

GUNNISON INDIVIDUAL POPULATION AREA ACTION PLAN

JUNE 2009

The Implementation Planning Workshop (IPW) for the GUIPA was held on 21 May 2009 at the Aspinnall-Wilson Center on Western State College's campus. Thirty participants representing CDOW, BLM, USFS, USFWS, Gunnison County, City of Gunnison, NRCS, NPS, Saguache County, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association, and private citizens, met and ranked the issues affecting GUPD in the GUIPA. 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 GUIPA. The issues ranking process resulted in disease, population monitoring, population reestablishment, associated species, and poisoning being ranked as the highest potential threats to GUPD in the GUIPA. 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 2 strategies for each of the highest ranked issues for possible implementation in the 3–5 year GUIPA action plan. The list of strategies selected for each issue follow:

Disease

- **Establish protocol for dusting GUPD colonies and management emphasis areas with consideration of impact to non-target insect species (not in Prairie Dog Conservation Strategy)**
- **3.3.1.8:** When optimal dusting protocol or other appropriate flea control methodologies are developed, determine priority GUPD and WTPD areas for dusting application.
- **3.3.1.9:** Work with land management agencies to gain approval for application of dust or other appropriate flea control methodologies in priority GUPD and WTPD areas.

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.

Population Reestablishment

- **Establish protocols for identifying and prioritizing reestablishment sites (not in Prairie Dog Conservation Strategy)**

- **8.1.1.1:** Identify and prioritize for possible reestablishment areas of formerly occupied GUPD and/or WTPD habitat. Considerations should include areas that are: (1) too far from current colonies to reestablish naturally; (2) are necessary for increasing and/or expanding current range into formerly occupied range; (3) are on lands where stakeholders are willing to participate in management; and (4) have little to no impact to private landowners.

Associated Species

- **2.1.1.1:** Work with public land agencies and other affected stakeholders to identify management emphasis areas (within the GUPD and WTPD IPAs) where intensive management can focus on landscape scale conservation for the entire prairie dog ecosystem.
- **2.1.1.2:** Identify appropriate conservation strategies from this plan to be applied on a more intensive basis in the identified management emphasis areas (see Strategy 2.1.1.1), to protect the entire GUPD and WTPD ecosystems (e.g., dusting, reintroduction of prairie dogs, habitat enhancement, and land-use restrictions).

Poisoning

- **6.1.1.1:** Develop a reporting system that tracks how much poison is purchased for GUPD and WTPD control, and where it is used (e.g., acres/county) on an annual basis.
- **6.2.1.1:** Educate poison applicators on the importance of following label restrictions.

ACTION PLAN:

Many of the strategies selected during the Gunnison IPW were to identify and prioritize management areas (3.3.1.8, 7.1.2.3, 8.1.1.1, 2.1.1.1) for dusting and population reestablishment. Establishment of protocols for dusting and for identifying management areas should be the first activities accomplished in the 3–5 year action plan. Potentially working first to maintain several smaller 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.

- **Task:** Develop protocol for identifying and prioritizing areas for dusting and for population reestablishment. Identify management areas and potential MEAs (8.1.1.1).
- **Cooperators:** BLM, NPS, Private landowners, Gunnison County, Stockgrowers, NGOs, USFS
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Biologist and agency personnel time to create maps and identify potential management areas. Field work would include mapping potential sites based on proximity of current colonies, potential for GUPD expansion, willingness of stakeholders, and likelihood management area will have no impact to private landowners. (\$5,000.00)
- **Timeline:**

JULY to DECEMBER 2009 – Develop protocol for dusting
JULY to DECEMBER 2009 – Develop protocol for prioritizing areas for population reestablishment
APRIL to JUNE 2010 – Identify and prioritize areas for dusting
JUNE 2010 to JUNE 2012 - Identify areas for population reestablishment and identify cooperators
JUNE 2010 to JUNE 2011 – If areas identified for dusting and population reestablishment do not help conserve an intact prairie dog ecosystem, work to identify MEAs

Plague was identified as a high priority issue in the GUIPA. Dusting and other flea control methodologies were ranked as the main strategy to maintain and conserve existing GUPD colonies. Monitoring of dusting and other flea control methodologies is needed to determine effectiveness and benefit to prairie dog conservation.

- **Task:** Work with land management agencies to gain approval for dusting (3.3.1.9) and apply flea control methods.
- **Cooperators:** BLM, NPS, USFS
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Dusting materials, technicians for applying dust (\$20,000 per year)
- **Timeline:**
JUNE 2009 to April 2010 – Gain approval for application of dust
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2010 to 2012– Apply dust to identified colonies/MEAs
- **Task:** Monitor impacts of dusting and other flea control methods between treated and controlled colonies (7.1.1.1, 7.1.2.3)
- **Cooperators:** BLM, NPS, USFS
- **Lead agency:** CDOW
- **Cost:** Technicians to complete mapping of colonies and population assessments including visual count surveys (\$15,000 per year)
- **Timeline:**
DECEMBER 2009 to JUNE 2010 – Develop a monitoring protocol to assess impacts of dusting on prairie dog populations.
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2010 to 2012– Conduct surveys prior to dusting and continue surveys as dusting is completed at treatment colonies in comparison to non-treatment colonies
SEPTEMBER 2012 - Start discussion with private landowners to prioritize additional areas on private lands for dusting (depending on results from earlier treated colonies).

The final issue identified was to monitor amount of poison applied in the GUIPA (6.1.1.1) and to educate applicators on importance of following label restrictions (6.2.1.1). These are difficult issues and are probably more appropriately managed at a range-wide scale because of the number of agencies that need to be involved and the scope of the problem. For the current GUIPA action plan, poisoning was not addressed and will be left up to stakeholders and other federal agency personnel to develop a

voluntary reporting system to track poisoning at the local IPA level. CDOW will continue to work with other agencies (i.e., Colorado Department of Agriculture) on this issue on a range-wide scale.

The CDOW will hold an annual meeting in May in the GUIPA 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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