

**Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG)**  
**April 2, 2018**  
**OSMP Annex - 7315 Red Deer Drive**  
**Meeting Summary - FINAL**

*Participants:* Dan Brandemuehl, Kristin Cannon, Pat Comer, Elle Cushman, Keri Konold, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Amber Largent, Joy Master, Val Matheson, Andy Pelster, Carse Pustmueller, Heather Swanson, John Vickery

*Facilitation:* Heather Bergman, Sam Haas

<b>Peak Facilitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send the public comments received to the Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG).</li> <li>• Send out the guiding principles and list of values brainstormed by the PDWG.</li> <li>• Send out the raw notes from the April 2 PDWG meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Keri Konold</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send the PDWG the email thread between Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) staff and Paula Shuler.</li> <li>• Find the results from the Boulder County phone survey from 2010 related to prairie dogs.</li> </ul>
<b>Elle Cushman, Keri Konold, Andy Pelster, Lindsey Sterling Krank</b>	Work together to refine the economic goal(s) and objectives. Keri Konold will organize the meeting.
<b>Amber Largent, Dan Brandemuehl, Val Matheson</b>	Work together to refine the social goal(s) and objectives. Val Matheson will organize the meeting.
<b>Pat Comer, Carse Pustmueller, John Vickery</b>	Work together to refine the ecological goal(s) and objectives. Pat Comer will organize the meeting. Send revisions to Heather Swanson for review.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

The first ten minutes of the meeting were dedicated to both verbal and written public comment. Public comments that were submitted online were read to the Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG) and sent to the PDWG after the meeting.

**Paula Shuler**

- Shuler expressed serious concern about the presence of prairie dog colonies on the Stratton and Brewbaker property in Boulder County. According to Shuler, the properties were purchased by the City of Boulder but not managed properly, and the quality of the land has deteriorated.
- Shuler lives on a 160-acre farm south of Stratton and Brewbaker. Prairie dogs have migrated from Stratton and Brewbaker in all directions to neighboring private parcels. Shuler has asked for the prairie dogs to be removed in the long term and

for the City to build a fence in the short term to keep more prairie dogs from migrating.

- Irrigated agricultural land is a valuable asset to the City and County and the prairie dog occupation has negatively impacted the quality of the soils.

### **Eleanor Lanaghan**

- Lanaghan is an Open Space and Trails technician and graduate student of biology at Miami University and has developed the Colorado Prairie Dog Squad as a citizen science program to engage residents and wildlife managers in prairie dog research. The first in-person training will occur in early summer of 2018.
- Colorado Prairie Dog Squad's mission is to provide prairie dog conservationists and managers with high-quality data about prairie dog abundance and habitat data across Colorado's prairies to protect the ecological functions of grasslands for future generations. Colorado Prairie Dog Squad has partnered with City and County of Broomfield Open Space and would like to extend an invitation to work with City of Boulder Open Space.

### **Group Discussion**

The PDWG discussed the public comments received. Below are the key themes from their discussion.

- Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) has reached out to Paula Shuler. There are irrigation improvements planned on the Stratton and Brewbaker property. The irrigation improvements will be used as a tool to manage prairie dog occupancy, as prairie dogs will move to drier parts of the property.
- Shuler has put up a mesh barrier on her property. Her property is across the road from the Stratton and Brewbaker property, not directly adjacent to it. She has an extensive prairie dog colony on her property.
- Prairie dog occupation of agricultural land is a systemic problem. It decreases production and impacts the livestock areas and the economic wellbeing of the many heritage ranchers. There should be time set aside during a future PDWG meeting to discuss the concerns of heritage ranchers.

### **SUBGROUP PRESENTATION OF REFINED PRAIRIE DOG MANAGEMENT GOALS**

PDWG members who met in February presented the refined prairie dog management goals. At the April 2 meeting, participants asked clarifying questions about the refined management goals and determined next steps. Below are the highlights from their discussion.

#### **Presentation of Refined Prairie Dog Management Goals**

- The subgroup compiled the revised goal statement document and accounted for the comments and input from the previous PDWG meeting. The subgroup split the goals into ecological, economic, and social components. The document is structured by overarching goals, objectives to meet those goals, strategies to advance the individual objectives, and tangible milestones. Milestones and strategies should be measurable and specific.

- The next step is to make the goal statements specific, measurable, accurate, realistic, and timely (SMART). There should be quantifiable objectives/strategies/milestones tied to each goal.
- The subgroup would like to have a conversation with the full PDWG about the goal and objective statements then split into subgroups to determine how to achieve the objectives and measure the strategies.

