



NEWS RELEASE

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NEW MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP EXPANDS BLACK-FOOTED FERRET RECOVERY EFFORTS

DENVER-(December 17, 2012) – A new agreement in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between federal and state agencies has set the stage for an innovative effort to recover the black-footed ferret, one of the most endangered mammals in North America. The agreement seeks to engage more private landowners, including tribes, in recovery efforts for this species.

This historic agreement signed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) on behalf of 12 member states, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) aims to boost the number of adult ferrets in the wild from 500 to 3,000 in the next 10 years with the cooperation of willing private landowners. That would potentially allow for delisting of the species under the Endangered Species Act and the return of ferret management to states and Tribes.

The agreement creates a new multi-faceted recovery initiative that provides opportunities for private landowners and tribes in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming to voluntarily engage in conservation efforts to benefit and advance the recovery of the black-footed ferret while also maintaining ranching operations. The agreement defines each organization's mutual interest and authorities related to the recovery of the black-footed ferret.

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

“The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies believes this multi-agency effort provides private landowners with the financial, technical and regulatory assistance they need to contribute to conservation efforts, while also maintaining their ranching operations,” states WAFWA President Jim Douglas. “Private landowners support a large number and wide diversity

of wildlife in conjunction with the food and fiber they produce. With their help, we can expand the amount of habitat available to ferrets with little impact to current operations.”

WAFWA member states’ game and fish departments are assisting in this effort by helping to identify and match interested landowners with other partners, as well as involvement with on-the-ground ferret reintroduction and management.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Service, in partnership with the other agencies, has developed a draft safe harbor agreement that provides opportunities for landowners to allow reintroductions of the ferret on their property. Landowners can receive regulatory assurances from the Service from this new recovery initiative. Landowners who sign a safe harbor agreement can be confident that no additional regulatory restrictions or commitments related to black-footed ferrets will be imposed on their land.

“Maintaining working ranches on the landscape is good for ferrets and other prairie wildlife,” said Service director Daniel Ashe. “This creative partnership with private landowners, natural resource managers, and others can help us recover the black-footed ferret.” Each Federal agency participating in the agreement brings unique expertise to the recovery effort.

The Service has delivered a notice of availability of a draft programmatic Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) and draft environmental assessment (EA) to the Federal Register for public review and comment for 30 days. Availability of the documents dates of the public review period, and contact information will be announced in the Federal Register on December 19, 2012.

"This simple and flexible regulatory mechanism provides an attractive incentive for landowners who want to help conserve the black-footed ferret," notes Ashe.

The Draft SHA and EA will be available on-line at www.blackfootedferret.org. Anyone needing a printed or electronic copy of the Draft SHA and EA or the Notice of Availability published in the Federal Register should contact the Service at 970-897-2730 or request a printed or electronic copy by e-mailing kimberly_tamkun@fws.gov.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

The NRCS will assist participating landowners in implementing prescribed grazing plans and administer a Farm Bill conservation program, as requested, to address conservation concerns.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

The APHIS-Wildlife Services will work with the USFWS and state agencies to provide prairie dog and disease management on participating lands with the goal of supporting prairie dog populations through disease prevention in ferret reintroduction areas while limiting prairie dog expansion into other areas. Prairie dog management is designed not only to benefit the recovery

of black-footed ferrets, but also to protect landowners and their neighbors from the expansion of prairie dog colonies into areas where they are not desired.

“The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service’s wildlife services program is pleased to be a part of this important conservation effort,” states Wildlife Services Deputy Administrator William Clay. “We look forward to working with other agencies and private landowners to provide prairie dog management that not only maintains healthy and sustainable prairie dog populations for the benefit of the ferret and other prairie species, but also protects landowners from unwanted prairie dog damage.”

U.S. Geological Survey

Although great strides have been made to recover the endangered black-footed ferret in the wild, current efforts are hampered due to sylvatic plague outbreaks in both the ferret and the food source they depend upon, prairie dogs. Disease experts at the USGS and several other agencies have developed a plague vaccine for ferrets, and now are developing and testing a new sylvatic plague vaccine for use with prairie dogs. This oral vaccine is designed to prevent plague in prairie dogs, thus protecting the ferret and its prey base. Disease management at ferret reintroduction sites may include not only the vaccination of ferrets and the dusting of prairie dog burrows with an insecticide to control the fleas that transmit plague, but also the distribution of oral plague vaccine bait for prairie dogs.

"One of the barriers to improving the success of black-footed ferret reintroductions is both the cost and time required for current methods to control sylvatic plague in ferrets and their principal food prey, prairie dogs," said USGS Director Marcia McNutt. "The new plague vaccine and delivery system will allow our limited resources to immunize many more colonies, faster."

For additional information about the agreement and efforts to recover the endangered black-footed ferret, please visit www.blackfootedferret.org.

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