



A RARE BLACK-FOOTED FERRET (above) peeked out of a prairie dog hole after being released in Logan County on Nov. 14. Cathy Lucas (left), daughter of ranch owners Bette and Larry Haverfield, released a ferret, which immediately dived into a vacant prairie-dog burrow.

More endangered ferrets released in Logan County

By **TOMBETZ**
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For the fourth time in a year, the population of the endangered black-footed ferret south of Russell Springs increased Friday afternoon at federal wildlife agents and volunteers released 13 for the tiny predators, bringing the total so far to 48.

Larry Mr. Haverfield, a Logan County rancher who's taken a lot of heat over his views on wildlife, especially prairie dogs, said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service brought 13 more ferrets out to his ranch to be released.

"We put some near the house," Mr. Haverfield said, "and took the others a couple miles north to another spot."

"It was a terrible day with the winds, and we had a much smaller group to help and watch the release. The ferrets came right out of the cages and went into the prairie dog holes. They did not put on as much of a show as they have on better days."

He said this brings the total released up to 48 on his property, with about 20 released on Nature Conservancy land along the Smoky Hill River.

This is the fourth release of the endangered ferrets in Logan County as part of a reintroduction project being coordinated through the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Kansas Audubon Society.

Ron Mr. Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas, said Mr. Haverfield and two other landowners have invested thousands of dollars defending their right to conserve native wildlife on their land.

A century-old state law allows county commissions to order eradication of prairie dogs and enter private land with poison violates every acceptable concept of property rights and modern conservation standards, he said.

Over the past two years, Mr. Haverfield and his fellow landowners have been in a battle with their

neighbors and the Logan County commissioners over the preservation of the prairie dogs that are the key to the reintroduction of the ferrets. Black-footed ferrets were thought to be extinct until a small colony was found in Wyoming about 20 years ago. Since then, the federal agency has been working to reintroduce them across the High Plains.

Mr. Haverfield said Henry Maddox of the Fish and Wildlife office in Denver was one of the people who came out to watch the release. He told the ranch owner he was impressed, and thanked him for being willing to help reintroduce the ferrets.

Mr. Haverfield said some of the ferrets this time came from the Phoenix Zoo, where they had been

raised. He said this may be the last release at least for the year. Depending on how successful the ferrets are in reproducing and spreading, he added, Logan County may not get any more next year.

He said the wildlife people and Audubon Society will come out in the spring to see if they can spot and tag some of the young ferrets.

Under the Endangered Species

Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been raising ferrets and finding places to reintroduce them.

Over the past 25 years, the service says, the national goal has been to improve the status of the species from endangered to threatened by establishing 10 free-ranging populations of ferrets, spread over the widest possible area within their former range. To meet this goal, the

service hopes that 1,500 breeding adult ferrets will be established in the wild by 2010.

Black-footed ferrets are found almost exclusively in prairie dog colonies. Prairie dogs are their principal food, and ferrets live and rear their young in old prairie dog burrows. Black-footed ferrets have one litter each year, with an average of about three kits per litter.

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