

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Black-footed ferret is not the enemy

From the Goodland Star-News

Some people seem to think that anyone in favor of reintroducing the black-footed ferret also wants to see prairie dogs expand into every quadrant of the High Plains and beyond.

To set the record straight, we don't think prairie dogs need to be protected. We'd as soon shoot one with a gun as we have with a camera.

It's a problem, though, that the black-footed ferret has been on the endangered species list for 25 years. Wildlife groups are trying to find places where the little prairie-dog eater can live and reproduce. The goal of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other conservation groups is to get the ferret off the endangered list, and that could be a good thing for farmers and ranchers.

This little nocturnal raider catches prairie dogs for dinner, and a den of four will chomp through about 500 in a year. Allowed them to multiply by 10 families, and suddenly there are 5,000 less prairie dogs on a given ranch.

The ferrets alone won't control prairie dogs, but they can take a bite out of the population.

Five years ago, environmentalists backed an unsuccessful push to get the black-tailed prairie dog added to the endangered species list. Farmers and ranchers wailed that it would be impossible to consider the hated prairie dog as endangered. The truth is, however, that the range and number of prairie dogs in the High Plains today is less than 10 percent of what it was less than 100 years ago.

If this becomes a national battle, farmers and ranchers are not likely to win. There are more people who think prairie dogs are cute back East than there are ranchers out where the cows outnumber voters. Recent stories about the battle over prairie dogs in Logan County have brought a strong reaction across the country, with people offering to organize protests against the poisoning.

The 1901 Kansas law calling for the eradication of prairie dogs and allowing counties to poison them over the objection of the landowner — who then gets the bill — might be thrown out today, as it appears to be in direct opposition to the federal laws, including the Endangered Species Act. The situation in Logan County might grow into a court battle that would end up costing lots of money and not satisfying anyone.

Debate about allowing the black-footed ferret to be introduced on private land in Logan County have gotten far away from reality. The plan would not stop neighbors from poisoning prairie dogs, nor does it say that a ferret found in a neighbor's field would halt agriculture operations.

If the ferret doesn't do well, then the experiment is over, but it doesn't mean the efforts to introduce the critters won't pop up again. Kansas is a historic home of the prairie dog and the black-footed ferret, and bringing the ferret back would help bring nature back into balance.

When the white man first started breaking out the prairie grass of the High Plains over 140 years ago, he changed the natural order. As with the American Indian, he waged war on any animal he felt was getting in the way.

The black-footed ferret is not the enemy, though, and given a chance to live and breed in Logan County, it will be at the top of the list of predators, which like to feast on prairie dogs.

— Tom Betz

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Holiday memories



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

Christmas is only a week away. My shopping is done and the only thing to do now is, well, work through the week to get to the holiday.

I know the forecasters are talking about a storm mid-week, so we might have a white Christmas.

Though Christmas is of course the big thing this month, I pretty much enjoy the entire month. Getting ready for the holiday and watching others do the same always brings me joy.

This year, that and the small things, like teasing my younger sister about what she got me for Christmas, or the expectation of going to my older sister's for the holiday have been especially enjoyable.

I'm not sweating the big things, like obsessing over what I might be getting for Christmas, or getting worked up over what the weather might be like for traveling. Instead, I'm trying to slow it down, take it one day at a time.

Time was, I couldn't wait for Christmas itself, but that has changed as I've gotten older, and once it was over, there was nothing to look forward to. But those times have made for some great memories.

Like staying up late Christmas Eve, watching MTV and making cookies with my sister Chris. Or getting threatened by Mom Christmas Day when asking if she needs any help with anything. (Her standard answer is that we can help by getting OUT of the kitchen and her way.)

Holiday animal antics. This year will be marked by the addition of two new dogs to the family, both belong to my sisters. The younger

has an eight month old Weimaraner named Donovan, and this will be his first Christmas. He has made life interesting, and this holiday will no doubt bring much of the same.

My older sister, Lori, just got a pup of mixed heritage — Australian Shepherd/Blue Heeler/Siberian Husky. I can hardly wait to see him, as that was the last type of dog any of us expected she would ever get. Plus I want to see what my brother-in-law, Mark, has to say about his new "child."

