

FOOTHILLS PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT
PRAIRIE DOG MANAGEMENT PLAN

PURPOSE AND INTENT

The Foothills Board of Directors recognizes that prairie dogs exist on our properties through-out the District. The Board adopts a prairie dog management plan to ensure existing prairie dog habitats are managed while allowing for community, facility users and infrastructure, safe use of parks, trails and open lands.

Migration of prairie dogs onto golf courses, irrigated turf, trails (active and passive recreation areas) or neighboring properties, raises several safety and health related issues. Prairie dogs cause considerable turf and tree root damage at our golf courses and park sites. The burrow holes interfere with play on golf courses, athletic fields and open play areas and undermine trails. Severe health questions arise due to disease carrying fleas that may jump to domestic animals, wild animals (rabbits, squirrels, coyotes, etc.) or human beings passing through prairie dog colony boundaries.

The District finds that a comprehensive prairie dog management plan will preserve the critical balance between wildlife habitat and activities within or near, golf courses, parks, trails and open lands. The purpose and intent of this policy is to protect the public health, safety and general welfare of all the District residents and properties.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

There are three types of prairie dogs in the State of Colorado, but the black-tailed prairie dog is the only species that occupies lands within the District. Prairie dogs are burrowing rodents that form colonies of between 8 to 35 dogs per acre. Prairie dog colonies do not thrive in tall grasses as the dogs tend to congregate in areas where grazing animals keep the grasses less than 12 inches tall, or where mowing practices provide open views of potential predators.

Prairie dog habitats exist primarily within native grass areas in the District. It is the intent of this management plan to manage those habitats and minimize conflict caused by public use of those areas; however, these areas may require differing types of management depending on the site and encroachment of the colony onto District golf courses, parks, trails or reservoir infrastructure and properties.

For those instances where prairie dog management is required, there are currently several generally accepted methods of prairie dog management in Colorado: natural vegetative barriers, raptor poles, fumigation, carbon monoxide and relocation. Any one or multiple types of management may be used on any park site, golf course or trail. Prairie dog relocation efforts will not be allowed on District owned, managed, or on contiguous properties. Shooting, poison grain baits, explosive devices, buried barriers, and fencing are not acceptable-control methods as part of this management plan.

PROGRAM CRITERIA

The prairie dog management plan for Foothills Park & Recreation District shall include the following guidelines. Each management situation shall be treated individually and one or more of these guidelines may apply in each case.

- Prairie dog colonies that remain within the boundaries of native grass or non-irrigated park or golf courses areas shall be evaluated and managed on a site by site basis. Existing prairie dog colonies will be removed by whatever method the District determines is needed from any site the District has determined will be used for improvement or new development.
- If it is deemed by District staff as a safety issue or damage to bike/pedestrian trail by undermining, a buffer of 50 feet on either side of a bike/pedestrian trail will be controlled by method of fumigation or carbon monoxide treatment to protect the trail and the safety of trail users.
- Prairie dogs do migrate to new areas from neighboring properties or colonies. Prairie dogs will be controlled on any District properties or portions of properties that previously had no prairie dogs on site.
- Any District reservoir dam must be protected from prairie dog burrows caused by prairie dogs. If prairie dogs are on or within 200 feet of any district dam, they will be removed by whatever the method the District determines is needed.
- If the prairie dogs or colony boundaries migrate onto irrigated turf or play areas, Foothills shall use any combination of native grasses, dense planting of vegetation, fumigation or carbon monoxide to attempt to restrict the migration of colonies. Native grasses will remain un-mowed in known prairie dog habitats throughout the growing season, which results in a potential grass height of 12 to 30 inches. Dense planting of vegetation will be used where growth of native grasses is not practical or where suburban development patterns prohibit the growth of native grasses. District staff will still mow a 3ft. strip along trails as part of normal maintenance practices.
- The preferred method of restricting colony migration shall be natural barriers; such as native grass or vegetation, however, fumigant or carbon monoxide control may be necessary, depending on the site and encroachment of the colony onto park, trail, open space, reservoir or golf infrastructure. Fencing or man-made barriers may be considered if cost effective, un-obtrusive and determined by staff to have the potential of being effective.
- Existing sites may be treated or controlled to maintain appropriate densities of 8 to 35 prairie dogs per acre.
- Fumigation or carbon monoxide shall be used in those instances where natural barriers are not keeping prairie dogs out of irrigated turf or play areas.

- Fumigation or carbon monoxide treatments shall be applied by District staff or a licensed chemical applicator and may be used more than once to achieve desired results. All federal, state and local laws will apply for use of fumigants.
- Appropriate management methods shall be implemented in cases where prairie dogs are migrating from District property onto residential, school, commercial or other public agency properties. As determined by District staff, a 50 foot buffer will be established on District property near neighboring commercial, residential and public property. The local Homeowners Association (HOA), Civic Association, Metro District, commercial management, school district or public agency, must provide the District a written statement requesting Foothills to implement appropriate prairie dog management measures. If an HOA or volunteer HOA does not exist or vacant property, a petition must be signed by the property owner or all property owners that are adjacent to the open space or District property from that subdivision. If different subdivisions cannot agree on a request to manage the site, the District will decide what type of management practice will be used if any. The District recognizes that prairie dogs have advocates and detractors. If necessary, the District may elect to consult with either groups of individuals to assist with the deliberation process of how to manage a particular colony or area.
- Relocation of prairie dogs to property not owned or leased by the District may be done with proper approvals from the District and required federal, state and local permits. Any volunteer group that approaches District staff and is subsequently granted permission to relocate prairie dogs will be given time constraints to relocate them and all of the relocation related activities must be completed at no cost to the District. As part of the approval process from the District, the volunteer group will be required to sign a legal agreement that will include a liability waiver. The District may consider participating financially to assist with the relocation effort, but will not provide any financial support that exceeds the amount that would be expended to mitigate the prairie dogs with control measures.
- If staff observe that a prairie dog colony has suddenly died out, it will call the Jefferson County Health Department to alert officials.

MAINTENANCE PRACTICES

It is the intent of this plan to manage prairie dog habitat, where appropriate as evaluated by District staff, within native grass areas of the District. Foothills staff shall use all appropriate wildlife management practices to ensure our goals are met.

The Foothills Parks Maintenance and Golf Course Maintenance staff shall be responsible for implementation and ongoing maintenance practices outlined within this policy. If necessary, Foothills staff will consult with local government agencies, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and if warranted due to concerns about disease, the Colorado Department of Health and Environment.