

CITY OF BOULDER OPEN SPACE & MOUNTAIN PARKS
Prairie Dog Working Group
66 S. Cherryvale Road, Boulder, CO 80303
April 24, 2017
Meeting Summary

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Dan Brandemuehl, Kristin Cannon, Patrick Comer, Aaron Cook, Elle Cushman, Jeff Edson, Deborah Jones, Keri Konold, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Amber Largent, Amy Masching, Joy Master, Valerie Matheson, Andy Pelster, Carse Pustmueller, Eric Sims, Jr., Heather Swanson, John Vickery.

Facilitation: Heather Bergman, Sam Haas

ACTION ITEMS

Heather Swanson	Ask OSMP rangers about the protocols for deciding when to take injured prairie dogs to rehabilitation.
Val Matheson	Inform the group when you hear back the City's attorney office about the mitigation/conservation fund.
Carse Pustmueller	Refine the wording of recommendation #15 to reflect intentions.
Joy Master	Send additional recommendations to Heather Bergman.
Heather Bergman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send Joy Masters' additional recommendations to the Working Group. • Send the evaluation criteria spreadsheet to the Working Group.
Working Group members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill out the evaluation spreadsheet individually and send responses to Heather Bergman by Wednesday, May 3, at 5 PM. • Contact each other with questions about specific recommendations and copy the entire Working Group on any responses.

PUBLIC COMMENT

As discussed by Working Group members during the first meeting, the opening ten minutes of the meeting were dedicated to both verbal and written public comment. Each person was allowed three minutes to speak. The individual comments are summarized below.

Paula Stephani

- Stephani, a resident who advocated for the Armory colony, summarized several concerns she has related to a recent incident at the Armory relocation site. Several weeks ago, neighbors of the Armory site sent Boulder City staff photos of several prairie dogs and newly active burrows at the Armory site. The photos also showed someone shoveling dirt on top of the burrows. On April 17, residents observed

workers covering the burrows with slabs of concrete and noticed prairie dogs running around trying to find a burrow entrance.

- When animal control arrived, they asked the landowner to stop to allow for a City investigation. The landowner declined and continued to cover up the burrows. Police told concerned residents there was nothing to be done.
- What recommendations can the Working Group make to protect prairie dog burrows from being violated?

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Carse Pustmueller shared her perspective on the incident at the Armory relocation site and offered several additional recommendations to the Working Group. Below are her comments and recommendations.

Comments

- Pustmueller reported that she observed the landowner at the Armory relocation site destroy three burrows, use a Bobcat to pack soil and destroy the tunnels, and cover burrow openings with concrete slabs. The police arrived at 7:30 PM and told the landowner to cease and desist. However, the landowner continued to work into the evening. The next morning, animal control arrived and informed Pustmueller that there was nothing that could be done to hold the landowner accountable. A sick prairie dog was euthanized.
- Pustmuller called different City departments and employees throughout the day. Nothing was done to stop the landowner from destroying the burrows. When the Department of Animal Control arrived, they noted that there were no active burrows and issued a warning. The origin of these few prairie dogs is unknown. They could be residual inhabitants of the Armory colony, or they could be from a neighboring colony.

Recommendations

1. Boulder City staff should trust and implement the advice of prairie dog conservation experts like Lindsey Sterling Krank, Dan Tripp, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and scientific literature. This should be an immediate action.
2. Any sick or injured prairie dogs should be taken to a rehabilitation facility as a first step. This should be an immediate action.
3. The City should prepare with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) a proposal for USDA approval for the use of the Sylvatic Plague Vaccine (SPV) on the southern grasslands. This should be an immediate action.
4. There should be a process for stopping suspicious activity during the intervening period when City staff has not determined issues of legality. This is a 2017 relocation pilot project.
5. The Wildlife Protection Ordinance, specifically section 6-1-12 relating to the damaging of prairie dog burrows, should be amended to promote non-lethal control methods. This is a policy issue.

RECOMMENDATION DISCUSSION

Working Group members reviewed and discussed the ideas presented at the previous meeting. Working Group members agreed to include the “immediate” and “2017 relocation pilot project” recommendations in the evaluation exercise. Recommendations are noted in *italics*. Additional information about and context for each recommendation is also included.

