

# Black-footed ferrets return to Kansas prairie

By Tom Betz  
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The black-footed ferret, one of the rarest animals in North America, returned to Kansas on Tuesday, Dec. 18 as 24 pups were released in Logan County after more than two years of effort, legal wrangling and poisonings.

The prairie-dog-eating ferrets were released on land which has been the center of a dispute over allegedly uncontrolled prairie dog populations. Fourteen were divided between two sites about two miles apart on land owned by Larry Haverfield, Gordon Barnhardt and Maxine Blank.

Ten were taken to a Nature Conservancy property 10 miles to the east which has been managed to retain 2,000 acres of prairie dogs within the Smoky Valley Ranch Preserve.

As "wildlife-friendly" landowners, Haverfield and his friends have been fighting to reintroduce the black-footed ferrets as part of their way to keep the balance of nature. They have large prairie dog towns that are a perfect place for the tiny carnivores, but a red flag to neighbors.

The ferret were thought for years to be extinct, until in 1981 a small surviving colony was discovered by chance in Wyoming. Since then, the government has been trying to reintroduce and stabilize the population. Many ranchers, fearing the endangered species will block attempts to eliminate prairie dogs, have resisted.

Haverfield and Barnhardt have been at the forefront of a controversy that has pitted them and their attorney, Randy Rathbun of Wichita, against neighboring landowners, Logan County commissioners and the Kansas Farm Bureau.

Haverfield said Thursday the Fish and Wildlife representatives wanted to keep the release confidential until after the ferrets had settled in.



Larry Haverfield released the first black-footed ferret reintroduced to the wild on Gordon Barnhardt's ranch south of Russell Springs on Tuesday evening. The ferrets were released directly into prairie dog burrows, which are their natural homes.

Photos by Ron Klataske/Audubon of Kansas.

"I am happy they are here," Haverfield said. "It is a good feeling to have them here. I don't know what will happen with all the legal stuff. Maybe the judge in Topeka will see this as a way out for him."

Haverfield said he went out Wednesday evening to see if he could spot any of the nocturnal animals, but did not see any.

"I have a spotlight on my pickup," he said, "and I will be looking for

them any time I am driving through the area in the early evening."

Haverfield rotates his cattle from pasture to pasture each week and seems more willing to tolerate a few prairie dogs on his land. He is out moving cattle almost daily.

The battle over the plan to reintroduce the black-footed ferrets has taken a number of twists. The Logan County commissioners passing a resolution forbidding the "intro-

duction" of the ferrets or any other endangered species in the county, but federal officials basically said the county couldn't tell them what to do.

Haverfield and Barnhardt were in Topeka on Nov. 20 for a hearing on a temporary restraining order from the Shawnee County to stop the poisoning of prairie dogs by Logan County on a permit issued by the state Department of Wildlife and Parks.

In October, the county had hired a firm from Tribune to poison about 100 acres of the Haverfield, Barnhardt and Blank land, with Phostoxin and had him come in on a weekend to do the poisoning when Haverfield and his lawyer were unable to find a way to stop them until more than 30 acres had been done.

The day before the hearing, while Haverfield was headed to Topeka, the Logan County commissioners had the Tribune firm come in and poison more of the land with Rozol.

Haverfield said he found out about the poisoning when he received a bill from the county.

He said the Rozol poison was spread around on the surface more than in the prairie dog holes, which is where the label on the product says it needs to be. He said he showed the poisoned area to several of the federal wildlife people after the ferrets were released.

Despite the shroud of secrecy around the release, the federal agency notified key players, including the Logan commissioners.

"Yeah, they called me," said Commission Chairman Doug Mackley. "They left a message on the phone."

What the county will do next is uncertain, he said.

"It's pretty tough to fight the federal government," Mackley said. "We'll talk about it. So far, we haven't done anything."

Haverfield and Barnhardt also face a civil lawsuit by 13 neighbors

for damages and claim that the prairie dogs have caused a loss of land value in the area.

Haverfield said he does not know what is going to happen with that case, but that he had been told that all the neighbors for a mile around his 6,000-acre ranch are accepting a Fish and Wildlife program to help control prairie dogs.

While their maverick ways may not endear them to prairie-dog-hating neighbors, the two draw praise from environmental and wildlife groups.

"These landowners (Haverfield and Barnhardt) have resisted the efforts to force them and other landowners to poison their lands to exterminate prairie dogs," said Ron Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas.

