

**Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG)**  
**April 9, 2018**  
**Location: OSMP Annex (7315 Red Deer Drive)**  
**Meeting Summary – FINAL**

**ATTENDANCE**

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

*Facilitation:* Heather Bergman, Sam Haas

**ACTION ITEMS**

<b>Staff</b>	Review plans/policies and flag areas where there are anticipated needed changes and where the subgroups should focus their efforts. Send these suggestions to Keri.
<b>Heather Swanson, Carse Pustmueller, Lindsey Sterling Krank, John Vickery</b>	Work together to refine the ecological goal(s) and objectives based on the suggested revisions from the April 9 meeting and discuss potential changes to plan/policies. Carse will coordinate the meeting.
<b>Dan Brandemuehl, Aaron Cook, Amber Largent, and Val Matheson</b>	Work together to refine the social goal(s) and objectives based on the suggested revisions from the April 9 meeting and discuss potential changes to plans/policies. Dan will coordinate the meeting.
<b>Pat Comer, Elle Cushman, Keri Konold, Lindsey Sterling Krank, Andy Pelster, Carse Pustmueller</b>	Work together to refine the economic goal(s) and objectives based on the suggested revisions from the April 9 meeting and discuss potential changes to plans/policies. Keri will coordinate the meeting.
<b>Peak Facilitation</b>	Send out raw notes from the April 9 meeting.

**SUBGROUP PRESENTATION OF ECOLOGICAL GOAL STATEMENT**

The subgroup of Prairie Dog Working Group (PDWG) members who met to refine the ecological prairie dog management goal presented their refined documents, and the group discussed and determined next steps for the goals and objectives.

**Key Revisions**

- The document was shortened and objectives were combined. The goal was revised based on the suggestions from the April 2 PDWG meeting. Objective 1 was shortened and a separate objective about plague resistance was developed.
- All the objectives related to updates to the Grassland Management Plan were combined into one, with distinct strategies for each. Objectives 5 and 6 were not changed.

## Clarifying Questions

PDWG members asked clarifying questions about the revised ecological goal and objectives. Questions are indicated in italics, followed by the response.

*Strategy 2 of objective 3 is to "review modeling method and data inputs to provide an updated suitability model encompassing the entire relevant grassland targets and apply those criteria to lands across City and adjacent county, public and private parcels." What does that process entail?*

The existing Grassland Management Plan does not govern land outside of City boundaries. It is important to consider all lands and potential opportunities in order to develop large, contiguous areas of habitat. The Grassland Management Plan was developed with intentional blinders because management was necessarily confined to City property, but this strategy is to open opportunities on adjacent land.

*Regarding objective 5, what percentage of Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) land is known to be vulnerable to habitat-altering management practices associated with prairie dog occupation?*

The percentage of area where there are known, at-risk plant or insect species is small, and the designation of those areas often depends on how "at risk" is defined. OSMP has lists of nested species within each target. That list could be referenced in this document, even though it is not tied to prairie dog management. It may be possible to place some indicators or goalposts on the data to minimize damage to at-risk species. The term "at-risk species" needs to be defined in this objective (federal level, state level, etc.). This objective should also state that effective mitigation should be pursued before taking steps to avoid adverse impacts.

*Strategy 1 of objective 3 is to "update receiving site relocation criteria (1-1) to fully utilize existing grassland receiving sites..." What does the term "fully utilize" mean in this context? Would executing this strategy require identifying new sites or would it mean changing the criteria for existing sites so that they can be used more?*

The intent is to make changes to the relocation criteria to allow for more flexibility in the use of current receiving sites and to allow more receiving sites to be identified. The City's criteria may be too strict and should be revisited. The intent behind this strategy should be explicitly stated. The strategy should also indicate that there need to be improvements in the process and capacity for conducting relocations because it is currently a slow system.

