



PRESS RELEASE

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The Gunnison's Prairie Dog Does Not Require the Protections of the Endangered Species Act

DENVER – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today the completion of a 12-month status review in response to a petition to list the Gunnison's prairie dog as a threatened or endangered species. The review has determined that protecting the Gunnison's prairie dog under the Endangered Species Act is not warranted at this time. Gunnison's prairie dog populations are stable and not declining, due largely to conservation efforts by State Game and Fish agencies that recognize the crucial role that prairie dogs play in the health of North American prairies.

The Gunnison's prairie dog lives in gently sloping, semi-desert grasslands and intermountain, shrub-steppe valleys in the four corners region of the western United States. The Gunnison's prairie dog is a very social, ground-dwelling rodent that lives in colonies and constructs complex, underground burrows. Because so many other prairie species, such as the black-footed ferret and the burrowing owl, depend on prairie dogs for food and shelter, the Gunnison's prairie dog is considered a vital "keystone" species of the prairie.

New genetic data supports the recognition of two taxonomically distinct subspecies of Gunnison's prairie dog: *Cynomys gunnisoni gunnisoni* found in south-central Colorado and northeastern New Mexico, and *C. g. zuniensis* found in southwestern Colorado,

northwestern New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. The ranges of the two subspecies overlap, as evidenced by the mixing of genetic material between them.

Sylvatic plague (an exotic disease), and poisoning campaigns historically killed large numbers of Gunnison's prairie dogs. Plague continues to be an impact and recreational shooting and poisoning kill prairie dogs at localized, easily accessible colonies. However, new monitoring data reveal that populations of both subspecies are stable and that Gunnison's prairie dog can withstand these localized impacts.

Additionally, our partners, particularly the State Game and Fish Agencies, continue to implement successful conservation efforts to conserve the Gunnison's prairie dog. The States have successfully monitored populations, enforced shooting closures, dusted colonies with insecticide, and are testing the plague vaccine, which may be a powerful tool in the future to control the disease. These ongoing efforts have contributed to the stability of the Gunnison's prairie dog. Therefore, the two subspecies of Gunnison's prairie dog are not in danger of extinction or likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future and do not require the protections of the Endangered Species Act.

This notice was published in today's Federal Register:

<https://federalregister.gov/a/2013-27196>.

For more information, see

<http://www.fws.gov/mountainprairie/species/mammals/gunnisonprairiedog/>

The Endangered Species Act provides an important safety net for America's native fish, wildlife, and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit

<http://www.fws.gov/angered/> .

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>. Connect with our [Facebook](#) page, follow our [Twitter](#) feed, watch our [YouTube](#) channel and view our [Flickr](#) photo stream.