

UTAH PRAIRIE DOG OCCUPANCY/HABITAT SURVEY PROTOCOL

Approved March 2007

The purpose of Utah prairie dog Occupancy/Habitat Surveys is to determine if Utah prairie dogs inhabit a proposed project area. A presence or absence survey equivalent to that described below must be used to determine if the proposed action may affect Utah prairie dogs. The results of the survey are only valid from the date conducted through the following 31 March.

1. Qualified Utah prairie dog surveyors must be pre-approved by the agency with approval authority over the proposed action. See glossary for additional information on qualified surveyors.
2. The area that must be surveyed is called the action area. It includes a 350-foot buffer zone extending from the proposed project footprint for projects that do not permanently alter habitat. For projects that may permanently alter or substantially impact habitat, or include surface occupancy, the buffer zone is ½ mile from the proposed project footprint boundaries.
3. The window for Active Season surveys is April 1 to August 31. Surveys that occur between September 1 and March 31 are considered Dormant Season Surveys.
4. Active season surveys should only be conducted on calm days (wind < 12 mph; < 3 on the Beaufort scale) when cloud cover is < 40 % and the ground is snow free. Avoid extremes of heat and cold. Dormant season surveys can only be conducted when the ground is snow free.
5. Surveyors must cover 100% of suitable habitat (see glossary) in the action area.
 - a) A visual survey will be performed first using binoculars or other appropriate optics. The surveyor will also listen for Utah prairie dog vocalizations during visual surveys to locate active prairie dogs. Once located, areas occupied by dogs will be scanned at least 3 times to count the total number of prairie dogs. If counts continue to rise with each subsequent scan, the area should be counted until the number of dogs counted reaches a plateau. The surveyor should record the maximum number of dogs seen and/or heard.
 - b) Following the visual survey, the surveyor will walk through the entire area searching for burrows and other prairie dog sign on parallel transects no more than

10 meters apart. Surveyors should walk transects using a compass or GPS unit for orientation, ensuring that the entire action area is adequately surveyed. Care must be taken as to not overlap transects.

- c) Legal access to the project area must be available to the Utah prairie dog surveyor. At times, legal access may not be available for the adjacent Utah prairie dog buffer zone. In these cases, the surveyor must use optics, aerial photos, audio cues, other technology, interview knowledgeable people, etc. and/or professional judgment to make limited interpolation of these lands from the surrounding lands.
- d) The surveyor must report the maximum number of Utah prairie dog counted within each colony within the action area.

6. Any burrows found within the action area should be identified and classified as Utah prairie dog, pygmy rabbit, burrowing owl, other, or unknown.

7. Surveyed habitat will be classified as follows:

- a) Not occupied – no Utah prairie dogs seen or heard and no signs of past or present occupancy by Utah prairie dogs.
- b) Occupied Habitat – Utah prairie dogs seen or heard and/or sign of past or present occupancy by Utah prairie dogs.
 - a. Active – Utah prairie dogs are seen or heard; burrows are found and show evidence of recent activity (fresh digging, scat, fresh tracks); burrows found during the dormant season are structurally suitable to house Utah prairie dogs (entirely open, partially filled with dirt, or open but blocked by sticks, weeds, or other debris.)
 - b. Inactive – This classification applies only to Active Season surveys. No Utah prairie dogs seen or heard; burrows found are structurally suitable to house Utah prairie dogs, but there is no evidence of recent (current year) activity (fresh digging, scat, fresh tracks). Burrows may be partially filled with dirt or open but blocked by sticks, weeds, or other debris. Open holes must be classified as Active.
 - c. Abandoned – no Utah prairie dogs seen or heard; any burrows found are completely collapsed, filled or otherwise unusable and have obviously been so for at least one year.

7. The perimeter of all colonies (groups of burrows/mounds) within the action area will be mapped using a GPS unit manufactured since 2004. All data will be provided to the authorizing agency as an ESRI compatible product (shapefile or personal Geodatabase) that is in a UTM Zone 12 NAD 1983 datum, including metadata. If the surveyor does not have legal access to the entire action area, other mapping methods may be utilized
8. All authorizing agencies are required to provide consolidated data sets to the UDWR at least once a year by March 1.

IMPACT ANALYSIS: For impacts analysis, a no effect situation would occur if no habitat occurs within the action area. A may effect situation would occur if habitat (active, inactive or abandoned) occurs within the action area, thus the surveyor must quantify take. Take would include the amount of habitat disturbed, and anticipated impacts to Utah prairie dogs within the action area. Harassment is considered take.

Other species impact analysis may be required by permitting agency.

GLOSSARY

Suitable habitat: Habitat capable of supporting Utah prairie dogs such as grassland or low-density sagebrush sites, agricultural fields, vacant lots, etc. Habitat within the action area that would be exempt from survey would be tree sites, >30% shrub canopy cover sagebrush stands, or rocky/cliff areas. Also, any previously mapped habitat must be treated as suitable, regardless of current vegetative status.

Surveyor Qualifications: As a general rule, a qualified Utah prairie dog surveyor is a biologist with a bachelor's degree or graduate degree in biology, ecology, wildlife biology, mammalogy, or related fields. A minimum of 20 hours of documented field experience surveying for Utah prairie dogs or white-tailed prairie dogs, and prairie dog sign is required.

The surveyor must be capable of recognizing and accurately identifying Utah prairie dogs and prairie dog sign. The surveyor must also have the ability to legibly and completely record all sign on the survey report form, use or have access to GPS/GIS and topographic maps.

Completion of a USFWS approved training session would be acceptable.

Take: To harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct; may include significant habitat modification or degradation if it kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns including breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

Utah Prairie Dog Occupancy/Habitat Survey Report

Survey Date _____ Cloud Cover _____ Elevation _____

Start Time _____ Wind Speed _____ Complex/Colony _____
End Time _____

Project Name _____

Project Area Size _____

Action Area (circle one): 350' buffer 1/2 mile buffer

Amount (size) of Project Area within Utah prairie dog mapped habitat/why clearance needed?

Location of Project Area: T. _____ R. _____ Section(s) _____

_____ include 1/4's

County _____

Location Description _____

Site Description and Current Land Use _____

Clearance Method (# of transects, how area surveyed, etc.) _____

Number of Utah prairie dogs Observed

Total Number of Burrows Observed _____

Adults _____

Number Active _____

Juveniles _____

Number Inactive _____

Total _____

Number Abandoned _____

Other Species _____

Visual Observations _____

Conclusions

No Effect

May effect

Comments/Take: _____

Clearance valid through 31 March _____

Conducted by (Name & Title) _____