

Prairie Dog Working Group
October 30, 2017
Open Space Mountain Parks Annex: 7315 Red Deer Drive

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Peter Boyatt, Dan Brandemuehl, Pat Comer, Aaron Cook, Elle Cushman, Deborah Jones, Keri Konold, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Amber Largent, Joy Master, Valerie Matheson, Andy Pelster, Carse Pustmueller, Eric Sims, Heather Swanson, John Vickery

Facilitation: Heather Bergman, Sam Haas

ACTION ITEMS

Staff Leads for Recommendation #4 and #5	Revise recommendation #4 and #5 per the Prairie Dog Working Group's agreements.
Peak Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send out a Doodle poll for dates in December and January for the next two meetings. • Send out a Doodle poll to the subgroups that are meeting to finalize recommendations #1-3.
Aaron Cook, Amy Masching, and Val Matheson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet to finalize recommendation #1.
Deb Jones, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Joy Master, Carse Pustmueller, Heather Swanson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet to finalize recommendation #2.
Pat Comer, Aaron Cook, Deb Jones, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Joy Master, Val Matheson, Carse Pustmueller, Lynn Riedel (if she wants), Heather Swanson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet to finalize recommendation #3.
All PDWG Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicate your availability for the next two meetings (December and January) on the Doodle poll that Peak Facilitation will send out. • Mark your calendars for the second Monday of each month (5:00 PM – 9:00 PM) through May.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The opening ten minutes of the meeting were dedicated to both verbal and written public comment. Facilitation staff summarized the written comments. The individual comments are summarized below.

Paula Shuler

- Shuler, a resident of north Boulder County, has a 160-acre farming property that borders city-owned open space that continues to be damaged by prairie dogs that have migrated from City of Boulder land.

- Shuler is disappointed that the Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG) has chosen to focus on City of Boulder properties with small numbers of prairie dogs because there are many prairie dogs on agricultural properties and neighboring private properties. Shuler suggests a field trip to Boulder County to see the damage from prairie dog habitation.
- Relocation and conservation should not be the only prairie dog management options. There are thousands of prairie dogs from Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) land in Boulder County impacting private neighboring properties. The City of Boulder must act to help private property owners curb property damage and devaluation due to prairie dogs.

REVIEW AND FINALIZATION OF FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

City of Boulder staff has worked to flesh out the PDWG's five recommendations from Phase One. Staff summarized the recommendations and PDWG members offered suggestions for revision. Included in the discussion were the changes proposed by the Task Group that met to discuss the recommendations.

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.

- Joy Master examined plans from Boulder County and Fort Collins and talked with multiple relocation contractors to gather a range of perspectives. These discussions revealed that it is difficult to separate plans related to the implementation of relocation from the definition of successful relocation; they are often enmeshed. There is also a difference between success of the project overall and success as it relates to prairie dogs and their survival.
- To define successful relocation from a project level, City of Boulder staff developed general principles to guide relocation goals, and the Prairie Dog Task Group added several principles.
- To define successful relocation from a prairie dog level, the recommendation defines success as implementation of best management practices (BMPs) and stability of the relocated colony. Pertinent BMPs were provided as well as ways to evaluate stability.

Group Discussion

- The Task Group struggled to define success and thought that the quantifiable measurements to evaluate stability should be kept general in the recommendation document.
- The recommendation document includes evaluation charts to assess stability after six months, 12 months, and 24 months. Some members of the PDWG felt that the

short-term, 30- to 60-day period immediately after the relocation should also be evaluated. Some members of the PDWG felt that the recommendation should include an evaluation five and ten years after the relocation.

- Some members of the PDWG felt that evaluations collected after two years would not accurately reflect the success of the relocation because long-term data captures many factors that influence a population's survival unrelated to the initial establishment of the colony post-relocation. There is a lack of clarity about when the measurement of successful relocations ends and general prairie dog management begins. PDWG members had questions about how much unique information a five-year post-relocation assessment would contribute.
- Some members of the PDWG felt that there were too many variables to consider when defining success, many of which are out of our control. The recommendation does include caveats on page 7. It states: "Relocations could still be considered generally successful if these conditions are not fully met, but these ratings outline the desired outcome and when not met should indicate that adaptation may be required. If success goals are not met, then it should be determined if there were controllable factors that could be altered to increase success or if this is typical.
- The criteria in this recommendation could appear to hold relocated colonies to a higher standard for success than colonies inhabiting the rest of the landscape as it lists success as the expansion of the population, which may be unrealistic because expansion may not occur in the wider system. This could, however, be accounted for in the evaluation utilizing the same caveat as previously discussed.
- The evaluation of stability lists many field data collection activities that are not currently being done. There was a discussion about what needs to be done versus what is feasible. The City of Boulder currently maps the prairie dog colonies every fall through on the ground mapping of occupied areas. The long-term data of OSMP's Grassland Preserves measures the overall stability of the prairie dog population in the area. It does not measure the density of specific sites because collecting data on density is extremely labor intensive and error prone, and collecting data on landscape scale would not be feasible. Success for the Grassland Preserves is measured as movement toward the conservation goals articulated in the Grassland Ecosystem Management Plan.
- The City of Boulder's assessments have revealed a new pattern related to the plague. Instead of epizootic outbreaks that wipe out an entire colony, there have been more cases of the plague that have resulted in a population reduction, or having some survivors remain after the epizootic
- Relocation contractors typically monitor the colonies they have relocated for as long as possible, and some contractors have reported colonies lasting over 20 years. It would be helpful if the City of Boulder's annual assessment data were grouped into a report that showed which colonies were relocated, so that the contractor could assess options for making relocations more successful.
- PDWG members had questions about the proposed adaptive management practices and some relocation experts had concerns about being asked to engage in lengthy discussions about methods for each relocation. While implementation details are not outlined in the recommendation document, it would be possible for the City of

