

Prairie Dog Working Group – Task Group Meeting
August 29, 2017
66 Cherryvale Road

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Dan Brandemuehl, Patrick Comer, Elle Cushman, Keri Konold, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Joy Master, Valerie Matheson, Andy Pelster, and Heather Swanson.

Facilitation: Heather Bergman, Sam Haas

ACTION ITEMS

Staff	Revise the recommendations based on the Task Group’s discussion.
Keri Konold	Compile the revised document and organize the supplemental document. Send the document to the Prairie Dog Working Group by the end of the day on September 7.
Lindsey Sterling Krank	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the outcomes of this meeting Deb, Amy, and Eric and address their questions.• Send Keri the spreadsheet that explains burrow depth. It will be included as an attachment to the summary.
Dan Brandemuehl	Discuss the outcomes of this meeting with Aaron and address his questions.
Pat Comer	Discuss the outcomes of this meeting with Carse and address her questions.

OVERVIEW

Prior to the meeting, each of the recommendations developed by the full Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG) was assigned to a staff member to develop. The staff team provided the Task Group with a 7-page summary of recommendations, as well as a longer “support document” to provide additional information about the recommendations. The draft recommendations were reviewed and refined by other members of staff, and the master document was compiled and sent to the Task Group.

Boulder City Council has made the decision to change the Prairie Dog Working Group’s scheduled meeting on September 26 to an Information Packet (IP). This will likely be submitted to City Council in late September or early October. It will include the final version of the phase one recommendations and information on phase two. City Council may also be asked to complete a poll with longer-term issues to be addressed in phase two so that the Prairie Dog Working Group knows where to dedicate their energy.

GROUP DISCUSSION ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff lead for each recommendation provided an overview of the proposed recommendation, and the Task Group provided suggestions for revision.

Recommendation 1: Create guidelines and criteria for prioritizing relocation/take sites on both public and private land.

Staff Presentation

Val Matheson, the staff lead for this recommendation, described the rationale behind the development of the proposed recommendation.

- The Administrative Rule was used as the structure for the priorities in this recommendation.
- A sentence was added about the prioritization of prairie dogs that have re-colonized an area where they had been lawfully removed. Eleven prairie dogs were left at Foothills Community Park last spring, and this year there are 62 prairie dogs there.
- This proposal also includes a definition of imminent construction. It is defined as demonstration to a high degree of probability that the land will be developed within 15 months.
- A fourth priority was given to sites where the landowner or the city department's desired future use conflicts with the presence of prairie dogs. This priority was not in the Administrative Rule. This was added in part to accommodate Naropa University's concerns regarding prairie dogs.

Clarifying Questions

Participants asked clarifying questions about Recommendation 1. Questions are indicated in italics with the responses below.

Is Naropa currently planning the development construction?

They have been planning construction for many years, but they are not pushing a plan forward, so it is not imminent. To be considered first-priority under this proposal, they would have to become an imminent development.

What is the best way to accommodate developers who do not want to prolong their timeline?

It benefits everyone to time the relocation for the summer months. If relocation occurs at a time when development plans are not imminent, prairie dogs may recolonize the area. It would be unfortunate to relocate a colony then have to spend resources to prevent recolonization.

Is the current timeline working for developers?

The timeline does not always work, because it is often hard to judge whether a development is 15 months from construction. With Naropa, the 15-month criterion did not line up with the landowner's intentions. Relocating prairie dogs may have delayed construction plans for Diagonal Crossing, but that was because they notified the city of the project in the middle of the winter.

Where do city land priorities fit into this prioritization?

That could fit into either priority one or two. For example, Foothills Community Park fits into priority one because it has caused damage to public facilities. Valmont is likely a number two priority because it is designated for removal and has a phased plan in place, but funding is being identified and development is not yet imminent.

What does it mean for a plan to be approved in a city context? Does it have to be funded in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)?

The land must be designated, and there must be a phasing schedule. It does not have to be funded yet.

The third relocation priority is confusing. What is an example of a third-priority site?

A third-priority site might have a colony that is identified in the Urban Wildlife Management Plan or the Grassland Plan for removal, but is not the highest priority, except for the fact that conflicts with adjacent neighbors have resulted in sustained lethal control on the adjacent private property.

How is this prioritization different from past regulations?

For the past ten years, City of Boulder sites have been first-priority. Lethal control permits have been issued to private property owners because all receiving sites had been designated for city prairie dogs. This proposal does not distinguish between public and private lands for first priority ranking. A development on private property where lethal control is an option would get priority over agricultural sites where lethal control can be delayed. It also describes why sites are not first-priority. The criteria for the sending site came from the Administrative Rule.

