

Black-footed ferrets growing in Logan County

By Tom Betz
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In the third year of the Black-footed ferret program in Logan County the numbers appear to be growing based on spotting done over the past few weeks.

Dan Mulhern, fish and wildlife biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office in Manhattan, said Monday the volunteer spotters had found 35 ferrets for sure over the eight nights of spotting on the Nature Conservancy and Larry Haverfield ranch south of Russell Springs.

He said the total spotted could go as high as 41, but he was sure of the 35. He said the majority of those captured over the two weeks appear to have been born on site, and did not have any electronic chips. He said one female was captured that has been released in the area three years ago.

Mulhern said he had different volunteers helping with the spotting and trapping that was done on Monday through Thursday nights the third and fourth weeks of March. He said the first night there were about 30 volunteers including some college and high school students on spring break. He said over the eight nights about 50 people volunteered to help in the spotting.

Larry Harper of Goodland, rode

with Larry Haverfield on Thursday night looking for the nocturnal creatures who use prairie dogs as their main source of food.

Harper said he and Haverfield used spot lights to try to locate the ferrets, but did not see any himself. He said he did see deer, jack rabbits and cottontails.

He did see one ferret that had been captured and was taken back to the portable lab to be checked and tagged before being released back into the wild.

Harper said he got down to Haverfield's ranch late in the evening on Thursday, and the sun was coming up on Friday morning when he drove back to Goodland.

Mulhern said the ferrets are spot checked twice a year to see how the population is doing, and he feels the project has done well in both locations in Logan County. The project has brought a lot of controversy because the surrounding farmers want the prairie dogs eliminated.

The Black-footed Ferret has been on the federal endangered species list for more than 25 years. However, efforts to reintroduce the ferrets have increased the numbers and beginning with 18 in 1985 a population of more than 1,000 now live in the wild with more young ferrets introduced each year. Mulhern said the ultimate goal is to take the



A female black-footed ferret captured last week in Logan County is checked out by Dan Mulhern of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Photo by Larry Harper/The Goodland Star-News

black-footed ferret off the endangered species list.

There are currently 19 black-footed ferret reintroduction sites located in eight states with one site in Mexico and one site in Canada. Black-footed ferrets have been reintroduced in Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Kansas, and New Mexico.

Black-footed ferret reintroduction into the wild began in 1991 when the captive population reached a level that some individuals could be released into the wild without risk to the essential captive population. The first reintroduction was at Shirley Basin in Wyoming.

Black-footed ferrets are 18 to 24 inches long, including a 5 to 6 inch tail. They weigh only one-and-a-half to two-and-one-half pounds, with males slightly larger than females. Black-footed ferrets are well adapted to their prairie environment. Their color and markings blend so well with grassland soils and plants that they are hard to detect until they move. They are obligate carnivores of the prairie dog for food and shelter. They are a slender, wiry animal with a black face mask, black feet, and a black-tipped tail. Their short, sleek fur is a yellow-buff color, lighter on the belly and nearly white on the forehead, muzzle, and throat. They have short legs with large front paws, and claws developed for digging. The ferret's large ears and eyes suggest they have acute hearing and sight, but smell is probably their most important sense for hunting prey underground in the dark.

There are three ferret species worldwide but the black-footed ferret is the only one indigenous to North America.

Hospital reviews possibility of opening dialysis service

DIALYSIS, from Page 1

program," he said. "I would like to do it quickly, but we need to be sure we are doing it the right way and we have it because the patients don't have an option they need this service."

"I appreciate the efforts we are doing on this," said board member Randy Coleman. "It is hard on the patients to have to go a long way away."

He said he felt sure Davita would have the expertise in training and might be able to help the hospital.

Jolly said Davita has offered their

equipment.

"I am sure they would give us a price on training," he said. "We have two people on staff who worked in Burlington and are already trained. It may not be just the initial training, it is the ongoing training. I feel there may be ways to do that. There is a program in Hays."

Coleman asked about a reasonable timeline to expect a decision, and how long it would take to get it started.

Jolly said he felt the hospital would be able to get the money for the equipment, but he was not sure what kind of operating loss the hos-

pital might have to start with.

"I think it will take time to get it going and have to find a way to fund that," he said. "Another question is where we have to set it up. Analysis of these questions make it tough to predict a specific timeline."

Brenda McCants, board chairman, said the hospital does not have a cost report yet.

Jolly said the hospital auditors are not sure about this as they have never done one of these. He said they are trying to get the payer information from Davita.

"There are lots of options to look at," he said. "The one in Burlington

did not work. We have to look at a model that will work here and find ways to get the fixed costs covered."

He said the Northwest Kansas Health Foundation has said they would help with the machines if

we need it.

Dale Schields and Joyce Moore, board member, reported the foundation had talked about the possibility and was willing to help with the dialysis machines if needed.

Medical center to install public wireless

WIRELESS, from Page 1

and family health center. He said the estimate from S&T of \$6,779 is about \$700 short of the total cost. He said the hospital staff can do some of the installing to save money.

He said he would recommend the hospital board go forward with the public network.

"It might keep someone from trying to access our network if this is available," he said.

A question was asked about what the cost would be once the public network was installed. Sanderson said it would be \$40 a month, and the connections would be through S&T. He said the hospital would not have any control, but there would be a sign up page similar to other public wireless systems.

Brenda McCants, board chairman, asked about the money for

the project and if they would be able to track the people who use the system.

Sanderson said they had the money in the budget, but took it out. He said they would probably do this rather than something else later in the year. He said they would get information about the system usage, and the opening page will be on the hospital web site.

Steve Riebel asked if the hospital would keep the employees from using the public wireless system, and if there was a way to keep that from happening.

Sanderson said he would rather let them use the public network rather than trying to use the private network.

Jim Precht, hospital finance officer, said he was looking at reallocating money for the wireless project.

"I know I have had questions from

people who want to know why they cannot bring their laptops," McCants said. "I feel it is good for us to be up with the real world."

Jolly said he felt Sanderson was right on the security area and that this would be a good answer.

Sanderson said it is another thing for the hospital to advertise once it is up and running to let people know the hospital has a public Internet access.

"To make it more patient and family friendly," McCants said.

The motion to approve passed unanimously with members Harlan House, Riebel, Randy Coleman, McCants, Joyce Moore and Jackie Drennan voting in favor. Board members absent were Matt Hartwell, Patty Eckhardt and Darin Neufeld.



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