

Emergency Alert Black Footed Ferrets In Danger!



On June 5, the National Park Service issued a press release regarding a situation of great urgency developing in South Dakota:

PENNINGTON COUNTY, S.D. - The National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service have confirmed plague as the cause of a prairie dog die off in Badlands National Park, Buffalo Gap National Grassland, and the greater Conata-Badlands ecosystem, in South Dakota based on a test result received 5/31.

The risk to humans remains low, however, plague is concerning. The disease has not been detected in Conata Basin since 2009, when it was responsible for killing more than 80 percent of the remaining population black-footed ferrets, one of the most endangered mammals in the world.

“We are concerned about the impacts to the black-footed ferret population and are taking necessary action to protect this important keystone species,” said Eric Veach, Superintendent of Badlands National Park. “Extensive conservation efforts in 2009 to manage the spread of plague were able to preserve a black-footed ferret population in the Conata-Badlands ecosystem, where the largest free-ranging black-footed ferret population in the world now resides.”

The National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and conservation partners are working to apply emergency flea control agents to stop the further spread of plague and to monitor for plague activity in the Conata-Badlands ecosystem to protect the black-footed ferret population and reduce any risks to human health. Additionally, black-footed ferrets are captured and vaccinated against plague. (From nps.org, updated June 5, 2024)

Sylvatic Plague (also known as Bubonic Plague) is deadly to both Black Footed Ferrets and the prairie dogs they rely on for prey. The disease spreads by direct contact between animals and by fleas carried on prairie dogs. Because it is so lethal, government agencies and wildlife conservation groups are mobilizing, mounting a two-pronged effort to halt the spread: forming groups to treat the prairie dog colonies by spraying and dusting to halt the spread of the disease. And they are working to trap and vaccinate as many BFFs as possible.

Some BFFs already have at least one “jab,” some may have even had a booster, as this is part of the work done every fall by the groups charged with monitoring the population, such as the National Park Service and our good friends at Prairie Wildlife Research. The vaccine was developed by the US military for soldiers; it is not manufactured commercially and is available only in small quantities. At the height of “baby season,” during the spring and summer months, we can expect that the many of the BFFs out there will be juveniles who have never been vaccinated before. But preferably all animals trapped will be boosted, as best practice.

While state and federal agencies are contributing funds, personnel, and supplies to the effort, **your help is needed!** Especially now, when matching funds are available through grants to Prairie Wildlife Research. This effectively doubles the value of every dollar given!!

PWR and AFA do not spend any money on marketing or professional fundraising, so you can be sure that **100%** of your gift will go to help purchase vaccination supplies, flea products, housing and food stipends for the volunteers in the field, etc. And your gift is tax deductible!

Follow the link to donate via AFA at <https://ferret.org/shopping/donations.html> or visit prairiewildlife.org. There is also a fund drive on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/E5JZZiFiNS45ofXj/?>