Will the City of Boulder be doing more lethal control on their own land as a result of this prioritization?

This is not yet known. There will be fewer receiving sites for city prairie dogs due to receiving sites being used for private property prairie dogs. Related, the City has not captured up-to-date data on private properties with prairie dogs.

How many first-priority public sites is the City of Boulder relocating this year?

The City of Boulder is relocating Diagonal Crossing (private) 6201 Spine Road in Gunbarrel (private), and Foothills Community Park (City).

Group Discussion

- It may be worth specifying that the proposal only includes private property sites within Boulder City limits.
- City Council wants to minimize lethal control. It is unclear whether they have a preference about where the lethal control occurs (private or public lands).
- It would be worth discussing how to prioritize within the first priority. Perhaps a rotating system could work (i.e., public, private, public, private). This may be challenging, considering how much land Boulder owns. There are also competing needs within city lands. It should come down to the imminence of lethal impact. The City Manager should have the authority to make final decisions when necessary.
- Less public money would be spent if there were more private relocations (the landowners pay for the relocation). However, this would result in more use of lethal control on public sites. This may be controversial; public land is more visible and the community feels more responsibility for avoiding lethal control.
- In the future, new types of agricultural properties may take precedence. For example, the city has identified properties for conversion to organic vegetable production (OSMP Agricultural Management Plan) to address the priority of local food availability within the city. When they are ready for conversion/development, the site might then become first-priority.
- Under this proposed prioritization, the majority of public sites fall into the second priority. Therefore, it is likely that public/private conflicts would occur less often.
- There is a less vocal group of people who care about agricultural properties. This proposal does not improve the situation for agricultural sites. When development on agricultural properties becomes imminent (e.g. conversion to vegetables), the situations would be described on a case-by-case basis.

Agreements

Based on the discussion above, the Task Group agreed to the following.

- The first priority will be visually laid out to delineate the subset of priorities. It should be laid out as:
 1. Imminent danger is the first priority.

- 1A. Public lands
- 1B. Private lands

- Specify that the City Manager will have the authority to make a final decision when necessary.

Recommendation 2: Create guidelines and criteria for prioritizing receiving sites on public lands within existing plans and develop recommendations for making receiving sites more feasible; develop recommendations for increasing landowner and stakeholder acceptance of the use of receiving sites.

Staff Presentation

Heather Swanson, the staff lead for this recommendation, described the rationale behind the development of the proposed recommendation.

- This recommendation presents a new set of criteria to prioritize receiving sites on Prairie Dog Conservation Areas (PCAs) and Grassland Preserves.
- Page three of the supplemental document provides a scoring system of criteria for prioritizing relocation sites. This system would help to identify the properties with challenges.
- This recommendation also includes information about stakeholder engagement. It proposes a process for assessing the relocation and developing a plan with neighbors. This process would have to be initiated far ahead of the relocation.
- Page seven of the supplemental document provides additional considerations associated with expanding receiving site availability.
- One item for consideration is that other recommendations (plague management) could work in direct opposition to this recommendation since achievement of those goals could lead to sustained occupancy in the Grassland Preserves above thresholds that would allow for relocation, thus reducing the availability of receiving sites in the long term within Grassland Preserves.

Clarifying Questions

Participants asked clarifying questions about Recommendation 2. Questions are indicated in italics with the responses below.

Would staff assess sites in the PCA that has been previously hit by the plague?

Yes, if the site is open, Boulder City staff would lead that process.

What does “planned consultative stakeholder engagement” mean?

The term refers to a spectrum of public engagement. On one end of the spectrum is collaboration, in which stakeholder agreements influence and drive policy. In the middle of the spectrum is consultation, in which stakeholder feedback is considered, but the process will continue even if there is not full agreement. Informing the public is on the other end of the spectrum. In the past, the city has simply informed the public about decisions.

One of the criteria is “habitat suitability.” Does that refer to the quality of the habitat or the potential viability of the population?

Habitat suitability refers to the suitability as defined in the habitat suitability model in the Grassland Plan that attempts to balance multiple objectives, finding the best place for prairie dogs while preserving other habitats.

On page six of the supplemental document it states that “during times of low occupation, opportunities exist for relocation.” How does the City of Boulder define “low occupation?”

For the Grassland Preserves, low occupation means below 10% prairie dog occupation.

Will this recommendation result in the expansion of receiving site options?