Immediate

1. *Get Council approval to use Delta Dust on the relocated Armory prairie dog burrows immediately. Without dusting, the Armory colony is in imminent danger.*
 - The Prairie Dog Coalition may be able to donate Delta Dust.
 - The management objective of using Delta Dust at this site is to demonstrate to the many concerned members of the public that the City is committed to the long-term safety of these specific animals. It would show commitment to the stakeholders involved in the relocation and would reassure members of the public.
 - While this would deviate from current practice, it would not require a policy change.
 - Working Group members should think about whether this action falls into the category of ecosystem management, individual species management, or individual animal management. The Working Group should also consider whether the Armory colony is in imminent danger and if a one-off dusting is going to help. Delta Dust has about a year-long effect.
 - Delta Dust application should be targeted and strategic. It should not be broad spectrum. This would require approximately four acres of strategic Delta Dust application.
 - If the Working Group decides to make this recommendation, this could be an emergency one-time exemption to current policy. However, Working Group members discussed the need to understand the larger implications of the recommendation on non-target species and vegetation and the need to rely on staff expertise and advise. For example, there was a specific concern about rare insects and whether repeated application of Delta Dust has been proven to impact invertebrate communities. It may take at least a season to collect all the relevant information.
 - This action would signify the first step toward establishing a large block prairie dog habitat.
 - There were lingering questions concerning the legality of Delta Dust application inside prairie dog burrows. CPW permits the application of US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved insecticides. According to the label, Delta Dust can be used to “control fleas and ticks in and around rodent burrows with a shaker can. Delta Dust should be applied as needed for control.” The application of Delta Dust inside burrows is common practice for most applicators.

2. *Leave the prairie dogs at Foothills Community Park if the burrows at the release site will not be dusted before relocation. Consider the use of barriers or other methods to keep the colony contained there.*
 - This site was marked as removal zone in the Grassland Management Plan in 2005. It was deemed a near-term removal site in the Urban Management Wildlife Plan in 2006. Dog parks were installed to deter prairie dog encroachment.
 - The Working Group could request an exception to the Integrated Pest Management process to use Delta Dust at the Damyanovitch site.
 - The City has prioritized the relocation of the Foothills Community Park colony and a private property colony with 156 prairie dogs for 2017 relocations. Development is imminent at the private property site.
 - The construction of a barrier around this property would require a plan revision.
3. *The City should collaboratively prepare with CPW a proposal for USDA approval for the use of the SPV on the southern grasslands to be used in 2018.*
 - The Working Group would have to decide on the research proposal scope. The scope would inform feasibility.
 - The City could develop a proposal during 2017 and recommend a pilot program for 2018. The research question could simply be: “Is the use of SPV on 14 acres of the southern grasslands effective in maintaining prairie dog resistance to the plague?” The scope could be increased after the first year.

2017 Relocation Pilot Projects:

1. *Require the one-time use of Delta Dust in burrows on all 2017 relocation sites.*
 - There is currently a permit for the Damyanovitch property. The City is still conducting evaluations on additional sites on the southern grasslands.
 - Ideally, stakeholders would be engaged in any decisions regarding the use of Delta Dust on properties. While a stakeholder engagement process may take too long for the 2017 relocations, there could be intentional outreach in the future.
 - CPW is working on a stipulation that would require relocation permit applicants to agree to the use of Delta Dust at all release sites. The Working Group should draft a recommendation that specifies what actions should be taken if CPW institutes this requirement.
 - The Delta Dust applicators should be provided with a map of local beekeepers and should notify them before the application.
2. *Place a temporary moratorium on any relocation receiving sites until they have been dusted or until there is agreement that they will be dusted.*
 - Fleas are most active in the Spring. Experts recommend using Delta Dust in the Fall. Fleas are never completely dormant.
 - The moratorium would only be for 2017. This would be a temporary solution while longer-term recommendations are being pursued.

