

QUARANTINE OF PRAIRIE DOGS IMPORTED FOR RELEASE ON TURNER RANCHES

PROTOCOL TURNER ENDANGERED SPECIES FUND JUNE 2001



Prairie dogs imported onto Turner ranches from areas within or near the known range of sylvatic plague will be quarantined prior to their release. If there are questions about whether quarantine is needed, consult an authority on plague in prairie dogs (e.g., Dr. Elizabeth Williams, Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory; Dr. Jack Cully, Kansas State University). Quarantine procedures follow in general the procedures described by Marinari and Williams (1998) that are specific to plague. They may be periodically updated and revised as new information or circumstances dictate.

Trapping and Transport

Turner organizations will not always have control over trapping and transportation, because animals for import sometimes will be trapped and brought to us by other organizations. We will follow the following procedures if we trap and transport the animals, and make all efforts to have them followed if others do these tasks.

- The recommended means of live-trapping prairie dogs is by use of any of a variety of wire mesh traps with locking doors triggered from the inside and suitably sized to easily contain large prairie dogs (e.g., Tomahawk, Hav-a-Hart style traps).
- Prairie dogs should be trapped only from colonies believed to be free of plague as indicated by geographic location, carnivore seroprevalance assessments, small mammal trapping/seroprevalance assays, flea sampling, and/or prairie dog activity surveys. Prairie dogs must never be trapped from areas where active plague is suspected.
- Prairie dogs in traps or during transport should not be exposed to extreme temperatures or adverse weather conditions.
- Juvenile prairie dogs or their mothers should not be trapped before pups are weaned; any juveniles of questionable age or lactating females that are trapped should be immediately released.
- Prairie dogs dying from unknown causes , including ones at trapping locations, must be submitted to a veterinary pathologist for necropsy.
- Accurate records should be maintained on trapping efforts including specific trap locations, times/dates, and personnel.

- Holding cages for prairie dogs being transported between trap sites and quarantine facilities must be sheltered and large enough to allow for postural adjustment. Aggressive animals (especially adult males) may need to be segregated.
- Trappers are responsible for adhering to all permit regulations for transport of live animals between or within states.
- To control fleas, apply carbaryl flea powder (Sevin or other brands) to prairie dogs at the trap site and, if necessary, again before introduction into quarantine. Use carbaryl also to dust the trouser legs of prairie dog trappers and caretakers. (Prolonged direct contact to human skin should be avoided.)
- Equipment used to capture and transport prairie dogs will be thoroughly treated with pesticide effective against fleas before it is brought into release locations to ensure that plague-infected fleas are not inadvertently introduced on traps or equipment.

Quarantine and Confinement of Animals

- Quarantine facilities will generally be located on the ranch where the animals are to be released.
- Fresh water and food (laboratory rodent chow, sodium-free cattle cake) will be available to prairie dogs held in cages.
- All prairie dogs will be visually examined daily for signs of injury and/or disease.
- Quarantine facilities will be physically enclosed to exclude domestic dogs, cats, other domestic pets, wild carnivores, and unauthorized personnel.
- Prairie dogs will be held alive in confinement for at least 14 days before they are released on Turner properties.
- The quarantine period begins on the first full day following prairie dog delivery to the confinement facility.
- Cages in quarantine facilities should be suspended 2 to 3 feet off the ground by chain or wire hangers, and separated from adjacent cages by 24 inches or more.
- Adequate floor space must be provided for each prairie dog to move about freely and adjust its posture. Huddling together and lying on each other is normal behavior for prairie dogs. Aggressive animals, especially adult males, may need to be segregated.
- In order to maintain a more hygienic environment, cage enrichment and bedding materials should not be used.
- New prairie dogs must not be added to a cage or adjacent cage (cages not separated by at least 24 inches) during the 14-day quarantine period. If a new animal is added with direct or through-cage contact, the 14-day observation period for all prairie dogs within the cage will begin on the next full day following introduction of the new animal.
- Accurate records will be maintained by cage to include trap site location, trap dates, delivery date, and any observed illnesses or deaths.
- No prairie dogs from a cage or adjacent cage in which a prairie dog has died from unknown causes may be released until it is determined the dead animal(s) test negative for sylvatic plague.
- If necropsy results indicate that dead prairie dogs are negative for plague, the length of the quarantine period for remaining prairie dogs need not be increased beyond 14 days.

- If plague is diagnosed in a sick or dead prairie dog, no prairie dogs from that cage or adjoining cage may be released until 14 full days after the last prairie dog died of plague.
- If euthanization of prairie dogs is necessary, use CO² suffocation or cervical dislocation by experienced personnel. For human protection, it may be appropriate to euthanize all prairie dogs in cages and adjacent cages where animals die of plague.
- A veterinarian will be consulted if prairie dogs manifest or show signs of diseases other than plague. A call to the Turner veterinarian Dave Hunter is recommended.
- Floors of quarantine facilities will be dusted routinely with carbaryl flea powder for flea control.

Necropsy and Coordination

- Prairie dogs must always be considered a potential source of plague transmission to humans.
- Sick prairie dogs must be euthanized and submitted to a veterinary pathologist for necropsy.
- All prairie dogs that die during trapping, transport, or confinement must be submitted to a veterinary pathologist for necropsy.
- Minimum postmortem examination must be conducted to determine if plague is present. Determination of cause of death by appropriate testing is highly desirable.
- If plague is detected during trapping, transport, or quarantine of animals, appropriate state and federal health and wildlife agencies will be contacted immediately.
- For South Dakota, these contacts are:

John Cooper, Secretary
 SD Dept. of Game, Fish and Parks
 523 E. Capitol Ave.
 Pierre, SD 57501
 605-773-3718

Larry Gabriel, Secretary
 SD Dept. of Agriculture
 523 E. Capitol Ave.
 Pierre, SD 57501
 605-773-3375

Sam Holland, State Veterinarian
 Animal Industry Board
 411 S. Fort St.
 Pierre, SD 57501
 605-773-3321

Lon Kightlinger
 SD Dept. of Health
 615 E. 4th
 Pierre, SD 57501
 605-773-6528

Pete Gober
USFWS - Ecological Services
420 S. Garfield, Suite 400
Pierre, SD 57501
605-224-8693, ext. 24

Dave Hunter, DVM, and
Alice Whitelaw,
Turner Endangered Species Fund
1123 Research Drive
Bozeman, MT 59718
406-556-8500

Literature Cited

Marinari, P., and E.S. Williams. 1998. Use of prairie dogs in black-footed ferret recovery programs. United States Fish and Wildlife Service National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center, Laramie, Wyoming. 8 pages.

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