It depends. The recommendation itself does not create additional receiving sites, because that can only be accomplished through a plan revision. However, working with adjacent landowners will hopefully allow the use of receiving sites that are already available, and working to decrease the time needed for sites to meet relocation criteria may increase site availability

Group Discussion

- Adjacent landowners will not always support prairie dog relocation. There are places that will never be receiving sites due to adjacent landowner concerns.
- What are the thresholds for support or lack thereof? In certain situations, the city would proceed with a relocation even if there was not full neighbor support. The intent of the stakeholder involvement is to create a procedure that really listens and engages neighbors in discussions about mitigation and diffuses potential conflicts.
- The scoring system should be tested and prototyped before it is recommended. It is important to remember that the scoring system is a prioritization tool, not a decision-making tool.
- To issue a relocation permit, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) requires a certain level of community support (or lack of objection). City staff should work to develop a more proactive approach to generate support. The Prairie Dog Coalition could assist in the creation of support. There should also be a substantial effort to spread public education about prairie dogs well in advance of a relocation project. There are opportunities for the city to partner with advocacy groups to accomplish this education.
- There should be more stakeholder engagement early in the process. There should also be a clear definition of how the engagement will impact decisions. The recommendation document should explicitly say that consultation will occur even if it impacts the project development timeframe. Education, outreach and support should be increased. A proactive approach should be taken.
- There are questions and concerns about conducting extensive stakeholder engagement on sites that have previously been used as receiving sites. The amount of time since the last relocation could be a factor. Forgoing stakeholder engagement on sites that had previously been permitted for relocation may reduce the bureaucracy. Public engagement must be done on a project-by-project basis to meet state guidelines.
- The Administrative Rule includes recommendations for how relocations should occur on Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) land, but it does not provide any information about how relocations should occur on City of Boulder Parks and Recreation land or other city properties. Some of the guidelines for Parks and Recreation may mimic OSMP, but there may be some variation.
- City of Boulder Parks and Recreation has not assessed their areas as prairie dog receiving sites like OSMP did with their Grassland Plan. Parks and Recreation had never been directed to take non-Parks and Recreation prairie dogs and the Administrative Rule does not cover Parks and Recreation yet. Parks and Recreation sites should not become de facto receiving sites simply because there has not been a system-wide evaluation. Some Parks and Recreation sites are in poor condition. Parks and Recreation needs time to perform evaluations and write a plan. Waiting for a plan may be time prohibitive, but at minimum, site assessments should be conducted prior to pursuing an area as a receiving site. This

recommendation should specify that Parks and Recreation sites can receive relocated prairie dogs once an assessment has been conducted. Or, the recommendation could simply state that evaluations will occur on a site-by-site basis when the site is unoccupied. This should apply to all non-OSMP city land that could serve as a receiving site.

- In terms of the relocation timeline, there was discussion about extending relocations into November. Relocations that begin by October 1 or October 15 may extend into November, but relocations cannot begin in November.

Agreements

Based on the discussion above, the Task Group agreed to the following.

- The document will clarify that there should be, at a minimum, consultative stakeholder engagement in advance. It should mention that public engagement may impact the development timeline.
- In terms of the scoring system, the document will clearly state that it is not designed to determine the outcome. It is a prioritization tool.
- The document will include a statement about pursuing partnership and education opportunities to proactively build community support.
- The document will include vegetation criteria for PCAs.
- The document will specify that evaluation of Parks and Recreation sites and other potential city receiving sites will occur on a site-by-site basis. It will also state the need for a system-wide analysis.
- In terms of relocation guidelines for Parks and Recreation land, the document will state: “Pending the explicit development of guidelines for Parks and Recreation, the guidelines for OSMP in the Administrative Rule will be used for Parks and Recreation where applicable.”

Recommendation 3: On approved sites, ensure that the number of prairie dogs to be relocated have adequate accommodations, utilizing existing or artificial burrows (including nest boxes) and taking into consideration existing native vegetation.

Staff Presentation

Heather Swanson, the staff lead for this recommendation, described the rationale behind the development of the proposed recommendation.

