

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET
GUIDELINES FOR THE
NAVAJO INDIAN RESERVATION

NAVAJO FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

JULY 20, 1985

INTRODUCTION

In compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the Navajo Area Policy on Threatened and Endangered Species. The following guidelines were developed to standardize survey procedures for the Black-footed Ferret on lands under the jurisdiction of the Navajo Tribe. By establishing these guidelines, we hope to resolve the problems that have risen from Black-footed Ferret survey requirements. These guidelines do not differ greatly from the Region 6 U.S.F.W.S. guidelines, however, they are more stringent than the guidelines adopted by Region 2. If judiciously followed, these guidelines will provide lead agencies and their authorized representative decision makers with reasonable confidence as to whether Black-footed Ferrets exist in an approved project area.

The Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department (NFWD) recommends that surveys be conducted on all projects that result in permanent changes to the habitat if they affect prairie dog towns larger than 10 acres, isolated prairie dog towns of 120 acres or more, or pass thru a complex of smaller towns that combined could support a ferret population. To determine if a complex exist, the center of the prairie dog town affected should be considered the center of a circle 4.5 miles in radius. If the combined area of all prairie dog towns within this circle totals 250 acres or more, a survey will be required.

The Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department recognizes a 120-acre size limit for a single town and a 250-acre size limit for a complex of towns as a preliminary working standard. On all prairie dog town(s) that exceeds the standard, a formal survey will be required. As data becomes available this criteria will be refined to indicate a minimum density of prey base or modified to more accurately describe the size of prairie dog towns needed to support a population of Black-footed Ferrets.

GUIDELINES

On all disturbances whether temporary or permanent the Fish and Wildlife Department requires that a preliminary survey be conducted on all prairie dog towns greater than 10 acres in size. This survey would consist of gathering information on prairie dog town size, location (to be plotted on 7.5 min. quad.) and a check for presences of ferret sign (i.e., diggings, scats, etc.). This information would determine if a formal survey is warranted on the area in question, and provide site-specific information as to the location and size of prairie dog towns throughout the reservation.

The preliminary surveys will be conducted on all prairie dog towns in the range of 10 to 120 acres. Single isolated towns less than 10 acres in size will not require a survey.

Construction projects that may include linear and spatial developments that permanently alter prairie dog towns will require preliminary surveys provided that they meet the minimum prairie dog town size requirements. These include facility sites, coalmines, powerlines, roadways, pipelines, and impoundments.

Construction projects requiring one year or less for completion must be surveyed for presence of Black-footed Ferret within one year before construction begins. A project that occurs in several increments and requires more than 1 year for completion would need surveys for ferrets on all prairie dog towns in the full project area (including a ½ mile buffer strip bordering the project) before starting construction. Thereafter, only that part of the project being developed each succeeding year would be surveyed prior to each year of impact.

Linear projects that only temporarily disturb prairie dog towns (i.e., pipelines, transmission lines, and fences) will require only a preliminary survey on the town(s) affected. But if a temporary linear project must pass through a prairie dog town of 120 acres or more between April 1 and September 30, then a formal ferret survey will be required. April 1 through September 30 is the time that breeding and litter rearing takes place, therefore, ferrets would be more susceptible to this type of disturbance.

Prairie dog control projects that involve the use of toxicants to reduce prairie dog town(s) require a preliminary survey. If any sign suggesting ferret presences is found, a formal survey must be conducted before treatment. If a proposed action involves the use of zinc-phosphide treatment grain as the control agent, the ferret survey area will include the prairie dog town where the proposed action is located, and any other town or portion of a town within ½ mile of the boundary of the town proposed for treatment.

If the proposed control agent involves the use of compounds under registration with the Environmental Protection Agency, then the area to be surveyed for ferrets will include the prairie dog town to be treated and any other town or portion of a town within 1 mile of the town being treated. This difference is justified on the basis of potential hazards to ferrets caused by secondary poisoning, known ferret mobility, and observations of ferrets consuming carrion.

SELECTION OF SURVEY METHODS

Under these guidelines, there are two acceptable methods to survey for ferrets or ferret sign.

Diurnal (daylight) surveys for ferrets are recommended if surveys are conducted between December 1 and April 15. This type of survey is used to locate sign left by ferrets. During winter months, ferret tracks on snow cover are more obvious and diggings more abundant because prairie dogs are less active and less likely to disturb or destroy ferret sign.

Daylight searches for ferret sign should meet the following criteria to fulfill the minimum standards of these guidelines:

1. Searches must be conducted between December 1 and April 15, but not more than 1 year before prairie dog control or construction is started.
2. Three searches must be made on each town with at least a 10-day interval between searches. (In late fall radio-tagged ferrets have remained underground for up to 8 days on the Meeteetse, Wyoming Study Area.)

3. On bare ground (no snow cover) surveyors must make hole-to-hole inspection for sign.
4. Following fresh snowfall, vehicles may be used to search for tracks or ferret diggings, but complete visual inspection of each portion of the town surveyed is required.
5. If ferret sign is observed, the prairie dog colony and any portion of the colony that extends $\frac{3}{4}$ mile beyond the project boundary will be surveyed using the following night search method.

Nocturnal (night) surveys involve the use of spotlighting techniques for locating ferrets. This survey method is designed to locate ferrets when the maximum population is expected to exist. Night surveys are recommended for the period July 1 to September 15. At this time, litters become active above ground at night.

