



**TURNER
ENDANGERED
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Black-footed Ferrets to be Experimentally Released on Bad River Ranches

Turner Endangered Species Reports Important Success for Long-term Restoration Effort

For Immediate Release

October 2, 2009

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BOZEMAN, Mont., -- Today the Turner Endangered Species Fund reports that on October 5, 12 black-footed ferrets will be experimentally released on Bad River Ranches near Fort Pierre, SD. Since 1999, the Fund has been restoring black-tailed prairie dog colonies in the Ash Creek Restoration Area on Bad River Ranches in anticipation of eventually contributing to the federal program to recover the ferret which is one of the rarest animals in the world.

Bad River Ranches contains 141,357 contiguous acres of mixed grass prairie. The experimental area is known as the Ash Creek Restoration Area (ACRA). In 1999 the prairie dog colonies in the ACRA measured 126 acres. Since then the Fund has worked to increase that acreage through strategic grazing, mowing, and translocations. Today the complex of 20 prairie dog colonies in the ACRA measures almost 1,300 acres.

On October 6th, 12 black-footed ferrets, 10 kits and 2 adults, from the National Black-Footed Ferret Conservation Center Captive Breeding Program in Colorado will be brought to Bad River Ranches and released temporarily. The ferrets will remain free-ranging up until the kits are about 120 days of age. At that time the Fund will recapture the animals so the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) can translocate them to restoration sites elsewhere in the western U.S for permanent release. Through nocturnal monitoring each ferret will be tracked to determine survival and movement patterns and facilitate recapture.



The purpose of these releases is to improve the survivability of released ferrets by pre-conditioning. Not surprisingly, captive-born ferrets that have been “pre-conditioned” to life in the wild, by being allowed to range freely at a secure location for a few weeks, generally experience higher survival rates when permanently released to the wild. This year will be the first year of pre-conditioning. The Fund is also proposing to pre-condition ferrets in 2010 and possibly 2011.

In addition to pre-conditioning, the USFWS has indicated the need to restore ferrets to small complexes of prairie dog colonies, typically covering less than 5,000 acres. This need is urgent due to a limited number of larger complexes and the increasing number of captive-born ferrets available for release. The proposed project will assess the suitability of Bad River Ranches as a site for restoring a small, but viable population of ferrets.

The black-footed ferret is one of the rarest mammals in the world and is protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. Since 1981 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has worked with multiple partners, like the Turner Endangered Species Fund, to recover the species. There are currently 18 black-footed ferret reintroduction sites located in eight states with one site in Mexico. Black-footed ferrets have been reintroduced in Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Kansas, and New Mexico. Today, from the 18 individual ferrets taken from the wild between 1985-1987 to begin the captive breeding program, approximately 800 to 1,000 individuals now live in the wild.

The Turner Endangered Species Fund is a non-profit operational charity dedicated to preserving nature by ensuring the persistence of imperiled species and their habitats with an emphasis on private land. The Fund was formed by Ted Turner in June 1997.

Bad River Ranches contains 141,357 contiguous acres of mixed grass prairie on which the Fund conducts the ferret restoration project. The ranch is located in central South Dakota and is owned by Ted Turner.



Figure 1. Bison grazing on one of the prairie dog colonies in the Ash Creek Restoration Area.



Figure 2. A female bison and her new calf grazing on one of the prairie dog colonies in the Ash Creek Restoration Area.



Figure 3. Bison, in the background, make frequent use of the prairie dog colonies for their high protein grass. Prairie dogs, in the foreground, appreciate the help in keeping the grass height down.