- The intent of this recommendation is to maximize the relocation potential on PCAs. While this will be different for every site, it may require the installation of infrastructure (mostly nest boxes).
- The situation in the Grassland Preserves is more nuanced due to multiple conservation priorities. This recommendation lays out three potential situations. The first is in areas with non-native vegetation, or where the soil has previously been tilled or disturbed. The second is in areas of intact native vegetation that have not been tilled or previously disturbed. The third is in areas of rare plant communities or directly adjacent to these communities if the associated disturbance presents a threat to the conservation of the plant communities. Page 12 of the supplemental document provides a thorough description of how best to minimize disturbances while still accommodating prairie dogs. Analyses would be site-specific. It would be helpful to have a contractor conduct a risk analysis of ground disturbance associated with prairie dog relocations in the context of intact grassland patches in a landscape context and define/provide a threshold for nest box disturbance.
- The recommendation refers to plant communities ranked by Colorado Natural Heritage Program as S1, S2, or S3. This system ranks plant species along a spectrum of abundance. S1 means that the species is critically imperiled; and S3 means that the species is vulnerable.

Clarifying Questions

Participants asked clarifying questions about Recommendation 3. Questions are indicated in italics with the responses below.

When was the most recent insect survey conducted?

Butterfly surveys were conducted in 2015-2016 in some parts of the system. There has not been a system-wide survey, or comprehensive surveys of other insect groups.

When and where is auguring going to be used, and should the document mention where the use of auguring is and is not appropriate?

The document says that auguring will not be used for the most part. There have been cases where prairie dogs have successfully established colonies in augured burrows, but it is not clear what conditions allow for successful establishment to occur. The document states that there will be sufficient infrastructure for the prairie dogs. The term “sufficient” will be determined with the contractor. Lindsey has a spreadsheet that shares her organization’s view of the best burrow depth for different prairie dogs. **Lindsey will share this spreadsheet with Keri, and it will be included in the summary.**

How successful has the city been at keeping coterie together after a relocation?

The contractors working with the city have been fairly successful at keeping coterie together. Before any relocation, the relocators observe prairie dog behavior and identify and mark coterie.

Group Discussion

- If the receiving site has different soil, new and different technologies can be assessed. Four-inch burrow width should be the standard.
- Maintaining the aesthetic of the artificial burrows is difficult. The tunnels stick out, which is unattractive. However, when the tunnels are cut back, it is difficult to find them. GPS may be an option.

Agreements

Based on the discussion above, the Task Group agreed to the following.

- To address the issues related to Parks and Recreation mentioned during the discussion about the second recommendation, this recommendation will state that “on non-OSMP-managed city land that has been identified for long-term prairie dog protection, infrastructure will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, pending the development of non-OSMP city guidelines.”
- The document will specify that sufficient receiving burrows will be defined with the contractor on a site-by-site basis.

Recommendation 4: Define successful prairie dog relocation; this includes continual evaluation of new or different relocation methods, ongoing opportunities for stakeholder engagement, and short-term, mid-term, and long-term evaluation of success.

Staff Presentation

Joy Master, the staff lead for this recommendation, described the rationale behind the development of the proposed recommendation.

- There are many different criteria for defining successful prairie dog relocation. Joy worked with Heather, Keri, and Lindsey to define parameters. This recommendation focuses on what success means, not how to achieve it. There is also a difference between success of the

relocation itself versus success of the relocation in context of the landscape and overall objectives.

- Adaptive management and flexibility are core principles of this recommendation. Techniques should be assessed, tried out, evaluated, then adjusted after each relocation.
- The supplemental document defines success and lays out caveats. The caveat list was not intended to be all-inclusive.
- The supplemental document provides general guidelines for rating successful relocation.

Clarifying Questions

Participants asked clarifying questions about Recommendation 4. Questions are indicated in italics with the responses below.

Is it necessary to conduct monitoring 24 months after relocation or is a year adequate?

The monitoring conducted 24 months after a relocation assesses wildlife and vegetation. It evaluates the long-term sustainability of the site. Monitoring conducted 12 months after relocation assesses the short-term success of the relocation. The distinction between the two monitoring objectives should be bifurcated in the report. Boulder County requires their contractors to send a monitoring follow-up report 24 months after the relocation.

What is the purpose of the ranking chart?

The chart is intended to assist with adaptive management. If a colony is rated poorly, it will be assessed. The chart places the focus on results.

This recommendation focuses on the receiving sites. Are there also criteria for the take sites?

Page 23 of the supplemental document includes a best management practice about removal site maintenance. It was not included as a criterion for success because this recommendation focuses on whether the relocation on the site was successful.

Who is going to do this monitoring?

It will likely be a case-by-case negotiation between the City of Boulder and the contractor. The financial landscape shifts yearly.

Does the City of Boulder always address the prairie dog management plan with the contractor or would that have to be integrated into the work plan?

For private properties, Val Matheson would write a statement about what the contractor must do to prevent recolonization in the agreement. In terms of public lands, there are state regulations that the city follows.