## **Group Discussion of the Ecological Goal Statement**

### *Discussion Related to the Goal Statement*

- The goal of “securing viable prairie dog populations” should clearly define what is meant by the term “secure,” as that term can be interpreted differently. Other terms such as “long-term” and “sustainable” should also be clearly defined in each context.
- The intent of the ecological goal is to widen the lens to the entire landscape beyond City Open Space and consider how the habitat suitability criteria can apply to the entire landscape with the goal of creating more prairie dog habitat. The original Grassland Management Plan was constrained to City of Boulder OSMP lands (not Boulder County or Parks and Recreation land).
- One of the ecological goals is to create an interconnected grassland area where prairie dog conservation is the primary management objective.
- The first sentence of the goal is to “update the City’s prairie dog management designations.” While designations may be problematic, the intent is not to un-designate removal areas but rather to identify areas where prairie dogs should be and to work to maintain prairie dog populations in those areas, independent of the designations.
- There are multiple management objectives for the Grassland Preserves, and creating a sustainable ecosystem for prairie dogs is only one of many concerns. The tactics used to create large-scale prairie dog conservation are being used in the prairie dog conservation areas (PCAs), but the PCAs are not large blocks of land. PCAs are areas that do not have many other conservation targets, as these areas are often degraded or ecologically disturbed by prairie dog activity.

### *Discussion Related to the Objectives*

- It may be useful to consolidate some of the objectives.
- It is important that the objectives set realistic expectations. For example, objective one is to “secure one or more interconnected networks of high-integrity grasslands that support viable populations of disease-free prairie dog colonies, with prairie dog numbers naturally controlled by viable populations of black-footed ferret and other native predators.” There are two landscapes in Boulder that could support viable black-footed ferret populations (Rabbit Mountain and the Southern Grasslands), but there are not areas within Boulder County that are large enough. It should also be noted that “disease resistant” may be a more appropriate term than “disease free,” as there is no evidence pointing to the existence of any disease-free prairie dog populations.

- Objective three includes a statement about working with local experts to review modeling methods and data input to provide an updated prairie dog habitat suitability model. This objective should more clearly state that its intent is to select additional receiving sites (“update the habitat suitability model in order to...”). Objective three is also an example of a statement that would have implications for other resources managed by OSMP.
- It would be helpful to clarify what is meant by the term “harmonize” in objective four.
- The subgroup should reword strategy two under objective five to make it clear that not every colony should increase prairie dog habitat, but rather that prairie dog numbers should increase in aggregate. The intent of strategy two was not to prioritize the improvement of prairie dog habitat on all land, but rather to identify areas where prairie dog occupation is and is not appropriate.
- In objective eight, it is unclear what data for at-risk species is being referenced. While OSMP monitors nesting bald eagles on the Southern Grasslands, they do not have a full list of at-risk species.
- There are several strategies that refer to the evaluation of OSMP criteria for release sites. Colorado Parks and Wildlife often defers to OSMP’s criteria because it is so comprehensive and thorough.

#### *Additional Considerations*

- The group discussed whether and how to include an objective related to population management. Some members voiced a concern that the document does not include a statement about the provision of population control methods, which is an important component of wildlife management. Some PDWG members pointed to objective six, which states that there will be a plan for the reintroduction of black-footed ferret and other native predators. They highlighted research that indicates that prairie dogs practice their own population control (infanticide, abortion, etc.) and that the primary goal should be to manage and maintain the boundary within which the prairie dogs live, rather than to thin existing populations. Prairie dog colonies will expand where they can, and there are both ecological and landowner concerns related to prairie dog expansion. There is more information about prairie dog control methods under the “social” goal and associated objectives.
- The PDWG should consider including a statement about ensuring that OSMP is equipped with the proper tools to remove prairie dogs from properties if habitat becomes too extensive in areas that are not designated for prairie dog use (e.g., irrigated agricultural land).

### **Group Discussion of the Social Goal Statement**

#### *Discussion Related to the Goal Statement*

- PDWG members discussed the use of the term “prairie dog conservation.” Some felt that “prairie dog management” may be a more acceptable term to the broader public who work outside of the conservation field, and others connoted the term “prairie dog management” with the use of lethal control. One option would be to create a

new phrase to more accurately reflect the social goal, such as “sustainable management and resiliency.”

- It is important to be clear about the breadth of conflicts associated with prairie dogs, so that it not assumed that the only conflicts that occur are between landowners and prairie dogs.
- It should be clear how “increased acceptance” will be measured. It could be measured through a community survey. The Prairie Dog Coalition did a survey in 2006 that asked 400 people across Colorado and South Dakota what they thought of prairie dogs. After the survey was conducted, there was an education effort, and the participants were interviewed again after learning more about prairie dogs. The overall positive perception of prairie dogs increased after the participants were provided with educational information. Boulder County also did a phone survey of over 3,000 residents in 2010 related to prairie dogs. *Keri Konold will find the results from this survey.*

