



UTAH PRAIRIE DOG

BACKFROMTHEBRINK.ORG



The Rarest Little Prairie Dog in the U.S.A.

The Utah prairie dog forages on grasses, flowers and seeds in the sagebrush steppes of the Beehive State, where it builds its "towns." These are vast underground networks of burrows where the prairie dogs sleep, breed, hide from predators and spend the cold winter months. The prairie dogs are not exclusive residents of these subterranean labyrinths. Burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, golden eagles, rodents, snakes, toads and salamanders all cohabit the underground abode.

At-Risk Story

Because Utah prairie dogs can cause considerable damage to farms and pastures by consuming crops and digging holes, this little critter became an unwitting enemy of many ranchers and farmers who turned to widespread poisoning. Such practices waned once the animal was classified as an endangered species and poisoning became illegal. Now land development and changes in rangeland composition hurt the prairie dog's prospects for recovery.

Habitat and Range

Though the prairie dog is still found in a handful of counties in southwestern Utah, its range has been devastatingly downsized from 500,000 acres to a mere 7,000. Better grazing management and habitat restoration techniques like brush management and prescribed grazing can help overcome rangeland competition.

Characteristics

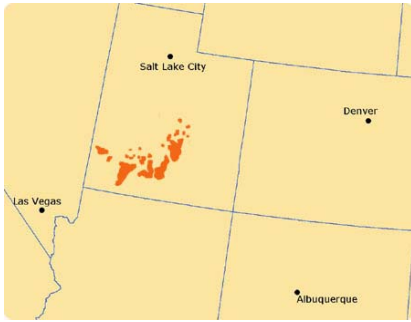
The Utah prairie dog is about 12-14 ½ inches long and weighs about 1.5-3 pounds. It is tawny brown, with a white-tipped tail and a dark brown "eye brow."

Threats to Survival

Almost three-fourths of the remaining Utah prairie dogs live on private property. Unfortunately, real and perceived impacts of prairie dogs on agricultural operations have led many landowners to consider prairie dogs to be pests, and with help from government agencies have dramatically reduced prairie dog populations on much of the western range. Land development, deteriorating rangeland health, the encroachment of woody vegetation (pinyon-juniper stands, shrubs), sylvatic plague and drought are currently significant threats to the Utah prairie dog.

ESA Listing Detail

Designated as *endangered* in 1973, the Utah prairie dog was down-listed to *threatened* in 1984.



The Situation Today

The total population of Utah prairie dog—the rarest of its kind in the United States—has declined to only 5,000 individuals. In order to survive a long period of hibernation, prairie dogs must have access to high-quality forage grasses, seeds and flowers. Their numbers and distribution have decreased substantially since European settlement of this area and the onset of poisoning campaigns, disease and a loss of habitat to agriculture and urban development. Improperly managed

grazing and prolonged drought have resulted in the gradual decline in the health of rangelands. About three-fourths of the remaining population resides in colonies on private lands.

Our 10-Year Vision

Our goal is to work with ranchers and other landowners to improve habitat for this species, utilizing existing conservation incentives programs and creative new tools such as conservation banking. We aim to keep the Utah prairie dog an important part of the biological diversity of both private and public land in the Beehive State.

Restoration Needed

- Incentive programs that encourage landowners to improve rangeland health
- Prescribed grazing, brush management through prescribed burning, re-seeding of treated areas with native grasses and compensation funds for grazing exclusion in sensitive areas
- Compensation of farmers for set-aside areas for use by prairie dogs
- A coordinated outreach effort to increase involvement by local landowners

Acres Needed

10,000 acres and 60 landowners

Cost of Recovery

Environmental Defense believes significant progress toward recovery can be made with a modest amount of money if it is targeted to specific areas and activities. Over the next 10 years, we will work to direct more than \$3 million to on-the-ground restoration projects that will help bring the Utah prairie dog Back from the Brink.

Every Dollar Counts

\$50 will fund brush management to enhance a single acre of prairie dog habitat.

\$100 will fund a visit to a landowner to discuss range improvement for prairie dogs.

\$500 will fund brush management to enhance 10 acres of prairie dog habitat.

\$1,000 will compensate a landowner for forgone grazing revenue for a 100-acre pasture.

\$10,000 will fund the re-seeding of native grasses on over 60 acres of rangeland to restore the habitat quality for prairie dogs on a willing landowner's property.