on other higher priority species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently re-evaluating the status of the black-tailed prairie dog and will soon publish a Federal Register Summary and Candidate Assessment form. The species may remain on the candidate list and maintain its listing priority number. In our original finding, the Service found that the recent decline of black-tailed prairie dog occupied habitat is due to several factors, the most influential of which is the widespread occurrence of plague, an exotic and completely lethal disease to the species. Plague could have an even more significant impact on the species if it manifests itself in portions of the range unaffected to date. In concert with plague, the loss of suitable habitat, and inadequate regulatory mechanisms may act upon fragmented populations to threaten the continued existence of the species. Although a number of proposals for regulatory change and active conservation have been proposed, few or none of consequence has been achieved. Plague and inadequate regulatory mechanisms remain the primary challenges and it will take active management range wide to adequately address these threats.