



Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation

Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation Reintroduction Site Profile

Date: February 2010

Location: Southeastern Montana

Species of PD: Black-tailed Prairie Dog **Acres of PD:** The Northern Cheyenne Reservation is located in Big Horn and Rosebud Counties in south-central Montana. Bordered on the west by the Crow Indian Reservation, Northern Cheyenne Reservation covers some 440,000 plus acres. About 2/3 of the Reservation is prairie grasslands and 1/3 is coniferous forest. Prairie dog distribution is primarily on the eastern 1/3 of the Reservation associated with the benches and bottomlands along the Tongue River and its tributaries. The northern reintroduction complex covers some 2,028 acres of prairie dogs and these expanded in 2009. The southern complex covered 2,011 acres but has been significantly reduced in terms of active acres due to plague. These areas are due to be remapped through contract in 2010.

Land ownership: Tribal Trust and Allotted (multiple Indian owners)

Years of ferret reintroduction: 2008 and 2009

Number of ferrets released to date: 2008- 42; 2009 - 33

On January 24, 2008, the first group of 8 black-footed ferrets was released on the Hwy 212 complex on Northern Cheyenne. Four males and 4 females from Turner's Arizona ranch were trapped from earlier releases and relocated to N. Cheyenne. An assembly for schools and Tribal Officials was held in the Tribal Casino and several school groups participated in this and later releases, naming some of the ferrets.

On October 24, 2008, the second group of ferrets - a total of 9 animals were released at N. Cheyenne. Wild born kits - Eight (8) females and 1 male from Conata Basin were released to the Hwy 212 complex, with an additional 2 females going to the Logging Creek complex.

On October 27, 2008, 11 more ferrets from the Conata Basin were released at N. Cheyenne - 4 BFFs at various towns within the Hwy 212 and the remaining 7 BFFs released at the Logging Creek complex.

On November 20th, 2008, 14 ferrets were received from the SSP captive breeding facility in Fort Collins. The 7 male kits, 6 female kits and 1 adult female were released on the Hwy 212 and Logging Creek sites.

2009 Reintroductions - The first allocation of ferrets arrived at Northern Cheyenne November 12, 2009, with the release of 17 animals, including 7 male kits, 7 female kits and 1 adult female. Another allocation of 16 animals arrived on November 23, 2009. All these animals were released on the northern Hwy 212 release complex except one male and one female, which were placed in the southern release site in an area which has not had plague in either of the episodes.

Estimated population size: 25

Research activities: To date primarily spotlighting, trapping of animals will be conducted this late summer to detect and transponder any young animals born at the site.

Site challenges: In 2009, signs of plague appeared at Northern Cheyenne southernmost release site - Logging Creek. This was later confirmed by the CDC when a dead prairie dog collected at the site was sent in for analysis. Dusting for plague was initiated beginning with sites on Logging Creek where live prairie dogs remained. As of early October, site review shows much of the complex is devoid of prairie dogs. Plague warnings were also circulated to nearby Indian Health Service providers.

Dusting was also continued on the remaining areas of the northern release site that were not dusted the first year (approx 583 acres). The northern, Hwy 212 release site/complex remains healthy and has expended in terms of acreage of prairie dogs. An initial request for 60 additional BFFs had been made for Northern Cheyenne for 2009. However, due to the reduction of prairie dog populations at the southern release site, this request was reduced to 30 animals.

Volunteer or visitor opportunities: Various volunteers/visitors participated in the ferret releases from Boy Scout groups from off reservation to agency and non-government agency groups. There has been opportunity for volunteers to assist with spotlighting and dusting although few show up for these activities.

Education staff and activities: There is no staff within the Natural Resource Department specifically dedicated to education. Activities with schools are carried out by their current staff and FWS biologists when we are there. An assembly for schools and Tribal Officials was held in the Tribal Casino and several school groups participated in the ferret releases, with different school group naming some of the ferrets.

Future plans: Snow surveys will be conducted this winter.

Monitor for plague (Spring/Summer) -This spring/summer – The southern complex will be assessed and trapping and relocation of prairie dogs will be implemented, if necessary and dusting for fleas will continue.

Spotlighting surveys, litter counts, trapping/transpondering and medicating any offspring will occur this summer - August.

We are in the process of finalizing incentive agreements with Tribe and Allottees (Spring/Summer).

Monitor for predators, burrowing owls.

Other information:

Partnerships - The Tribe continues to work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, World Wildlife Fund, and the Human Society on this program.

Preparation and passage of protective regulations for prairie dogs and any reintroduced ferrets and swift fox: We have been going through the process of re-writing our Game Code and regulations through this summer. The Code is now almost complete and has been sent to our Tribal Attorneys and persecutors for review and comment.

Signing of reintroduction areas: Seventy-five (75) metal signs were ordered and installed as necessary and large wooden signs were also put in reintroduction sites with high traffic or areas of potential shooting or trespass, if determined this would be helpful in protecting prairie dogs or newly release BFFs

Dusting: World Wildlife Fund, Northern Great Plains Program provided \$5,000 and purchased Delta dust for the initial dusting at Northern Cheyenne. Between September 15-17, 2008, tribal and agency crews dusted the

Hwy 212 town (149) were ferrets were released earlier in the year. Approximately 583 acres were dusted until efforts were halted due to cold weather and dogs becoming less active. Efforts resumed in summer of 2009 to cover all of the release sites. Approximately 1500 acres have been dusted thus far and dusting will continue again this spring as weather and road conditions permit.

Spotlighting: periodic spotlighting was conducted by the Tribal technician after initial release in January. In July and August, sightings were made of several BFFs in one location, indicating possible litters produced at the site. It is believed that at least 2 litters were born on N. Cheyenne in 2008.

