

GRAND VALLEY AND UNCOMPAHGRE VALLEY POPULATION AREA ACTION PLAN NOVEMBER 2009

The Implementation Planning Workshop (IPW) for the Grand Valley and Uncompahgre Valley Individual Population Area (GVUV IPA) was held on 9 November 2009 at the Bill Heddles Recreation Center in Delta. Participation was open to anyone interested in prairie dog conservation and management. Twenty participants representing CDOW, BLM, USFWS, Mesa County Health Department, private landowners, prairie dog rescue groups, Sierra Club, Colorado State University, CDOW commissioner, and private citizens met and ranked the issues affecting WTPD in the GVUV IPA. Attendees reviewed issues thought to negatively impact the WTPD and ranked their significance in the GVUV IPA. The issues ranking process resulted in disease, lack of information on population status and trends, rangeland condition and urban development as the highest potential threats to the WTPD in the GVUV IPA. This list is not meant to exclude other important issues, but rather to provide a starting point for identifying some short term action priorities to be implemented on the ground to help maintain and conserve WTPD populations in the IPA.

The participants reviewed the possible strategies identified in the Colorado Gunnison's and White-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Strategy and selected the top 2 to 3 strategies for each of the highest ranked issues for possible implementation in the 3–5 year GVUV IPA action plan. The list of strategies selected for each issue follow:

Disease

- **3.1.1.1:** Continue research to determine whether plague is enzootic in GUPDs and WTPDs (e.g., sampling of host and vectors) and what the effect of enzootic plague is on the species.
- **3.3.1.7:** Determine the minimum amount of dusting (pesticide) or other appropriate flea control methodologies necessary to maintain GUPD and WTPD populations during plague epizootic events and to prevent future epizootic events (optimal dusting protocol).

Population Monitoring

- **7.1.2.2:** Intensively monitor a GUPD site for long-term, site-specific data to compare with variation in population estimate.

Rangeland Condition

- **9.1.1.1:** Determine how to define high quality GUPD and WTPD habitat; share definitions with partners.
- **9.1.1.7:** Apply research findings to develop appropriate mitigation standards focused on achieving rangeland conditions that will support prairie dogs.
- **9.3.1.3:** Encourage and continue constructive organized dialogue among stakeholders (including agencies, private landowners, agricultural producers, NGOs) regarding rangeland condition BMPs for GUPDs and WTPDs.

Urban Development

- **11.1.1.3:** Identify funding sources for land protection of GUPD and WTPD habitat.
- **11.5.1.3:** Encourage biologists and land managers to work with planners to address GUPDs, WTPDs, and development issues.

ACTION PLAN:

Both of the strategies selected under disease by the work group are currently being evaluated by the CDOW and other agencies. Because research examining the effects of enzootic plague is ongoing (See the Issues section in the CCS under disease for additional information) the CDOW will continue to implement this strategy in the 3-5 year action plan.

In addition, the CDOW disease researcher is completing a project in the NW IPA to compare flea abundance and prevalence in habitat treated with deltamethrin to adjacent non-treated control habitat to evaluate the duration and efficacy of an insecticide called deltamethrin to suppress flea abundance and prevalence. This information will provide a guide to future management decisions and help develop an optimal dusting protocol. Once this protocol is available, it can be implemented within the GVUV IPA.

- **Task:** Work with land management agencies and private landowners to identify areas for dusting and gain approval for dusting
- **Cooperators:** BLM, Private landowners
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Biologist and agency personnel time to create maps and identify potential dusting areas. Field work would include mapping potential sites based on colony location and known plague occurrence.
- **Timeline:**
December 2009 to June 2012 – Identify areas for dusting and complete NEPA if required.

The strategy selected by the work group under Population Monitoring was originally developed to examine whether or not GUPD populations fluctuate as dramatically as WTPD's do. Within Colorado, 2 WTPD sites have been selected to be used for BFF reintroduction. Transecting results for both sites have shown that WTPD populations can fluctuate dramatically from year-to-year. For example, transecting in the NW IPA yielded annual population estimates ranging from 308 to 6,666 prairie dogs, resulting in an overall coefficient of variation (a relative measure of variation defined as the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean) of 72%. With such a high coefficient of variation, it is impossible to obtain estimates with precision adequate to detect changes in population estimates. Because these monitoring projects are ongoing in the NW IPA, CDOW will not be able to provide funding for additional sites in the GVUV IPA. If other agencies or groups want to select a site for this type of monitoring and can hire the crew to conduct the monitoring, CDOW could serve in an advisory role.

Determining how to define quality habitat for WTPDs will require research. The CDOW does not have the funding or personnel to conduct this research at this time. However, projects can be solicited from Universities.

- **Task:** Contact Universities to evaluate interest in this type of study. Pursue grant opportunities.
- **Cooperators:** Universities
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Personnel time
- **Timeline:**
 - JUNE 2010 TO APRIL 2011 – Contact Universities and look for grant opportunities.
 - APRIL 2011 TO APRIL 2013 – Design study

Strategy 9.1.1.7 will be initiated after research is complete.

- **Task:** Continue to solicit stakeholder input on projects. Inform stakeholders of findings and projects planned.
- **Cooperators:** BLM, USFS, USFWS, private landowners
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Personnel time
- **Timeline:** Continuous

Urban Development strategies will require local CDOW biologists to develop relationships with City and County planners so as to be part of the conversation when development is planned in important WTPD habitat. Prairie dogs will be added to the list of species that need to be considered as development continues.

- **Task:** Local CDOW biologists need to introduce themselves to County and City Planners and make them aware of the need to consider WTPDs in their planning efforts. Comment on planning efforts as needed with regard to WTPDs. Continue to look for potential funding to protect important WTPD habitat.
- **Cooperators:** City and County planner, private landowners, BLM
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Personnel time
- **Timeline:** Continuous

One strategy not selected by the November 9th working group has been identified by the CDOW and BLM as an important strategy for maintaining a healthy prairie dog ecosystem in this IPA. The strategy identified was:

STRATEGY 2.1.1.1: Work with public land agencies and other affected stakeholders to identify management emphasis areas (MEAs) within the GVUV IPA where intensive management can focus on landscape scale conservation for the entire prairie dog

ecosystem. These MEAs will balance the long-term conservation needs of prairie dogs and associated species with other land uses that may occur.

- **Task:** Work with BLM, private stakeholders, and non-governmental agencies to designate MEAs for WTPDs where appropriate and feasible.
- **Cooperators:** private landowners, BLM, NPS, USFS, NGOs
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Personnel time
- **Timeline:**
JUNE 2010 TO APRIL 2013 – Coordinate with other agencies and stakeholders to identify potential MEAs.

Plan Implementation and Follow-up

The CDOW will hold an annual meeting in the GVUV IPA to update the community on the implementation of the action plan and evaluate the success of each year's activities. The CDOW will schedule this meeting at a convenient time and location so that interested stakeholders will have the ability to attend. In addition, the local CDOW biologist will complete a written annual summary for public review that describes projects initiated, results of projects, and future planned efforts.