



**TURNER
ENDANGERED
SPECIES
FUND**

First Black-footed Ferret Born in New Mexico in 75 years

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

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Contact: Mike Phillips, 406-556-8500

mike.phillips@retranches.com

BOZEMAN, Mont., -- Today the Turner Endangered Species Fund reported that the first black-footed ferret to be born in the wild in over 75 years had been discovered at Vermejo Park Ranch in north-central New Mexico (Figures 1 and 2). Since 1998, the Fund has participated in the federal program to recover the ferret which is one of the rarest animals in the world. First with captive breeding and more recently with reintroductions to the wild grasslands at Vermejo, the Fund has made substantive contributions to the recovery program.

Reintroductions conducted between 2005 and 2007 at Vermejo involved 75 ferrets. Eventually 40 of these animals were recaptured and, as planned, translocated to other restoration sites in the western United States for permanent release. The remaining 35 ferrets were never retrieved and probably died after living for some time in the wild at the ranch. Ferrets are notoriously short-lived, with an average life span of only a few years.

In 2008 the Fund released 54 ferrets that were allowed to remain free-ranging at Vermejo. The wild-born animal discovered last night was an offspring from two of these animals. Currently about 10 ferrets are free-ranging at Vermejo. Additional reintroductions involving up to 60 ferrets will be carried out this fall. Reintroductions will continue until establishment of a viable population of about 30 family groups, or about 120 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.

Vermejo Park Ranch contains about 60,000 acres of shortgrass prairie on which the Fund conducts the ferret restoration project. The ranch is located in north-central New Mexico and is owned by Ted Turner. Vermejo Park is one of the few ferret reintroduction sites to be located on private land.



Figure 1. The first black-footed ferret to be born in the wild in New Mexico in over 75 years was confirmed for the first time during spotlight surveys at the Vermejo Park Ranch on September 16, 2009. The young male can be seen peering at the spotlight from a prairie dog burrow.



Figure 2. The first black-footed ferret to be born in the wild in New Mexico in over 75 years was confirmed for the first time during spotlight surveys at the Vermejo Park Ranch on September 16, 2009. The young male can be seen peering at the spotlight from a prairie dog burrow. Ferrets are intensely curious (a useful trait for a predator) and somewhat tolerant of humans in part because they are nocturnal and have relatively few encounters.