

28-Dec-08

re: Prairie dog public comment

To Whom It May Concern:

We are alarmed that prairie dogs in South Dakota continue to suffer persecution based on dangerously faulty information and hearsay. Local mythology, without any evidence, accuses prairie dogs of destroying vegetation, causing erosion and endangering cattle. Multiple research projects, on the other hand, have revealed the opposite. The science is clear: prairie dogs occupy just a tiny fraction of their former range, meaning they can no longer perform their important ecological function on grasslands. Their presence improves habitat quality for a host of other species (e.g., black-footed ferrets, burrowing owls), promotes the growth of nutritious grasses and forbs that are highly valuable to both wild and domestic grazers, and never causes livestock injury. Moreover, we would point out that prairie dogs are a colonial species. Under natural conditions, they create permanent, sustainable colonies, just as they did for centuries before settlers first arrived on the plains.

We feel strongly that the prairie dog deserves protection under the Endangered Species Act, and that any decision regarding the status of this species must derive from an impartial assessment of its ecological role and relationship with livestock.

Sincerely,

Aaron Wirsing, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Wildlife Ecology
College of Forest Resources
University of Washington



Karl Wirsing, MA.
Managing Editor
Rails to Trails magazine
Washington, D.C.



Robert Wirsing, Ph.D.
Visiting Professor
Georgetown University
School of Foreign Service in Qatar
Doha, State of Qatar



Nancy Wirsing
Ranch Owner
Gregory, South Dakota



Brooke Sargeant, Ph.D.
Ecologist
Seattle, Washington

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brooke Sargeant". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping flourish at the end of the last name.