Calling the two "wildlife heroes," he said they have invested tens of thousands of dollars defending their right to conserve native species on their land.

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## County delays fire-chief decision

CHIEF, from Page 1a

the people involved and look at what we need to do. I fully agree we need to make some changes."

Thomas said the commissioners have not looked at the budget to see where the money to pay a chief might come from.

"What happens with the fire board?" Rasure asked. "If we have a full-time fire chief, then does the fire board go away?"

Dennis Bentzinger of Med Enterprises Fire Extinguishers, was at the meeting to ask questions about the fire chief position. He said he was in favor of having a person to oversee all the county fire departments, but wanted to know if the commissioners had looked at the duties and costs.

"If we have a full-time chief that answers to the commissioners," Bentzinger said, "then there is no need for a fire board."

"We have to look at that as part of what we can do," Tiede said.

"Set a date and we will be there," Bauman said, adding that a Monday or Friday evening might be the best.

Commissioner Mitch Tiede said it should be the first part of January, and Thomas said it will be a public meeting.

Bentzinger said looking at the rural fire budget, it seemed the amount spent had gone up about 40 percent in the last couple of years.

Bauman said part of that was from poor purchasing in the past.

Bauman said he felt the rural fire departments are getting to a level where the costs should level off.

Bentzinger brought up the county buying hydraulic extrication equipment and asked if that wasn't a duplication. Bauman agreed the city did have a set of equipment.

"Couldn't there have been an agreement to use the city's?" Bentzinger asked. "I know it is done and we spent \$80,000. I think we should have had more dialogue before we started doing this."

Bauman said the county is running three fire departments out of a small budget and not getting things prepared for the future.

"We are still using some bunker gear from the 1980s," he said. "That is something that should be upgraded."

Tiede said the other rural fire departments, in Brewster and Kanorado, have said they want a full-time chief. He said they need help because they are not getting enough volunteers.

"If we came up with the money, I assumed that David would be the fire chief today," Rasure said.

"I would like to see that happen," Tiede agreed. "We have a good person doing us a good job. ... It would not be fair to advertise this position; we could get someone the volunteers don't know."

James Miller, business development director for Eagle Communications, who is the assistant city fire chief, said he came to Goodland from Ellis County and was on the fire department there. He said the city helped the county fire department and both had extrication equipment.

Bauman said the city and county have been working together and things have been smooth.

"I think the other part is behind us," he said.

Sheriff Kevin Butts said he did not feel having two sets of extrication equipment was duplication.

"I felt the county needed their own equipment," he said. "We have miles of road to cover. Personally, I would like to see that each department has a set of extrication equipment."

"I have been holding someone while waiting on the rescue guys. ... I think it was a wise decision."

"I think you are on the right direction. We need a fire chief over everything. I think we are lucky that something major has not happened."

"If we don't get this done," Bauman said, "then Alan and I have not done our work. There is plenty of work to be done. I think if we have this position, we can help Brewster and Kanorado, and maybe that will help them get some volunteers."

## public notice

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF SHERMAN COUNTY, KANSAS FILED PURSUANT TO CHAPTER 59 OF THE KANSAS STATUTES ANNOTATED

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF ROGER W GIBSON, Deceased Case No. 06 PR 03

NOTICE OF HEARING ON PETITION FOR FINAL SETTLEMENT

THE STATE OF KANSAS TO ALL PERSONS CONCERNED:

You are hereby notified that on the 11th day of December, 2007, a Petition for Final Settlement was filed in this Court by

Jill Deeds, as executor named in the Last Will and Testament praying for a final settlement of the estate, approval of his acts, proceedings and accounts as executor, allowance for attorneys' fees and expenses, determination of the heirs, devisees and legatees entitled to the estate and assignment to them in accordance with the Will of Roger W Gibson, deceased. You are hereby required to file your written defenses thereto on or before the 4th day of January, 2008, at 10:00 o'clock a.m., on said day, in said Court, in the City of Goodland, in Sherman County, at which time and place said cause will be heard. Should you fail, judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon the Petition.

Jill Deeds, Petitioner  
 VIGNERY & MASON L.L.C.  
 214 E. 10th, P. O. Box 767  
 Goodland, Kansas 67735  
 Telephone: 785-890-6588  
 Attorneys for Petitioner

Published in The Goodland Star-News on Fridays, Dec. 14, 21 and 28, 2007.

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