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News Release

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U.S. Forest Service Announces One-Year Suspension of Black-tailed Prairie Dog Shooting Restrictions on Thunder Basin National Grassland

(DOUGLAS, Wyo.) March 3, 2017 – Forest Supervisor Dennis Jaeger has rescinded the ban on shooting Black-tailed prairie dogs on the Thunder Basin National Grassland for one year, until March 3, 2018.

Due to current, high populations of Black-tailed prairie dogs on the Thunder Basin and new information that the Thunder Basin National Grassland is not currently being considered for Black-footed ferret reintroduction, the shooting ban is being lifted.

A one-year rescension of the existing shooting prohibition has been signed by Jaeger, with the intent to protect habitat and immediately curb significant prairie dog colony expansion which occurred in 2016. The situation on the ground will be re-evaluated in 2018.

The shooting ban has been adjusted multiple times over the last 14 years, and currently affects approximately 50,000 acres of U.S. Forest System managed lands in northeast Wyoming; Campbell, Converse, and Weston counties.

The prohibition has been in place since March 22, 2002 to allow for the recovery and establishment of limited short-grass prairie ecosystem habitat within the Grassland. That habitat is built and sustained by Black-tailed prairie dogs, benefits numerous associated species, and ultimately could allow for the possible reintroduction of the Black-footed ferret.

Decision-making authority within Wyoming regarding reintroduction of Black-footed ferrets lies with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Wyoming.

“After plague hit the area in 2000-01, restriction of recreational shooting was intended as a tool to help establish viable short-grass prairie ecosystem habitat via the Black-tailed prairie dog,” said Jaeger. “It has been effective and now the pendulum has swung the other way and prairie dog populations are well above desired levels in northeast Wyoming.”

In 2015, Black-tailed prairie dogs occupied approximately 27,800-active acres of the Thunder Basin National Grassland’s 553,000 total acreage. According to observations in 2016, this number has increased. The management objective for 18,000 acres of occupied Black-tailed prairie dog colonies in core area (Category 1) was met in 2015.

The U.S. Forest Service diligently works to balance management of viable Black-tailed prairie dog colonies and the numerous other sensitive species with the concerns of our neighbors, the State of Wyoming, and the wide variety multiple uses and resources for a sustainable Thunder Basin National Grassland.

Direction for implementation of this approach is contained in the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan.

For more information about management of the Thunder Basin National Grassland, call the U.S. Forest Service at (307) 358-4690 or stop by 2250 East Richards Street in Douglas between 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Mon.-Fri.

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