Speaking of Lori, I think we're headed there Christmas Day, and that is always fun. She lives in the country outside Garden City, and we always play with her horses, get shown her gifts and barrel racing videos, along with watching RFD TV and subjected to barrel racing stories.

Or the annual John Wayne movie marathon. I don't know if there is one on this year, but that always happens if more than one of his movies is on during the holiday. (Lori is a fan.)

I also wonder if there will be any opportunities for antics of our own this year. Past holidays

have included "punking" Lori, but we didn't get the chance last year. Our mom beat us to it, and let's just say my older sister is an easy target.

I've been handcuffed to the steering wheel of my car (don't ask), chased by wild turkeys, lost in the country, and had more reason to laugh than any person ought.

Christmas lights, loud music and caffeine figure into the celebration of Christmas also, mostly when out driving around my hometown looking at the latest and greatest holiday displays.

The past couple of years, one particular house is always on the must-see list. Almost every square inch of the yard is filled with as many lights and holiday figures as can be squeezed in.

But if you want to see them in all their glory, make sure it's before 10 p.m. because that is when they turn off the lights.

If it sounds crazy, maybe it is. I have learned there is no such thing as a "typical" or "normal" or "perfect" holiday. Those unexpected, out of the blue things are what make any time spent with family or friends special.

This year, I hope everyone has a few of those moments.

Merry Christmas.

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Fire storms

Ken Poland

• Ken's World

Oscar Wilde said it. "Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation."

Did the election indicate some discontent?

Our political situation can be compared to the fire storms in California. The latest big fire in California may be out or under control by the time you are reading this, but, I doubt that our political fire will be.

The Santa Anna winds of politics are sweeping through, following the election turnover of power. Bush is desperately trying to salvage what he can of his legacy. How many years will it take for re-growth to cover the charred ruins of our national integrity? How long must our children and children's children face the threat of economic collapse for a failed policy of borrow and spend to support a dying cause?

Sad to say, we have Democrats and other special interest groups fanning the fires and perhaps even mixing volatile fuels into the fire fighting retardants. The looters are rushing in to take advantage before the system can secure the area. Republicans and former administration allies are intercepting the supply lines and fighting for the protective gear and oxygen masks. And then, we have some who stubbornly hold to a failed strategy of misinformation being supplied by an inefficient intelligence agency and unqualified

commanders.

We are busier at trying to identify those who torched the fire than we are at recruiting qualified firefighters. The fire chiefs are fighting over whether to allow wild fires to clear the accumulated brush and undergrowth of centuries worth of husbandry failures or to go in and try to douse the fire and ignore the underlying failure to address honest appraisal of historic apathy of the bordering fire districts. They are fighting to implement one or the other program that will neither one work.

What a mess! It makes a person just want to roll over, cover up their head, snooze through the morning, and hope the fire abates itself by afternoon. We, mankind, want to just pray to our God or gods, (whether it be Zeus, Buddha, some sacred cow, proper alignment of the planets, Allah, the God of Abraham, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, or whatever deity you choose) and wait for our prayers to be answered.

Folks, that ain't a gonna work! I can't speak for all those false or pagan gods, but God the father, Jesus the son and the Holy Spirit (our trine God) depends on the hands and feet of the believers to deliver the message of peace and goodwill to all men. You notice I said, "hands and feet," not our mouths. Preaching good will and passing laws won't do the trick.

God can, but I don't think in our present age that He will anoint anyone of us to just wave the magic wand and deliver water from a barren rock. And even if he did, maybe you should re-view the story and the penalty Moses paid when he struck the rock instead of obeying with a passive wave of his staff. Obedience seems to be the last option we want to try.

When Christians begin living their faith and honestly trying to reflect the image of God, as Christ did, then and then only will we be able to heal the wounds of centuries worth of conflict. Everyone of us has blemishes that distort the image of God, but if we admit our faults He is faithful to erase them and individually we can show the world we are Christians by our love. And then as individuals we can join together and truly become a Christian nation with ideals and policies that reflect God's love.

Ken Poland lives in Gem and occasionally contributes to the Colby Free Press

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce

Tinsley