3. *Develop criteria for selecting relocation contractors. The contractors should be selected and contracted by the City. The contractor should be trusted by the public and should have extensive experience with and commitment to conservation (not extermination).*
 - There is a public perception that contractors who are not focused on conservation handle prairie dogs recklessly.
 - Ideally, this recommendation would help increase the number of contractors who advocate for humane wildlife management. Contractors could be taught non-lethal methods.
 - There are often only two bids for a relocation request for proposal (RFP) put out by the City. One bid is typically from The Prairie Dog Coalition and the other is from a company that also does extermination. This recommendation could limit the number of choices.
4. *Identify a list of preferred prairie dog relocation contractors who meet the criteria determined in recommendation #3.*
5. *Install and maintain visual barrier fences at relocation sites adjacent to homes. Fences would address many landowner concerns, e.g. property devaluation, colony expansion, and the potential for plague transmission to humans and pets.*
 - If the City proactively erected barrier fences, it would demonstrate to local homeowners that the City recognizes and respects their concerns.
 - Barriers typically cost between \$24.00 - \$26.00 per foot.
6. *Provide incentives for private landowners to offer their land as a receiving site.*
 - The Prairie Dog Coalition could potentially provide the incentive for 2017.
 - The Working Group should consider what the monetary threshold is. Typically, incentives between \$8,000 - \$10,000 prompt landowner agreement.
7. *Create a conservation/mitigation fund to be used for prairie dog conservation, including the acquisition of land for prairie dogs.*
 - This could be a pilot project for 2017, and then it could be considered as a long-term policy recommendation based on the feedback from the pilot year.
 - City staff is currently waiting to hear from the City Attorney's Office regarding this recommendation. Val Matheson will inform the group when she hears back.
8. *Continue to evaluate new or different relocation methods to increase success and/or reduce impacts of relocation.*
 - This is a general recommendation to use adaptive management.
 - The City could contact experts on a regular basis to assess the potential for integrating new technologies into relocations and prairie dog conservation.
9. *Evaluate sites that have had plague in the past, identify open burrows that could be used in the future, and act to keep burrows open.*
 - With appropriate training, this could be done by volunteers.

10. *Consider options that would allow Prairie Dog Conservation Areas (PCAs) to be used as relocation sites.*
 - This action is on the 2017 City work plan for the current PCAs.
 - There is research that states that sustainable prairie dog relocations typically require the relocation of at least 150 prairie dogs.
 - Many of the PCAs already have prairie dog colonies.
 - Many PCAs are adjacent to homes. If the Working Group decides to recommend barrier placement on sites adjacent to homes, they may want to consider funding priorities. It would very likely be costly to install a barrier on all PCA property adjacent to homes.

11. *Define successful relocation. Data should be continually collected on colonies post-relocation to assess occupancy.*
 - The Working Group should determine a clear definition that can be used to describe goals in relocation RFPs.
 - Data should be collected three months, six months, and a year post-relocation.

12. *Develop best management practices for relocations that minimize impacts to native grassland communities associated with the relocation and analyze methods to minimize disturbance.*

13. *Establish practices that encourage City staff to trust and implement the advice of prairie dog conservation experts.*
 - It may be difficult to execute this idea if experts disagree.
 - While this may have been a factor in what happened at the Armory last week, it is also important to clarify the lines of authority and communication for emergency situations.
 - Many people have practical knowledge of prairie dog management but do not have a degree. Their experiences should be included in the analysis of methodologies.

14. *Take sick or injured prairie dogs to a rehabilitation facility as a first response.*
 - Prairie dogs can be taken to rehabilitation facilities outside of the County. The facility must follow specific release guidelines. Prairie dogs must be released within ten miles of the capture site. They must also have landowner permission to release the prairie dog.
 - Heather Swanson will ask the Open Space and Mountain Parks rangers about the protocols for deciding when to take injured prairie dogs to rehabilitation.

15. *Determine chain of command and establish protocols to enforce the cessation of suspicious activity when it appears that the City's ordinance to protect prairie dogs is being violated.*

16. *Create more transparent guidelines for both the process of prioritizing relocation sites and for sharing City relocation priorities with the community.*

- 17. Ensure that receiving site criteria include a requirement to provide adequate accommodation for the number of prairie dogs that will be moved to the site.*
- 18. Review the Administrative Rule for the Relocation of Prairie Dogs to see what could be transferred to future recommendations.*
- 19. Create a relocation policy that prioritizes colonies that are in imminent threat of lethal control, regardless of land ownership.*

NEXT STEPS

- Joy Master will send her additional recommendations to Heather Bergman. Heather Bergman will send them to the group.
- Heather Bergman will send the Working Group the evaluation criteria spreadsheet.
- Each Working Group member will fill out the spreadsheet individually and send their response to Heather Bergman by Wednesday, May 3, by 5 PM.
- Working Group members should rate each recommendation based on their best understand. Contact each other with questions about specific recommendations and copy the entire Working Group on any responses.