Boulder to implement the success measures while working with relocation contractors on a case-by-case basis. When there is a shared understanding of success, it is easier to agree on methods. There are multiple ways to get from A to B and still meet success criteria without defining the specific way.

- The landscape perspective seems to be missing from this recommendation. It is unclear if this recommendation would monitor progress toward larger occupation goals. In a functional colony, some prairie dogs may migrate, and if they are remaining on the larger landscape, this would still be successful
- PDWG members had questions about the timeframe for evaluating BMPs during the relocation. While there may be BMPs that do not apply to every relocation, they would be assessed before the relocation to determine methods and after the relocation to measure success.
- One of the goals is: “to evaluate disease risks and prophylactic measures.” PDWG members had questions about the use of the word “prophylactic.” One example of a prophylactic measure is the sylvatic plague vaccine. Another is the use of Delta Dust. The City will continue to assess the pros and cons of pesticide use.
- It is important to remember that success is evaluated system-wide; there are no colony-specific goals. The recommendation must have built-in flexibility to allow for different future scenarios.
- Some PDWG members were concerned about the level of detail in the tables, given the time and effort it takes conduct monitoring efforts. Members suggested emphasizing population and expansion and generalized goals for wildlife and vegetation, but taking out the quantifiable indicators.
- The following suggestions for change were presented by a member and discussed by the PDWG:
 - One of the stated goals is to “mitigate conflicts with existing land uses or management.” The suggested change is to add “to allow relocations to occur and thrive” at the end of the sentence. This is suggested because other land uses often take priority over prairie dog habitat, and the goal should be to mitigate conflicts to ensure successful prairie dog relocations. PDWG members thought that the word “mitigate” addressed the concern raised about this goal. The PDWG agreed to add “at the take site” to the bullet and insert language about conservation.
 - One of the stated goals is to “support prairie dog colonies, especially in suitable and protected areas.” While not the intent, “suitable” in this context can be interpreted as areas where there are minimal conflicts, which may limit habitat to Prairie Dog Conservation Areas (PCAs). The suggested change is: “to support prairie dog colonies, especially in the Southern Grassland Preserves, and to create a large block of prairie dog habitat.” PDWG members expressed concern that this suggested revision placed limits on the intent, as the Southern Grassland Preserves may not always have low occupation. Some PDWG members had questions about whether this goal refers to ecological or habitat suitability, and suggested changing the language to “viable colonies.” It was determined that the goal referred to both but that viable was misleading as well. Some PDWG members thought that the goal of

supporting prairie dog colonies was too broad, as the goal of relocation is to maintain or build population numbers. It was discussed that we would add text about supporting the conservation of prairie dogs and this should be resolved.

- One of the stated goals is “to minimize disturbance to the land.” The suggested change is: “to provide adequate accommodation with existing burrows or artificial burrows while minimizing disturbance to the land.” Some PDWG members suggested changing the goal to “minimize and mitigate disturbance to the land” and adding a second bullet for the rest. There is also a stated goal to “ensure relocations are conducted in a way that is humane.”
- One of the stated goals is “to discourage prairie dog recolonization.” The revised change is to add “...by nonlethal means” at the end of the sentence but the PDWG did not agree to the revision.

Agreements

- One of the goals is: “to evaluate disease risks and prophylactic measures.” Instead, insert: “to evaluate disease risks and the application of potential mitigation measures.”
- On page five, it states that “mortality from enzootic disease outbreaks should be considered for evaluation of success but different considerations should be given for those that are native/natural versus those that are not, such as the plague.” Some PDWG members interpreted “different consideration” to mean “less consideration.” This should be edited to clarify that is not the case.
- One of the stated goals is to “mitigate conflicts with existing land uses or management.” Instead, insert: “to mitigate conflicts with existing land uses at the take site.” Also, add language about conservation to this goal.
- One of the stated goals is to “support prairie dog colonies, especially in suitable and protected areas.” Instead, insert: “support prairie dog conservation goals.”
- The PDWG agreed to add an additional goal: “to provide adequate accommodation with existing or artificial burrows.”
- Page 2 of the recommendation describes the criteria for good indicators of stability. The PDWG agreed to make these criteria more general and take out the charts on pages 5 and 6.

