

SAN LUIS VALLEY INDIVIDUAL POPULATION AREA ACTION PLAN

AUGUST 2009

The Implementation Planning Workshop (IPW) for the SLV IPA was held 18 August 2009 at the Inn at the Rio Grande, Alamosa. Thirty eight participants representing CDOW, BLM, USFS, USFWS, Saguache County, Alamosa County, NRCS, NPS, USDA APHIS, Gunnison and Colorado Farm Bureau, State House and Senate Representatives, and private citizens, met and ranked the issues affecting GUPD in the SLV IPA. Participation was open to anyone interested in prairie dog conservation and management. Attendees reviewed issues thought to negatively impact the GUPD and ranked their significance in the SLVIPA. The issues ranking process resulted in disease, population monitoring, energy development (solar), and rangeland conditions, being ranked as the highest potential threats to GUPD in the SLV 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 GUPD populations in the IPA.

The participants reviewed the possible strategies identified in the conservation assessment and selected the top strategies for each of the highest ranked issues for possible implementation in the 3-5 year SLVIPA action plan. The list of strategies selected for each issue follow:

Disease

- **3.2.1.3:** Implement plague monitoring and surveillance efforts for GUPD and WTPD management needs.
- **3.5.1.1:** Improve public understanding of the role of prairie dogs in ecosystems (e.g., website, pamphlets, radio and TV shows). *Locally-Developed Public Education effort* – added by SLV IPA working group.
- **3.5.1.2:** Improve public understanding of the role of prairie dogs in plague epidemiology (e.g., website, pamphlets, radio and TV shows). *Locally-Developed Public Education effort* – added by SLV IPA working group.

Population Monitoring

- **7.1.1.1:** Implement occupancy sampling every 3 years (start year for GUPDs was 2005; start year for WTPDs is 2004) as per current protocol. If the range-wide trigger (Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 2007) is reached, increase sampling frequency to annual sampling.
- **7.1.2.3:** Develop monitoring schemes in areas identified for implementation of GUPD and WTPD conservation strategies to identify responses of populations to management.

Genetics

- **5.1.1.3:** Determine the existence, nature, and extent of metapopulation structure by examining patterns of effective gene exchange among populations/colonies.

For GUPDs compare this information between the range referred to as ‘montane’ and “prairie” by the USFWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008).

- **5.2.1.1:** Collect DNA and morphometric samples from the GU, SLV, SP, SE, SW and LPA IPAs to be used in determining subspecies designation.

Energy and Mineral Development (Focus on Public Lands & Solar Energy)

- **4.2.1.1:** Map occupied GUPD and WTPD habitat prior to, during, and after energy and/or mineral development (*Solar energy development targeted on public lands in the SLV*).
- **4.3.1.1:** Identify high quality GUPD and WTPD habitat with conservation potential, and work toward protective management of these areas.

Rangeland Condition

- **9.1.1.5:** Determine the effect habitat enhancement projects (designed to reduce sage-brush cover and improve forb and grass cover) have on prairie dog reproductive output and survival.
- **9.2.1.1:** Develop and implement demonstration projects in appropriate locations in GUPD and WTPD range (include public and private lands, various habitat types, various ungulate species [e.g., sheep, cattle, wild ungulates], integration of prairie dog management practices and working

ACTION PLAN:

Many of the strategies selected during the SLV IPA workshop were to identify and prioritize important areas for GUPD management on public lands within the SLV, as it relates to the potential for future solar energy development. (**4.2.1.1, 4.3.1.1**), and for the monitoring of GUPD populations and plague. Several of the strategies rated high for the SLV IPA are strategies that are already considered high priorities for the CDOW and other GUPD IPA working groups. These strategies include dusting for plague, plague monitoring efforts, genetic analysis of GUPD populations, and on-going population monitoring with the range-wide occupancy modeling (**7.1.1.1., 5.1.1.3, 5.2.1.1**) These strategies will not be pursued as SLV IPA specific priorities, since they are currently state-wide ongoing efforts being lead by CDOW. Identification of important areas for both GUPD and solar energy development in the SLV is one of the most unique issues related to this IPA, and should receive some priority for task implementation, as these issues will not likely be undertaken in other GUPD IPA’s. Therefore, these should be the first activities accomplished in the 3-5 year action plan. Potentially working first to identify and maintain public lands areas within the IPA (i.e., colonies) will lead to the development and identification of larger Management Emphasis Areas (MEAs) that will help maintain an intact prairie dog ecosystem and those other species associated with it.

Plague was identified as a high priority issue in the SLV IPA. Pre- and post plague monitoring were ranked as the main strategies to maintain and conserve existing GUPD

colonies. Evaluating of the efficacy of dusting and other flea control methods is needed to develop appropriate plague control techniques.

- **Task:** Work with land management agencies to develop a strategy to monitor and track plague occurrence in the SLV IPA.
- **Cooperators:** BLM, NPS, USFS
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Personnel and meeting time
- **Timeline:**
 - JANUARY 2010 TO APRIL 2011 – Gain approval for plague monitoring process.
 - MAY/SEPTEMBER 2011 TO 2014– Implement plague monitoring protocol and provide information on plague occurrence to CDOW for incorporation into the state-wide database.

Task: Improve public understanding of the role of prairie dogs in plague epidemiology (e.g., website, pamphlets, radio and TV shows.)

- **Cooperators:** BLM, NPS, USFS
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** (\$15,000 per year)
- **Timeline:**
 - DECEMBER 2009 to JUNE 2010 – Develop an educational strategy to improve public understanding of prairie dog populations and plague epidemiology for the SLV.
 - JULY 2010-JULY 2012 – Implement education program.

Task: Map GUPD colony boundaries using GPS technologies on public lands within areas identified for future solar energy development, and identify high quality GUPD habitat to protect for conservation potential. Monitor impacts to populations within colonies using site specific surveys. (4.2.1.1, 4.3.1.1)

- **Cooperators:** BLM, NPS, USFS, USFWS
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Technicians to complete mapping of colonies and population assessments including visual count surveys (\$25,000 per year)
- **Timeline:**
 - JANUARY 2010 TO NOVEMBER 2010 – Initiate coordination and identification of solar energy targeted focus areas on public lands within the SLV.
 - APRIL 2011 TO NOVEMBER 2013 – Initiate surveys and mapping of prairie dog colonies on public lands within the SLV.
 - DECEMBER 2013 TO MAY 2014– Complete mapping project, develop GIS layers, and identify high quality habitat for GUPD colonies on public lands within the SLV.

The final issue identified was rangeland conditions and its effects on GUPD populations. This is a difficult issue to tackle and most strategies will require research level projects, and/or preliminary ground work because of the number of

agencies that need to be involved and the scope of the problem. For the current SLV IPA action plan, additional steps will be required before specific tasks can be developed and pursued. CDOW will continue to work with other agencies on this issue on a range-wide scale.

Plan Implementation and Follow-up

The CDOW will hold an annual meeting in May in the SLV IPA to update the community on the implementation of the action plan and evaluate the success of each year's activities. 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 report for public review.

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