1. Surveys will be conducted between June 15 and October 31, but not more than 1 year before prairie dog control or construction begins. We recommend that surveys be done as close to the start of construction as possible.
2. The prairie dog town will be surveyed by spotlighting from dusk to dawn on each of 3 consecutive nights. Depending on vegetation and terrain, large prairie dog towns should be divided into tracts of 320 acres and systematically searched. If sign suggesting ferret presence is found or if unidentified green eye shine is observed, a five (5) night search must be conducted.
3. Observations on each prairie dog town or tract search will begin at a different starting point on each successive night to maximize the chance of overlapping the Black-footed Ferrets night time activity period.
4. A survey crew consists of one vehicle and two observers equipped with one or two 200 to 300 thousand candlepower spotlights. In terrain not suitable for vehicles, a crew will consist of two individuals working on foot with battery-powered spotlights.

SURVEY REPORT FORMS

Preliminary Surveys. The following form, labeled Attachment A, will be used for all preliminary surveys conducted. The information will be used to determine if a formal survey is deemed necessary and to insure that the agency conducting the survey has complied with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and the Navajo Area Policy.

Formal Surveys. The following forms, labeled Attachment B, will be used for all formal surveys conducted. A report summarizing all survey data, prepared for each individual search effort must be written and submitted to the Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department; P. O. Box 1480; Window Rock, Arizona 86515, within 30 days after completion of the survey.

SURVEYOR QUALIFICATIONS

When Threatened or Endangered (T & E) Species habitat is scheduled to be disturbed by any activity, the affected (T & E) habitat must be adequately surveyed in advance by a qualified person(s).

A qualified person(s) means a person(s) that has had hands-on experience with the individual T & E Species under field survey conditions and is schooled in all the latest and most up-to-date techniques and methodologies in finding the individual T & E Species involved.

The person(s) must submit an application, in writing to the Navajo Fish and Wildlife (in accordance with the Navajo Fish and Wildlife regulation 3.02). Along with the application and proof of hands-on experience and schooling, a detailed study plan on how the T & E investigation will be conducted will also be submitted. This information will be subject to evaluation by the Navajo Fish and Wildlife prior to receiving Tribal authorization to conduct any T & E investigations.

LITERATURE CITED

CLARK, T. W., and T. M. CAMPBELL III. 1981. Suggested guidelines for black-footed ferrets surveys. Biota Research: Agency Report.

CLARK, T. W., T. M. CAMPBELL, M. H. SCHROEDER, and L. RICHARDSON. 1983. Handbook of methods for locating black-footed ferrets. Wyoming BLM Wildlife Technical Bulletin No. 1. 55 pp.

MARTIN, S. J. and M. H. SCHROEDER. 1979. Black-footed Ferret survey on 7 coal occurrence areas in S.W. and southcentral Wyoming. 8 June-25 Sept. 1978 Report to BLM Cheyenne. 37 pp.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE. 1984. Draft Black-footed Ferret Survey Guidelines for Compliance With the Endangered Species Act. 7 pp.

NAVAJO FISH AND WILDLIFE

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET SURVEY RECORD

ATTACH MAP OF AREA SURVEYED PREFERABLY ON 7.5 MIN. MAP DELINEATING THE BOUNDARY OF PRAIRIE DOG COLONY.

LOCATION OF P.D. TOWN: STATE AND COUNTY _____
GRAZING DISTRICT _____ QUADRANGLE _____

NAME OF INDIVIDUAL, LOCATION AND DATE(S) SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED:

NAME :
LOCATION:
DATE(S) :

COLONY FEATURES :	OPEN RANGE	FARM LAND		
TOPOGRAPHY :	FLAT	HILLSIDE	SWALE	RIDGETOP
VEGETATION :	SAGE	GRASS	SHRUB	P-J
ACTIVE :	YES	NO		
PRAIRIE DOGS :	YES	NO		

RESULTS OF SURVEY:

TOTAL ACREAGE OF PRAIRIE DOG TOWN: _____
 BURROW COUNT _____ PLUGGED BURROWS _____
 AVERAGE DENSITY-HOLES/ACRE _____ % PLUGGED BURROWS _____
 SKULLS COLLECTED: YES NO
 MUSTELID SKULLS & SCATS COLLECTED: YES NO

EVIDENCE OF FERRET SIGN: (DESCRIBE) _____

RECOMMENDATION: _____

OTHER WILDLIFE SPECIES SEEN:

INSPECTED BY: _____
(SIGNATURE)

(DATE)

(TITLE)

REVIEWED BY: _____
(SIGNATURE)

(DATE)

(TITLE)

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET SURVEY FORM
DIURNAL SURVEY (DAYTIME)

Attach map of area surveyed preferably on 7.5 min. map
Delineating the boundary of prairie dog colony.

Location of P.D. Town: State and County _____

Grazing District _____ Quadrangle _____

Name of Individual, Location, and Date(s) survey was conducted:

Name:

Location:

Date(s):

Colony Features: Open Range Farmland

Briefly describe the colony features such as topography, vegetation and activity of the prairie dog colony.

Results of Survey:

Total acreage of prairie dog town _____ Burrow Count _____

Plugged Burrows _____ Average Density-Holes / Acre _____

Skulls Collected: Yes No Mustelid Skulls and Scat Collected: Yes No

Evidence of Ferret Sign: (Describe)

Comments:

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET SURVEY FORM
NOCTURNAL (NIGHTTIME) SURVEY

Date of Survey _____ Species of Prairie Dog _____

Name of Individual, Location survey was conducted:

Name:

Location:

Weather: Temperature _____ Wind Speed & Direction _____

Cloud Cover _____

Begin Survey: _____ End Survey: _____

Total Man/Hrs. _____

General Comments: (possible ferret sign encountered, tracks observed, unidentified green eyeshine observed, etc.)