

Prairie Dog Committee Findings

Prairie Dog Basics:

The highly social prairie dogs live in large colonies or "towns" – collections of prairie dog families that can span hundreds of acres. Families usually consist of 1 male and 2 to 4 females living in a strict social hierarchy. Prairie dog pups reach sexual maturity at about 3 years of age, and after their third winter the dominant male in a given family will drive them away, forcing them to establish their own families on the edges of the colony. The dominant male will defend the family's borders against rival prairie dogs, and disputes are resolved with fighting. Prairie dogs are also aggressive against predators such as badgers and snakes.

Prairie dog tunnel systems help channel rainwater into the water table to prevent runoff and erosion, and can also serve to change the composition of the soil in a region by reversing soil compaction that can be a result of cattle grazing. The tunnels usually have several chambers. Tunnels can descend vertically as much as 5 meters (16 feet), and can extend laterally as much as 30 meters (100 feet). Prairie dogs line their burrows with grass to insulate them, and the earth excavated from the burrow is piled up in mounds around the burrow's entrance. The prairie dogs use these carefully maintained mounds as observation posts.

The prairie dog is well adapted to predators. Using its dichromatic color vision, it can detect predators from afar and then alert other prairie dogs to the danger with a special, high-pitched call. Their burrows generally contain several routes of escape.

Prairie dogs are also very susceptible to **bubonic plague**. Also, in 2002 a large group of prairie dogs in captivity in Texas were found to have contracted tularemia. The prairie dog ban is frequently cited by the CDC as a successful response to the threat of zoonosis.

Prairie Dog Control Methods:

Extermination:

Extermination would be the first line of defense in a long term control program. This method would also lend itself to having an immediate impact and can be partnered with other companion methods. Exterminators referenced below were contacted and all provided quotes of \$5-\$9 per hole and also charged a trip fee that averaged approximately \$200. A final quote would need to be requested prior to having services rendered.

A All Animal Control of Denver
5588 S. Parker Rd, #182
Aurora, CO 80015
303-452-2113 Office Phone
303-452-7572 Fax

All American Wildlife Control Ph# 303-840-7743

Animal and Pest Control Specialists ph# 303-987-0842

Exclusion and isolation:

Total exclusion is not often practical or economically feasible except for small areas. However, prairie dogs do prefer short grass so that they can see intruders and some success has been reported by using fences that obscure vision (like snow fences, or burlap fences), hay bales, etc. Fences block prairie dogs' view and make a habitat less suitable to prairie dogs. Windrows of pine trees have also helped. Switchgrass has also been used to control the expansion of prairie dog colonies. Plant these grasses in close rows that will produce a dense, self-maintaining barrier.

Frightening:

In general, most frightening techniques have not worked. Boulder, Colorado has tried enclosing a prairie dog infested area of a park and turning it into a dog park. It is assumed that the prairie dogs will leave rather than compete with dogs.

Range management:

A big factor in prairie dog control is range management. Overgrazed rangeland means short grass, exactly what prairie dogs are looking for. So, leasing for grazing of cattle would only make the situation worse.

Trapping and relocating prairie dogs:

Federal regulations require that live trapping of prairie dogs be accomplished using only humane traps that do not injure the prairie dog upon capture. The traps must be checked regularly to insure that the animal does not go without food, water or shelter for an unnecessary period of time requires that an itinerary of capture dates and sites be provided to the appropriate Animal Care Regional Office a minimum of two days prior to collection. In addition, state and local governments may have additional permitting requirements for either capture or relocation. Once a prairie dog has been caught, there is the question of what to do with it. Relocation is the desired fate of trapped prairie dogs, but it is often hard to find an acceptable place where the prairie dog is welcome. As a result, trapped prairie dogs are often humanely euthanized. The cost of capturing and moving prairie dogs can run between \$30-\$300 per prairie dog.

Hydro seeding & drill seeding:

Both of these methods would be desirable and would provide an almost immediate impact depending on planting timing and rain/snow fall. Calls to vendors yielded estimates of \$100 to \$135 per acre. An alternative would be to rent a tractor/drill seeder from Clark Equipment which would cost \$275/day equipment for the rental fee and the cost of the seed (cost of seed TBD). There would also be a \$50 delivery fee of the equipment.

Recommendations:

Implement an extermination program that would consist of an initial extermination treatment of the open space and subsequent treatments as needed to keep population in control. It would also be recommended that range management be a part of the control program (i.e. snow fences, hay bales and seeding). If this issue is not addressed there is a high potential for the spread of the colony to the other open space areas and lots. The burrowing could also have an impact on septic tank drainage fields.