Black-Footed Ferret Recovery: Things are Looking Up!

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The black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) is considered one of the most endangered mammals in the world. Hindering the success of recovery efforts is the presence of Sylvatic Plague and a general intolerance of the ferrets primary prey, the prairie dog. To date, the only tools against plague at reintroduction sites have been vaccination of ferrets prior to release, application of pesticides, and translocation of prairie dogs into sites following an epidemic plague event. In addition to the high cost of plague management, ferret recovery is hampered by loss of habitat to sod-busting and development and ESA regulations that make landowners wary of finding or hosting a listed species. However, in recent years, innovative approaches to plague management, prairie dog conservation and ESA regulation have laid a new path for ferret recovery across Western states. These approaches include the following: 1) An MOU signed in 2012 by the USFWS, NRCS, USGS, Wildlife Services, and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies facilitating cooperative conservation efforts with willing landowners to maintain ranch land in prairie habitat and the livestock operations that they support *while* providing for the conservation and recovery of wildlife species associated with prairie dogs, 2) Development of a safe harbor agreement that would provide regulatory assurances to land owners willing to allow ferret re-introductions, and 3) Development of a sylvatic plague vaccine meant to be dispersed at ferret reintroduction sites. Successful implementation of these new tools could result in ferret recovery within the next decade.