#### *Discussion Related to the Objectives*

- There should be an objective that specifically relates to stakeholder identification.
- Strategy one under objective one states that “staff should review current protocols and request input from citizens for their update.” Instead, it should be: “staff should review current protocols and encourage engagement from the public.”
- The goal of objective one is to ensure that there are clear protocols of communication during a problem or emergency (e.g., at the Armory last year). This objective could be measured by monitoring the trend in landowner/stakeholder complaints. However, it should be noted that the call volume often decreases when prairie dog populations are low and vice versa, so this may not be an adequate measurement of the quality of communication.
- There were questions related to objective one and whether PDWG members are concerned that there is a systemic issue related to communication protocols, or whether concerns stem specifically from the incident at the Armory last year where burrows were being destroyed. The current protocol is to call animal control in an emergency to deal with a legal issue. Unfortunately, during the Armory emergency, animal control did not have the right person on call so they referred complaints to the police.
- It is important to be mindful of the implications of the term “public education” as opposed to “engagement.” Engagement implies a mutual exchange of ideas rather than one-way communication.
- The PDWG discussed strategies to achieve objectives two and three. One suggestion is to take advantage of the window of time after plague moves through a colony to restore those areas to their pre-prairie dog states. Another strategy is to look at colonies from a landscape perspective and anticipate where and when prairie dogs will encroach so that barriers can be planned. Objective three references prioritizing parcels for addressing OSMP irrigated agriculture goals on parcels that are isolated from priority prairie dog colonies. This is challenging because most irrigated agriculture land is on the margins of Open Space, and almost every parcel is within migrating distance of another parcel.

- OSMP land borders over 11 miles of non-city lands. Barriers cost \$27.00 per foot, so a barrier around the perimeter of OSMP land would cost approximately \$1.7 million. Perhaps some reprioritization of parcels could help to create an understanding of the magnitude of the challenge. From the irrigated agriculture perspective, it would be most beneficial to invest in quality irrigation systems. Boulder Parks and Recreation land borders five miles of non-city land, and while barriers are not the preferred solution, Parks and Recreation has used barriers since 2001 to help institute the Wildlife Management Plan. However, there are tradeoffs related to barriers that need to be considered, and it is not a one-size-fits all option.
- Objectives four and five could potentially be combined and could relate specifically to targeted public outreach.
- Regarding strategy one of objective five, it may be possible to provide an online version of the homeowner packets to avoid the use of paper. The strategy could specify that technology should be integrated into communication efforts.
- Objective six is currently in the City's legislative agenda, so the intent of this objective is to elevate the importance of state regulations that facilitate the transfer of prairie dogs across county borders.

#### *Additional Considerations*

- The goal document should note that the current OSMP public engagement model for prairie dog management has been for staff and wildlife ecologists to address comments and issues as they arise, but that this can impact their ability to focus on other tasks. There could be a statement like "we appreciate that this goal requires certain expertise, and we encourage Council to consider resource allocation and time associated with the achievement of these objectives."
- The word "citizen" should be replaced by the word "resident" or "community member."
- It may be helpful to have Amy Masching review this section before it is finalized to help with the framing and language.

#### **Group Discussion of the Economic Goal Statement**

##### *Discussion Related to the Objectives*

- There should be more clarity in the objectives about how the money that is raised would be used.
- Some PDWG members had questions about the term "net positive impact." Often, when a city's goal is to avoid negative impact, the approach is to simply use mitigation techniques to minimize impact. Instead, the intent of creating a net positive impact is to go beyond mitigation and devise innovative ways to ensure that development allows for the restoration of habitat. Net positive impact is applicable beyond relocation and could be integrated into the PDWG guiding principles.
- Strategy two of objective one is to "provide brokering services to private landowners for priority receiving and removal sites on public and private land." This strategy should have a footnote with references to explain what "brokering services" means.

- Strategy two of objective two is to “work with Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to identify Farm Bill-funded conservation practices that could support grassland restoration and prairie dog habitat management on private lands.” Some PDWG members raised questions about how this would look in relation to agriculture properties. Prairie dog conservation would only be part of the partnership with NRCS; the overall goal would be to restore grassland species. It is also worth researching whether the Farm Bill grants can be used on public land projects. There may be opportunities for partnership on long-term leases.
- Objective three states that “City of Boulder staffing, budget, and resources are maintained at sufficient levels.” This connotes that the current levels are adequate. This could be reworded to: “appropriate budgets are identified and maintained.”

#### *Additional Considerations*

- This goal should include discrete pilot projects that serve as milestones that are geographically and temporally constrained. The pilot projects can be tweaked and expanded upon, but it is important to start implementation of projects soon.
- It should be clear how each objective will contribute to the accomplishment of the overarching goal statement.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

- The PDWG will divide into subgroups to refine each of the three goals before the meeting on April 9. During the next meeting, the PDWG will discuss and finalize the goals and have a conversation about prioritization (what should be done first?). The subgroups are:
  - Economic goal: Elle Cushman, Keri Konold (lead), Lindsey Sterling Krank, Andy Pelster
  - Social goal: Dan Brandemuehl, Amber Largent, Val Matheson (lead)
  - Ecological goal: Pat Comer (lead), Carse Pustmueller, John Vickery
- Peak Facilitation will send out the guiding principles and the meeting summary during which the PDWG brainstormed values.