Group Discussion

- There should be a best management practice (BMP) for moving coterries together. Once agreed upon, the BMPs should lay out the specifics of a stable prairie dog population and how to best determine that stability.
- Monitoring should not disturb prairie dogs. There should be passive measurements of success.
- Evaluations should account for natural mortality, and typical dispersal.
- Every site is different. The definition of success must be wide enough to adapt to the range of situations.
- It is important that the receiving site infrastructure is adequate.
- The rating could be shifted to be “poor, fair, good, very good, excellent.”

- There is criteria used by The Nature Conservancy that could be used as a reference point for how to set measurable goals.
- This recommendation lays out the effectiveness measures, but it does not include an implementation monitoring plan. Adaptive management requires a focus on implementation. This could be included in the scope of work with the individual contractors.
- There should be goals for take sites and receiving sites. Monitoring take sites would help ensure that the prairie dogs do not re-colonize the area.
- There are state regulations that ensure prairie dogs and the burrows at the take site have insecticides applied to them before relocation. Maybe Delta Dust should not be applied above ground at the non-regulated release site if the goal is to preserve the pollinator habitat. Everyone, including the City Manager, needs to understand the nuances of Delta Dust application.

Agreements

- The document will include a statement about the purpose of the chart as a tool for adaptive management.
- The document will specify that the responsibility for monitoring will be negotiated between the city and contractors on a case-by-case basis.
- A goal statement about the implementation of measures to discourage prairie dog recolonization will be added to the document. It should also state that a plan must be in place if, for some reason, all the prairie dogs cannot be removed from the take site.
- The document will mention the need for an articulated plan at the take site.

Recommendation 5: Collaboratively prepare, with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, a research proposal for US Department of Agriculture approval for the use of the sylvatic plague vaccine (SPV) on the southern grasslands in 2018 and beyond.

Staff Presentation

Heather Swanson, the staff lead for this recommendation, described the rationale behind the development of the proposed recommendation.

- This recommendation lays out a 2018 pilot project to use SPV on all occupied acres in the Southern Grassland Preserve, which is one third of the Grassland Preserve.
- There have been preliminary discussions with CPW, but no intense collaboration yet. The timeframe, scope, budget, study plan for the project will be determined in collaboration with CPW.
- The results of this project will be evaluated after one year.

Clarifying Questions

Participants asked clarifying questions about Recommendation 5. Questions are indicated in italics with the responses below.

Page 28 of the supplemental paper is confusing. It says that the City of Boulder plans to complete a draft plague management plan. The plague management plan is separate from the pilot project, correct?

The pilot project is not the same thing as the plague management plan. This should be clarified in the document.

How does this impact relocations? Can the city continue to use the vaccine or Delta Dust before the program starts?

The vaccine is not included in the relocation permitting process. This has nothing to do with relocations; it is just a study. CPW may be interested in a paired research study with Boulder County, where the County uses dust and the vaccine and the city uses the vaccine.

Does this study eliminate the possibility of using plague management tools other than SPV?

No.

When does the city expect to see results of this research study?

Without knowing the details of the monitoring, it is hard to tell.

Is there a USDA release date for public availability of the SPV?

It may be a year or two. It is currently being distributed more than ever before. There are variables related to manufacturing and distribution that may impact production.

Group Discussion

- From a research perspective, one year is not a very long time. There is nothing in the document that limits the research to one year. Page 29 of the supplemental document lays out the future beyond 2018.
- There is a vaccine for the black-footed ferret, but it is not oral. This project moves the city in the right direction in terms of potential black-footed ferret reintroduction.

Agreements

- The document will refer to the pilot project as a research proposal, rather than a plague management plan.
- The document should include a description of the comparative research design with Boulder County.
- The document will state that “pending successful outcomes, the city anticipates continuing the project.”

NEXT STEPS

- Peak Facilitation will provide a meeting summary draft within a week.
- The revised recommendation documents will separate background information from recommendations. The lead for each recommendation will do the revisions, then staff will rearrange the supplemental document. This document will be sent out to the full Prairie Dog Working Group by the end of the day on Thursday, September 7.
- The full Prairie Dog Working Group meets on Sept 11.
- Task Group members will individually reach out to specific members of the Prairie Dog Working Group to prepare them and ensure minimal discussion duplication.
 - Lindsey will talk to Deb, Amy, and Eric.
 - Dan will talk to Aaron.
 - Pat will talk to Carse.
- Future e-mails sent from Peak Facilitation will explicitly lay out the homework and deadlines.