*Objective 2 is to "manage prairie dog colonies on city OSMP lands for plague resistance..." Does this refer to all OSMP lands or only OSMP lands that are designated for prairie dog conservation?*

The plague management and monitoring plan will hopefully provide clarity about what lands should be managed for plague resistance.

*Objective 4 provides the year 2020 as a milestone. Is that milestone tied to the creation of the black-footed ferret recovery plan or the implementation of the plan?*

That milestone is tied to the creation of the plan.

*Goal 1 references “viable plague-resistant prairie dog populations.” What does this mean?*  
A viable plague-resistant colony is stable and does not have the significant fluctuations in habitat that are caused by plague. With the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret and other predator species, the prairie dog population would be regulated in that context. The population would fluctuate within the natural range of variability.

*What are the concerns associated with prairie dog and black-footed ferret habitat in the Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuge?*

Rocky Flats has a wildlife management plan. The core area of land in Rocky Flats is not a wildlife refuge but is managed by the Department of Energy (DOE) in perpetuity. They probably use lethal control to manage the prairie dog population on that part of the land.

### **Group Discussion**

PDWG members discussed the revised ecological goal and objectives and provided final suggestions for revision.

- Any reference to the “Boulder Valley” should be replaced with the “Boulder region.”
- Milestone 2 of strategy 1 under objective 2 is to “work with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to create and implement an acceptable policy that may limit the use of insecticides but allows such use on large prairie dog occupied ecosystem colonies.” There is nothing in the IPM policy that restricts the use of Delta Dust. The City always evaluates sites to determine if it is necessary to use insecticide, with the goal of minimizing the use of chemicals. However, Delta Dust has never been used at the scale that is suggested in this proposal. The strategy is to use Delta Dust and other insecticides on City lands such as the Grasslands so that it is possible to build up prairie dog populations in larger areas. The IPM policy may need to be reworded. It is also possible that the development of a plague management and monitoring plan will create the desired impact.
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service has changed their criteria for black-footed ferret introduction. They used to require a minimum of 10,000 acres of contiguous habitat for reintroduction and they have since reduced that to 1,500 acres. The City of Boulder does not own 1,500 acres of contiguous property, so it would have to partner with Boulder County.
- It may be possible to combine objective 6 with milestone 2 in objective 2.
- Objective 1 has two components: habitat health and predator reintroduction. There is only one strategy to address both elements and it relates to habitat. The strategy should reference objective 4 (“for more about predator reintroduction, see objective 4”), or the objective could be simplified to: “...containing viable populations of prairie dog colonies naturally limited by viable populations of native predators.” However, some PDWG members are concerned that changing the objective in this way detracts from the importance of black-footed ferret reintroduction.
- The PDWG should consider the intent of objective 2. There are different implications if the intent is to promote the use of Delta Dust in order to allow for the creation of large blocks of prairie dog habitat than if the goal is to manage plague (which may or may not require the use of Delta Dust). The purpose of the IPM policy is to use

alternatives to Delta Dust when possible. The intent of this objective should be clarified.

- While the City of Boulder has no jurisdiction on non-City lands, there are potential areas for collaboration and partnership. The language in strategy 3 should be changed to “...and look for opportunities to apply those criteria to lands across City and adjacent county, public, and private parcels.”
- There was a discussion about the PDWG's overarching, guiding problem statement for prairie dog management. Each goal and objective is meant to address the problem statement that “the conservation of prairie dogs in the Boulder region is currently unsustainable on ecological, social, and economic grounds.”
- Objective 1 should clarify how the money will be acquired to achieve the objective, or it should reference goal 3, objective 2.

### **Suggested Areas for Revision**

Below are the topics/areas that the PDWG discussed and would like a subgroup to further refine.