Recommendation #5: Collaboratively prepare, with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), 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.

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

- Heather Swanson has talked with Dan Tripp and Mike Miller at CPW and will be scheduling a meeting to discuss the objectives of the SPV research proposal in early December.
- The goal is to have a draft research plan by the end of 2017. It would be interesting to work with Boulder County to do a paired study. The proposed plan is to acquire

enough SPV to apply it to all the active acres in southern grasslands (60.25 acres last year). The study would likely not produce results until after the plague moves through the landscape.

Group Discussion

- Some PDWG group members were concerned that the use of SPV would not be approved for the study, and they wanted to discuss a contingency plan/strategy. OSMP staff stated that there would be continual collaboration with CPW to understand the prioritization of their SPV allocation. If there is no SPV available, this recommendation would not be carried out.
- A one-year study is unlikely to produce any viable data with SPV alone. Some PDWG members suggested a dual use of SPV and Delta Dust, or a double dose of SPV over multiple years. Other members of the PDWG expressed concern about the controversial nature and community response to the use of Delta Dust. OSMP staff members will discuss the use of SPV in a multi-year study with CPW and Boulder County, but there may be constraints associated with committing to a multi-year study before completing the assessment of the results from the first year.
- The recommendation must address the tension between the goals of this study and the rules associated with pesticide use and the Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM). It should provide some flexibility for addressing these issues. It may be possible to add introductory language about how this is an effort to better meet the prairie dog conservation goals on OSMP land. It is important to remember the tradeoffs and risks associated with committing to applying Delta Dust/SPV on every acre of prairie dog habitat, as this would drastically reduce or stop prairie dog mortality from the plague which would likely result in the lack of receiving sites.
- The supplemental information for this recommendation provides an overview of the preliminary pilot framework and goals beyond 2018 in the southern grasslands. It specifies that there will be a “feasibility study” after 2018, and some PDWG were concerned that there would not be any on-the-ground action.
- Some PDWG members suggested revising the plague management goal. The stated goal is to “maintain sufficient prairie dog population in the Grassland Preserves to meet Grassland Ecosystem Management Plan defined viability measures...” The suggested revision was “to create and maintain sufficient prairie dog populations.” Other members of the PDWG expressed concern that the goal of creating habitat does not align with the interests expressed by some members of the public.

Agreements

- Change the heading of the plague management goal on page 1 to “plague management goals for the Southern Grasslands Grassland Preserve.”
- In the “future beyond 2018 in Southern Grasslands” section on page 2, specify that “it is the desire of the PDWG that this will be a multi-year study, pending the approval of CPW.”

NEXT STEPS FOR FINALIZING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations #1-3 should clarify that there are plans that are not related to development.
- The supplemental information for recommendation #2 provided was copy/pasted from recommendation #3. Heather Swanson will correct this and resend it to PDWG members. She will also correct the calculation for Richardson II that incorrectly states that $71+1+1 = 38$.

PLAN FOR PHASE TWO OF PDWG

Heather Bergman described the proposed objectives and process for Phase Two.

- During the PDWG on September 11, several PDWG members suggested that the group agree to prairie dog management guiding principles and values. The objectives for Phase Two are to agree to guiding principles, identify associated changes to plans and policies to achieve the management goal(s), and recommend goal(s) and associated changes to plans and policies to the City Manager.
- There will likely be six meeting in Phase Two. The first meeting will be spent reaching an agreement on guiding principles (e.g., science-based decisions, minimization of lethal control, etc.) and values (e.g., consideration of impacts to grasslands, agriculture, etc.).
- The PDWG will spend three meetings reaching an agreement on overall prairie dog management goals for the City of Boulder. During the first meeting, the PDWG will review existing goals and PDWG members will present a proposed goal statement with associated values and considerations. During the second meeting, the PDWG will discuss the proposals. During the third meeting, the PDWG will reach an agreement on one or more goals.
- The final two meetings will be spent exploring the needed changes to plans and policies to reflect agreed-upon goal(s). There will likely be some sub-group work to discuss how specific goals relate to different plans/policies.

NEXT STEPS

- Starting in February, the PDWG will meet the first Monday of each month (through May).
- Peak Facilitation will send out a Doodle poll with additional dates in December and January for the next two meetings.
- Peak Facilitation will send out a Doodle poll to the subgroups that are meeting to finalize recommendations #1-3. It may be best to have a three-hour meeting during the day to discuss all three, and people can come for the first, second, and/or third portion. Ideally, this group should meet before Thanksgiving.
 - Aaron Cook, Amy Masching, and Val Matheson will finalize recommendation #1.
 - Deb Jones, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Joy Master, Carse Pustmueller, Heather Swanson will finalize recommendation #2.
 - Pat Comer, Aaron Cook, Deb Jones, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Joy Master, Val Matheson, Carse Pustmueller, Lynn Riedel (if she wants), and Heather Swanson will finalize recommendation #3.