

MONTANA BLACK-FOOTED FERRET REINTRODUCTIONS, 1994-1996 ^{TWS}

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Black-footed ferrets (*Mustela niaripes*) reached the brink of extinction in the 1980s. Successful captive-breeding efforts have produced ferrets for release in the wild in 4 states since 1991. Montana reintroductions to establish a wild population began in 1994 with the release of 40 ferrets, another 36 in 1995, and 43 in 1996. Releases were on black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) colonies on the UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge in southern Phillips County, northcentral Montana. Five wildborn kits from 3 litters were observed during 1995 and 18 from 7-8 litters in 1996. Approximately 35 animals were in this population during December 1996. Many variables affected success including; ferret age and rearing method, predator management, and habitat quality. Ferret kits pre-conditioned prior to release survived better than naive counterparts. Short-term ferret survival was apparently increased by exclusion of coyotes (*Canis latrans*) from release sites with electrified netting and/or lethal coyote control, but significantly higher survival through the following breeding season was not evident. We present and discuss results from these reintroductions and current assessments of techniques to establish wild black-footed ferret populations .