

Rare ferrets find home on range in Logan County

By **TOMBETZ**
ntbetz@nwkansan.com

The black-footed ferret, one of the rarest animals in North America, returned to Kansas last month 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 Mr. 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, Mr. 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 was 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 rebuild and stabilize the population. Many ranchers, fearing the endangered species will block attempts to eliminate prairie dogs, have resisted.

Mr. Haverfield and Mr. 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.

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

"I am happy they are here," Mr. 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."

Mr. Haverfield said the ferrets arrived Tuesday, Dec. 18, and he went out the next night to see if he could spot any of the nocturnal animals, but didn't see one.

"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."

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

The battle over the plan to reintroduce the black-footed ferrets has taken a number of twists. Logan County commissioners passed 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.

Mr. Haverfield and Mr. 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 Mr. Haverfield, Barnhardt and Blank land, with Phostoxin and had him come in on a weekend to do the poisoning when Mr. 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 Mr. Haverfield was headed to Topeka, the commissioners had the Tribune firm come in and poison more of the land with Rozol. Mr. Haverfield said he found out about that 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 did notify key players, including the county 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 added.

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

Mr. Haverfield and Mr. 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.

Mr. 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 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.

Suppers to help museum roof

The Decatur County Last Indian Raid Museum plans fund raisers in January, February and March to help pay for repairs to the roof and other maintenance work.

The first event will be a supper from 5 to 7 p.m. on Saturday in the Bohemian Hall, featuring chili

soup, cinnamon rolls and drinks.

Following that, the museum plans dinner from 5 to 7 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 9, and Saturday, March 8, all in the Bohemian Hall.

All will be served for a donation.

Goodbye, Christmas



ON MAIN STREET last week, Melvin Martin was taking down Christmas decorations. The crew was storing them at the old youth ranch at Sappa Park, since the county wanted its storage building for a recycling center.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Buck use bothers alliance

Members of the Oberlin Business Alliance discussed ways to make sure the group's Santa Bucks are used only at participating businesses as its meeting last Wednesday, but didn't make any decisions.

Each year during the holidays, the group sells Santa Bucks through the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce office. The Santa Bucks are scrip money, like gift certificates, which can be spent at alliance member businesses only.

This year, the office sold over \$18,000 worth of Santa Bucks, said Jo Henderson, Chamber manager.

Some of the stores that aren't Alliance members have been accepting them, said Connie Grafel, marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.

The group, said Gary Walter with the Bank, can decide not to honor the Santa Bucks from nonmember stores, said Mr. Walter, but they need to make a decision.

Now, he said, the money is deposited in the Bank when the bucks are sold. People use the Santa Bucks at a store and the scrip is then taken to the Bank to be reimbursed.

Kurt Vollertsen, owner of Ward Drug Store, said he would hate to throw the responsibility on the Bank.

Maybe, said Ms. Henderson, a list of participating stores could be handed out to people who buy the Santa Bucks. The list, said Joe Stanley, owner of Stanley Hardware, also could be printed on the back of the Santa Bucks.

Mr. Vollertsen noted that the group needs to find a new place to store Christmas decorations because the county wants to use the building where the decorations are now stored for recycling.

Mr. Walter suggested the building at the former Sappa Valley Youth Ranch where the mower is now stored.

In other business, the alliance:

- Talked about the speaker system downtown, which didn't work during the Parade of Lights after Thanksgiving. The speakers will play music, but the microphone didn't work during the parade.

- Talked briefly about golf cart use in the city. Ms. Grafel said Charles Godwin, with Terrace Gardens RV Park, had bought a golf cart and he is refurbishing it for his guests. She said state Rep. John Faber is introducing a bill to allow golf carts to be tagged for use on public streets.

- Agreed to donate \$50 to the Golden Age Center.

- Discussed calling 4-H groups, a group at the high school or the Girl Scouts to see if they could be in charge of hemming the season banners and hanging them downtown five times a year.

- Heard that Mr. Vollertsen had asked the city crew to scatter sand curb to curb downtown, not just in the middle of the street, since the parking area was so slick.

- Decided to do a professional football championship giveaway again this year.

Scarce ferrets used to dwell in state

State museum records indicate Kansas was a significant "stronghold" for black-footed ferrets prior to poisoning campaigns intended to exterminate prairie dogs from all of their historic range in the western two-thirds of the state.

The records indicate ferrets have been missing from the Kansas landscape for at least 50 years, said Ron Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas.

He said he was invited in September 2005 to tour several Logan County ranches with prairie dog colonies and help document ecological values for other wildlife. It was soon apparent, he said, that as many as three private ranches had the potential to support experimental reintroduction of the endangered species.

Neighboring landowners have resisted, and one response to that has been trying changing the law which

allows counties and townships to poison prairie dogs.

"With antiquated state statutes imposed for more than a century, poisoning campaigns designed to eradicate prairie dogs are still being imposed on ranch landowners without their permission," Mr. Klataske said. "Audubon of Kansas has taken the leadership role in asking the Kansas Legislature to repeal and revise the most destructive sections of those statutes. Our recommendations are reflected in Senate Bill 257."

In a partnership initiative with Audubon, he said, five families with 26,000 acres of ranch land sent a letter in November 2005 requesting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service evaluate their properties for potential reintroduction of the endangered ferret.

