

Gunnison's and White-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Strategy Implementation: Action Planning Through Collaborative Local Workshops

In response to comments and concerns from various stakeholders, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) recognized the need to develop and implement a local implementation process involving stakeholders in ranking issues and prioritizing actions. By actively involving local stakeholders in the process, we can alleviate fears about possible regulatory actions and reiterate the positive, preventive focus of the Gunnison's and White-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Strategy.

Stakeholders in each individual population area will be responsible for developing an action plan through a local workshop process using a collaborative, facilitated discussion and ranking process. Participation in the planning workshops will be open to anyone with an interest in the management of prairie dogs in the defined project area: local communities, landowners, conservationists, state, federal and local agencies, and any other interested individuals or organizations. In light of criticism of the 2007 planning workshop, we will not limit participation, but participants should be aware of the need to keep the group size at a level that promotes efficient discussion and of the time commitment needed for participation in the workshop.

Each workshop will use a facilitated process to ensure that participants' views are heard to promote agreement around short-term action needs. Using a consistent methodology, participants will collectively rank the scope and severity of each of the issues within their individual population area. Participants will then use the high ranking issues to prioritize strategies for implementation within that individual population area. Individual strategies will be prioritized according to (1) contribution to species/ecosystem conservation, (2) feasibility, (3) cost, and (4) social & political importance. This process will implement, at the local scale, the prioritization process used for statewide actions in the draft plan. This local prioritization will *replace* the prioritization in Appendix F of the draft plan and tables 20 and 21.

These workshops will be conducted in a relatively rapid one day process. In the past, the CDOW has employed local working groups to develop and implement local management strategies (e.g. sage grouse working groups). We are not advocating to the use of that model here for two reasons: first, we hope to avoid the "meeting fatigue" that has been associated with drawn-out working group processes; and (2) secondly, the draft strategy contains a rich base of information on the species' status, threats, and potential conservation strategies. This process does not need to reinvent that initial information. Instead, the focus is on developing local action plans based on the draft strategy.

The deliverable from each rapid assessment workshop will be a tailored Individual Population Area Action Plan for prairie dog conservation that contains the individual population area's top ranked issue(s) and prioritized actions for immediate implementation with identification of responsible parties, estimated timelines, and costs. The appropriate CDOW Wildlife Conservation biologist(s) will be responsible for

coordinating the implementation of actions defined in the action plan. The CDOW will provide annual reports on action implementation, including (1) strategies implemented (including the success of strategy implementation, cooperating partners, and research results); (2) results and updates for all population monitoring and surveys conducted (including occupancy monitoring, BFF family rating surveys, colony mapping, or other surveys completed during the year); and (3) an evaluation of species status.