- Clarify the form(s) that mitigation will take and what the thresholds related to impacts to other species are
- Clarify the intent of revisiting the site review criteria
- Clarify the scope of the plague management objective
- Change references to “Boulder Valley” to “Boulder region”
- Clarify the scope of the IPM revision in Milestone 2 of strategy 1 under objective 2
- Determine whether objective 6 should be combined with milestone 2 in objective 2
- Re-write objective 1 or reference the black-footed ferret objective in objective 1
- Address issues related to funding objective 1 (e.g., the conservation fund)
- Clarify any language that references opportunities on non-City lands so that it is clear that the intent is to look for opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

### **SUBGROUP PRESENTATION OF SOCIAL GOAL STATEMENT**

The subgroup of PDWG members who met to refine the social prairie dog management goal presented their refined document and the group discussed and finalized the goals and objectives.

### **Key Revisions**

- In the goal, the term “increase acceptance” was changed to “identify and minimize conflict.”
- A lot of content was shortened. Objective 3 was removed because the subgroup determined it was not addressing high-priority social issues. Objective 6 was moved up to be a strategy under objective 2. Objectives 4 and 5 were consolidated into one objective (objective 3).

### **Clarifying Questions**

PDWG members asked clarifying questions about the revised social goal and objectives. Questions are indicated in italics, followed by the response.

*Is the transfer of prairie dogs currently allowed across county lines?*

Yes, state legislature (Senate Bill 99-111) allows for the transport, but the intent is to keep it as a proactive item to be addressed with County Commissioners. That item (b. of strategies for objective 2) should be pulled out and made a separate objective.

*Strategy a. of objective 2 is to “implement policies, procedures, and completion timeline for removal parcels, with barrier or other mitigation alternatives if relocation cannot be completed within projected timeframe.” What is the intent of this strategy?*

This strategy is aimed to address adjacent landowner concerns like the ones expressed by Paula Shuler so that there is a definite timeframe for addressing their concerns. PDWG members expressed concern that this strategy may exacerbate conflicts with adjacent landowners if the City cannot commit to removing the prairie dogs either at all or within the set timeline. It is important only to make promises that can be kept. Landowners have the right to manage and use control methods on their land. The subgroup should return to this item to consider how to reword it so that the objective still addresses the problem while not committing the City to promises it cannot keep. Anyone who contacts the City should receive a consistent message.

*Goal 2 is to “Identify and minimize conflicts associated with prairie dogs and increase community understanding of prairie dog roles in the context of diminishing habitat and competing land uses.” What is “the context” referring to here? Some may interpret that statement as a push for getting public acceptance for a diminished prairie dog population, rather than a push for building acceptance for a large prairie dog ecosystem.*

The goal of placing the issue in the context of diminishing habitat is to show the broader picture of competing land uses. The extent of prairie dog habitat has decreased significantly, so this may help people understand the onus to preserve what is left. The goal should be reworded so that it is clear that the goal is to accommodate prairie dogs while addressing competing priorities and land uses.

*One of the strategies listed under objective 3 is to “speak with HOA boards and property owners often to help proactively address their specific concerns and needs before they develop into problems.” How will the City proactively address concerns/needs?*

This item came from the recommendation to create packets or educational flyers for new homeowners to help them understand the issue. It was not intended as a promise that the City would work with homeowners one-on-one to solve every problem. The second and fourth bullet should be combined, and the part about “proactively addressing concerns/needs” should be removed.

### **Group Discussion**

PDWG members discussed the revised social goal and objectives and provided final suggestions for revision.

- There seem to be three clear objectives: one is related to specific projects for relocating prairie dogs, the second is relevant to communication protocols, and the third is about broader social engagement.

