

RELOCATION OF THE FORT HARRISON PRAIRIE DOG COLONY^{TWS}

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A 10 ha black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) colony at Fort William Henry Harrison in the Helena Valley was relocated to two new sites during the fall of 1997. Prairie dogs were relocated because of a multi-million dollar construction project planned for the Fort Harrison cantonment area which included the existing prairie dog colony. Prairie dogs were live-trapped and moved 1 km to a 1 ha disturbed grassland site located outside the development zone near the northeastern corner of Fort Harrison. Prairie dogs were also transported 500 km by vehicle to the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMRNWR) and released at a prairie dog colony extirpated by a sylvatic plague epidemic during 1996. The Fort Harrison relocation site was mowed and fenced with 5x5 cm mesh wire fencing. The fencing was buried 45 cm below the soil surface and extended 90 cm above the soil. A total of 79 prairie dogs was captured and moved to the Fort Harrison relocation site during September 1997. Prairie dogs apparently were able to climb the enclosure fence or squeeze through the wire mesh. Prairie dogs were observed on several occasions

traveling on a gravel road back to the original colony. The greatest number of prairie dogs observed within the enclosure was 17, and five remained at the relocation site by December 1997. Groups of 33 and 16 prairie dogs were released at the abandoned CMRNWR colony during early and mid-October. Prairie dogs readily used abandoned prairie dog burrows and showed little tendency to move from the release site.