Two Logan County ranchers, Gordon Barnhardt of Bucklin and

Gene Bertrand of Wallace, had separately contacted wildlife agency two decades earlier to indicate a willingness to have ferrets on their land. That followed the discovery of a small population in Wyoming in 1981 and establishment of a captive breeding program to bring the animals back from the brink of extinction.

The century-old state law that allows county commissioners to order eradication and enter private land with poison violates every acceptable concept of property rights and modern conservation standards, Mr. Klataske said. Poisoning with agents such as Rozol and Phostoxin can kill other predators, including swift foxes, burrowing owls, bald and golden eagles, ferruginous hawks, which also feed on prairie dogs, and many other, he said.

RAWLINS & DECATUR COUNTY, KS LAND AUCTION

Thursday, January 24, 2008 • 10 a.m.

Auction Location: Saint Mary's Hall, Herndon, KS

Land Location: From the intersection of Hwy 117 and road Y, go 3 miles north on Hwy 117, 1 mile east on road BB, then 3/4 mile northeast to the southwest corner of Tract 3.

Sellers: Karmel K. Hutfles, Brett Chambers & Daron Chambers

Tract 1: SW 1/4 of 12-1-31 Rawlins County, consisting of approximately 123.3 acres cropland, 34.8 acres grassland.

Tract 2: SE 1/4 of 12-1-31 Rawlins county, consisting of approximately 6.1 acres cropland, 151.9 acres grassland.

Tract 3: NE 1/4 of 13-1-31, Rawlins County, consisting of approximately 130.1 acres cropland, 31.0 acres grassland.

Tract 4: NW 1/4 of 18-1-30, Decatur County, consisting of approximately 22.0 acres CRP, 122.2 acres grassland.

FOR A COMPLETE SALE BILL VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT:

WWW.GLADREALESTATE.COM

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND A TOUR OF THE LAND CONTACT ROCKY HAYES AT:

GLAD REAL ESTATE
 415 STATE, ATWOOD, KS 67730

ROCKY HAYES, AUCTIONEER

OFFICE: 785-626-2039 HOME 785-626-9600

Final Week for Front End Liquidation Sale 50% OFF

- * All Gifts
- * All Counter & Christmas Greeting Cards
- * All Party Goods and Gift Wrap
- * All Health & Beauty Aids

Prescriptions & Diabetic testing supplies will not be included in this sale

WE WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH TOP QUALITY PRESCRIPTION SERVICE

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

Thanks for your community support during our Liquidation Sale

DRUG STORE
Addleman
 137 S Penn Ave - Oberlin, KS - 785-475-2661

+++ OBERLIN +++ Enrollment: January 9 and 10, 7 to 8:30 p.m. Decatur Community High School Room 112. Education Coordinator: Candy Dejmal, 785-475-2179 (home) or 785-475-2231 (school).

| No. | Course Name | CR. | Instructor | Place | Time/Day |
|-------|---|-----|--------------------|-------|-----------|
| CO126 | Presentation Software | 1 | C. Dejmal | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts: Wed, 1/23 | | Ends 2/20 |
| CO176 | Intro. to Computer Concepts & Application | 3 | M. Larue | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts: Wed., 1/16 | | Ends 4/30 |
| AC101 | Accounting Fundamentals | 3 | C. Dejmal | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts Mon. 1/14 | | Ends 4/28 |
| EN177 | English Composition II | 3 | B. Breth | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts Mon. 1/14 | | Ends 4/28 |
| EN110 | Medical Terminology | 1 | L. Doeden | H.S. | TBA |
| | | | Starts TBA | | Ends TBA |
| HE101 | Basic Nutrition | 3 | M. Moxter | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts Wed. 1/16 | | Ends 4/30 |
| PS176 | General Psychology | 3 | J. Wenger | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts Mon. 1/16 | | Ends 4/30 |
| PS276 | Developmental Psych. | 3 | J. Wenger | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts Weds. 1/14 | | Ends 4/28 |
| SO176 | Intro. to Sociology | 3 | J. Wenger | H.S. | 7-10 p.m. |
| | | | Starts Thurs. 1/17 | | Ends 5/1 |
| SO123 | Criminology | 3 | J. Wenger | H.S. | TBA |
| | | | Starts TBA | | Ends TBA |
| MA205 | Elements of Statistics (Pre College Algebra) | 3 | P. Dorshorst | H.S. | 9:43 a.m. |
| | | | Starts Thurs. 1/10 | | Ends 5/23 |
| MA178 | College Algebra* (After Jan. 2 class will meet Mon. 6-9 p.m.) | 3 | P. Dorshorst | H.S. | 6-9 p.m. |
| | | | Starts Weds. 1/2 | | Ends 4/7 |
| CJ110 | Intro to Criminal Justice | 3 | J. Wenger | H.S. | TBA |
| | | | Starts TBA | | Ends TBA |
| AR175 | Art Appreciation | 3 | T. Woolsey | H.S. | TBA |
| | | | Starts TBA | | Ends TBA |

*Mandatory Placement is required. Contact local outreach coordinator for information.

COLBY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
 1255 S. RANGE • COLBY, KS 67701
 PH. 785-462-3984