- Objective 2 is to “Prioritize proactive, non-lethal prairie dog control methods.” Some worry that the word “prioritize” could mean that a list gets created without any plan for implementation. Others worry that the word “implement” implies that only non-lethal methods would be used and emphasized that there may be scenarios for which lethal control is necessary as a last resort. The PDWG set a guiding principle of minimizing lethal control. This objective should be re-written to stress that non-lethal control should be maximized.
- There should be a strategy under objective 2 to address the agricultural component to ensure that creative solutions for these land management designations are utilized.
- The following reorganization of goal 2 was suggested: Objective 1 is the review of mechanisms for communication; objective 2 is about broader social engagement; objective 3 is about specific problems related to prairie dog conflicts. Objective 3 should identify different categories of conflict (i.e., irrigated agriculture and prairie dogs, adjacent landowners and prairie dogs, etc.). The strategy related to communicating with county commissioners should be a separate objective.
- Some PDWG members suggested rewording objective 2 so that it provides specific, proactive strategies for addressing conflicts. Agricultural goals are raised in this objective in the context of minimizing conflict. However, this component may belong in goal 1 as part of the objective concerning updates to the Grassland Management Plan. Agricultural properties are a fixed asset and exist independent of the location of prairie dog colonies. The agricultural properties cannot be expanded or moved.
- This goal should be reviewed by Amy Masching.

### **Suggested Areas for Revision**

Below are the topics/areas that the PDWG discussed and would like to be further refined by a subgroup.

- Create a new objective related to the transfer of prairie dogs across county lines
- Rewrite objective 2, strategy a. to account for potential unachievable promises and the importance of consistent communication/messaging from city staff
- Consider rewording objective 2, changing the word “prioritize” to “maximize”
- Determine how best to address agricultural interests in this goal (e.g., flood mitigation tools, potential reevaluation of leases to accommodate different uses)
- Reorganize the objectives per the suggested outlined in the group discussion
- Reword the goal—specifically the part about diminishing habitat—to clarify that the intent is protect prairie dogs while accommodating other priorities/uses
- Change the second bullet under objective 3 strategies to “create a campaign to build more public awareness”
- Consider combining bullets 2 and 4 under objective 3 strategies and/or relook at the HOA bullet to make sure that no unfulfillable promises are being made
- In point a of objective 2, clarify the implications for the designation of removal areas and what it would mean for related components of the goals (e.g., barrier fences, etc.).
- Review objective 1 to make it clear that the goal is to review the communication protocols (not necessarily change them) to make sure that they are clear. Consider

including a strategy of holding a briefing/after-action review of the incident at the Armory

## **SUBGROUP PRESENTATION OF ECONOMIC GOAL STATEMENT**

The subgroup of PDWG members met to refine the economic prairie dog management goal presented their refined document and the group discussed and finalized the goals and objectives.

### **Key Revisions**

- The goal statement was not changed, but the word “conservation” needs further definition. There was a modification to objective 1 to replace “prairie dog relocation projects” with “prairie dog conservation activities, including relocation projects.”
- The subgroup spent a lot of time discussing objective 2, and rewrote and created new strategies. The objective was made more general, and the content of the original objective was turned into multiple strategies that support the purpose of the objective. A new strategy (4) was created under objective 2.
- The principles of strategy 3 are the same, but it was reworded. The goal of the revision was to not limit conservation spending to only acquisition and easements but rather to open it to other opportunities that could create net gains for the prairie dog ecosystem.

### **Clarifying Questions**

PDWG members asked clarifying questions about the revised economic goal and objectives. Questions are indicated in italics, followed by the response.

*Can the subgroup further clarify objective 2? It seems that it may be limiting only to be able to use the conservation fund money just on public lands.*

It may not have been the intent for the money be only applicable on public lands. While it is a public fund, one of the goals of the conservation fund is to allow for public resources to be used to provide a private solution.

*Regarding objective 2, strategy 2 (“utilize monies in the fund to leverage federal, state, county, city, and philanthropic programs and funds”), should the original language about the Sierra Club be included as a strategy?*

Yes, that will be included in the final version.

*Regarding objective 2, strategy 1: the current fee structure only requires landowners who are requesting relocation to pay the relocation fee. Did the subgroup want the structure to remain the same, or did they want to broaden it to more people?*

This objective should clarify that it is for the relocation of prairie dogs from private land.

