

## BLACK-FOOTED FERRET

*(MUSTELA NIGRIPES)*

**Navajo/Federal Statuses:** NESL G2 / listed endangered 11 MAR 1967 (32FR:4001).

**Distribution:** Former range extended from Canadian Great Plains to U.S. inter-mountain region and the Southwest. Navajo Nation historic records include: Mexican Springs, NM, 1948; Keams Canyon, Oraibi, Howell Mesa, AZ, pre-1960. No known wild ferrets on the Navajo Nation except for those associated with the Arizona Game & Fish Dept. re-introduction on Tribal Ranch lands of Big Boquillas in Aubrey Valley, Coconino Co.; there are likely prairie dog colonies of sufficient size elsewhere to support ferrets that have not been surveyed.

**Habitat:** Medium to large active prairie dog towns (>80 ha, and  $\geq 20$  burrows/ha) or complex of towns (two or more towns within 7 km). Prairie dogs are their main food source, and burrows are used for denning and rearing young. On the Navajo Nation, prairie dogs occupy extensive areas in low- to mid-elevation (1200-2000 m), plains and desert grassland and desertscrub habitats, and are recognized by clusters of burrows (10-15 cm dia.) with associated dirt mounds (approx. 60 cm dia., 10-20 cm height).

**Similar Species:** Long-tailed Weasel has shorter body, yellowish-white belly, with brown above and, in Southwest usually has a dark mask; mink are mostly uniform dark brown with white chin; European ferret (sold in pet industry) is very similar to *M.nigripes*, but has long hair, is variable in color and tail is usually dark the entire length.

**Phenology:**

- e.MAR-l.APR: mating
- e.MAY-e.JUN: birthing of young
- l.JUN-l.JUL: young first emerge from burrows
- e.SEP-e.OCT: young independent from parents, dispersal
- year-round: nocturnal, non-hibernating residents of prairie dog towns

**Survey Guidelines:** Preliminary survey\* of prairie dog towns >4 ha to determine size and estimate burrow density; formal diurnal (1 DEC-31 MAR [15 APR\*]) or nocturnal (1 JUL-15 SEP [31 OCT\*\*]) survey during project year for towns >49-81 ha or towns or complexes >81 ha, and including at a minimum the portions of towns within ½ mile of project.

\*Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department. 1985. Black-footed ferret guidelines for the Navajo Ind. Reserv.

\*\*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1989. [Black-footed ferret survey guidelines for compliance with the endangered species act](#). Denver & Albuquerque.

**Avoidance:** No alteration of prairie dog towns year-round where ferrets occur, or where no recent surveys have been conducted. Negative survey results are valid indefinitely if coverage included the entire town or complex (i.e., all towns within 7 km), otherwise results are valid for 1 year. Certain exceptions exist for actions of limited disturbance (see guidelines).

**References:**

- Clark, T.W., T.M. Campbell, M.H. Schroeder and L. Richardson. 1984. Handbook of methods for locating black-footed ferrets. Wyoming Bur. Land Manage., Wildlife Technical Bulletin No.1. 39pp.
- Fortenbery, D.K. 1972. Characteristics of the black-footed ferret. U.S. Dept. Interior, Fish & Wildlife Service, Resource Pub. 109. (description)
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. 1988. [Black-footed ferret recovery plan](#). Denver.