### **Group Discussion**

PDWG members discussed the revised economic goal and objectives and provided final suggestions for revision.

- Objective 3 should clarify that the “phase 2” refers to the PDWG’s process.

- There are three groups of funding needs: acquisition of land for prairie dog habitat, prairie dog management by staff, and non-lethal control measures. The original intent of the prairie dog conservation fund was to collect money from private landowners to help fund the acquisition of priority prairie dog habitat and easements. Then, there was a discussion about including agricultural lease fees in the fund. It may be useful to provide a break-down of which fees would be used to fund different needs. Regarding the City's acquisition plan for OSMP, there are not many areas available for acquisition in the southern area of the City. The City owns 45,000 acres and Boulder County owns more than 100,000. Very few parcels exist that are larger than 35 acres. The southern area is nearly all private land. It may be possible to specify that the priority aim of the conservation fund is to acquire prairie dog habitat, but there are certain realities tied to OSMP's budget that may limit the acquisition capacity. The objective could prioritize the list of funding needs for which the conservation funds would be spent. Using matching funds with Boulder County for acquisitions may be possible.
- Objective 2 strategy 3 should be reworded so that it does not say that the City will "investigate the possibility of using private landowner agricultural leases...". It should also clearly state how this strategy relates to objective 2, or strategy 3 should be pulled out as a separate objective.
- Regarding objective 2, strategy 2, milestone 1, there are some terms and entities that are not accurately defined in the document. For example, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency, not a funding program.

### **Suggested Areas for Revision**

Below are the topics/areas that the PDWG discussed and would like a subgroup to further refine.

- Clarify the collection and use of fees on public lands
- Change the language in objective 2, strategy 3
- Clarify in objective 3 that "phase 2" refers to the PDWG process
- Clarify the language about "requesting relocation" in objective 2, strategy 1
- Re-examine the language about fees and uses and consider prioritizing the uses (e.g., "this money will be spent on X use")
- Consider whether objectives 1 and 2 should state that funds will not be used for staff time
- Review objective 3, strategy 2 and determine whether it should be rewritten or separated out as a distinct objective
- Regarding objective 2, strategy 2, milestone 1, clarify the language around agencies and think about stating that the City should work with agencies "such as" NRCS
- Consider recommending an update/change/prioritization to funding needs—while property is expensive, it may be helpful to take another look at the acquisition plan for the purpose of attaining large-block habitats

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Three subgroups will meet before the meeting on April 30 to address the specific suggested revisions discussed during this meeting. The subgroups should also begin

to consider what implications the goal/objectives/strategies/milestones have for changes to current plans and policies. This will be the last round of revisions. Subgroups should send their revised goal documents to Peak Facilitation several business days before the April 30 meeting. The subgroups are:

- **Ecological goal:** Lindsey Sterling Krank, Carse Pustmueller (coordinator), Heather Swanson, John Vickery
  - **Social goal:** Dan Brandemuehl (coordinator), Val Matheson, Aaron Cook
  - **Economic goal:** Pat Comer, Elle Cushman, Keri Konold (coordinator), Lindsey Sterling Krank, Andy Pelster, Carse Pustmueller,
- Staff will review current plans/policies and flag areas where they anticipate a need for changes and where the subgroups should focus their efforts. Staff will send these suggestions to Keri. Staff will inform the subgroups they are participating in about the plans that would likely be impacted by the goals.
  - Peak Facilitation will include the PDWG guiding principles in the next agenda.
  - The PDWG will briefly review the final revised goals at the April 30 meeting. Before the meeting, members of the PDWG should review the revised goals and come prepared to raise concerns only if they are unable to live with the document as it is written. The PDWG will reach a final agreement on the goals during the meeting. The PDWG will then prioritize the objectives within each goal. Finally, the PDWG will discuss potential changes to current plans and policies for each goal. There will also be an update on the proposed changes to the IPM policy.