

Presentation by Ron Klataske,
Executive Director, Audubon of Kansas
to the Kansas State Senate, Committee on Natural Resources
in Opposition to SR1711 and in Favor of Black-footed Ferret
Conservation Programs
February 14, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective and that of Audubon of Kansas and other conservation partners who have been actively involved in the reintroduction of Black-footed Ferrets (BFF) and conservation of other wildlife associated with Black-tailed Prairie Dog in Kansas.

Although I have been professionally involved in wildlife management and conservation since I enrolled in KSU 50 years ago, I grew up on a family farm/ranch and have been involved in agriculture my entire life. I continue to manage 1,173 acres of personal/family rangeland for livestock and wildlife in three Kansas counties and the 5,000-acre Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary in Nebraska.

Audubon of Kansas and every Kansas resident that I know of who has an interest in conservation and stewardship of the State's Wildlife Heritage is opposed to SR 1711 because they support the recovery of endangered species, the commendable efforts of private landowners to accommodate the presence of native wildlife on their land, and appreciate the professional efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to work in partnership with these landowners and all other stakeholders—including bending over backwards to address and mitigate the concerns of other landowners who want prairie dogs controlled on their land.

The Kansas Conservation Community opposes Senate Resolution 1711 because almost all of the “WHEREAS” statements are flawed with misinformation and disinformation and/or are in total error. Likewise, the “Be it resolved” claims are based on these distortions and are designed as an egregious assault on the professional efforts of everyone involved. Apparently this is because opponents of the conservation initiative have tried and failed in every other forum of public discourse. This resolution is not worthy and is not deserving of the endorsement of this Committee or the Kansas Senate. Opponents have objected to and blocked educational events planned for youth and the public in the area, hired an outside agitator from Idaho to be as disruptive and insulting as possible in meetings with employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Kansas, and they have negatively exaggerated almost every conceivable aspect of the Black-footed Ferret reintroduction project going back to more than a year before the first ferrets were returned to the shortgrass prairies of Kansas: suggesting on one occasion that the project threatened the integrity of farm and ranch landowners in Osage County (300 miles away).

Regarding some of the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th WHEREAS statements, they totally distort the entire concept and established federal procedures for the proposed Programmatic Safe Harbor Agreement program and the ongoing Environmental Assessment.

There is absolutely no basis for the claim in SR 1711 that these two draft documents are insufficient and misleading, or that they were “developed rashly and without adequate information.” Although they are already comprehensive in Draft form, they are specifically designed to encourage comments from individuals and others to broaden the scope of information. That is the reason for the substantial comment period. Opportunities for comments are available to everyone. It is not any more feasible for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to meet with every county commission, governmental agency and Indian tribal council in twelve states than it is for this legislative committee to have meetings on every subject in each of the 105 Kansas counties.

Outreach is what the USFWS is doing right now. The normal NEPA protocol is underway. We encourage all members of the Legislature to read the Draft documents and offer substantive comments.

The 9th WHEREAS is absolutely and completely false and a complete distortion. There is no basis for the statement that, “There has been a complete disregard for the risk to the health and safety of Kansans because of plague outbreaks.”

Plague is not caused by prairie dogs or Black-footed Ferrets. It is a non-native disease that has been in the U.S. for more than a 100 years. Human cases of plague are rare (an average of 7 per year are reported to CDC) and most human cases are caused by infested domestic cats. Some cases are from rock squirrels. If contracted by a human, plague is easily treatable with antibiotics. Far more people are killed by livestock or bees. If anything, prairie dog colonies are like canaries in a coal mine because if plague is in the immediate landscape prairie dogs quickly die off and it is evident. Thus, people can take extra precautions. By contrast, deaths in other small mammals are less noticeable.

Because of the presence of APHIS-WS and USFWS work with ferrets in Logan County, there is currently a monitoring program to detect the presence of plague. Otherwise there wouldn't be any detection program.

USDA Wildlife Services annually collects coyote blood in January from a multi-state coyote-shooting contest and tests this for plague titers. From this we know that plague is no closer than eastern Colorado and extreme southwestern Kansas at this time. The Fish and Wildlife Service is formulating a plague contingency plan this winter that may include plans for flea powder dusting in the event it is getting too close for comfort. Interestingly enough, in this regard, the Logan County Commission passed a resolution several years ago against flea dusting. Who's working against the health and safety of the residents?

Oakley Graphic
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Special County Commission meeting

The Board of Logan County Commissioners met for a special meeting on Tuesday January 29, 2013. Those present were Commissioners Carl Ulrich, Clint Kvasnicka and David Hubert. Also present were Sheila Ellis, Randy Younkian, Garry & Shirley Berggren, Gene Beagley, Ron Clark, Jo Darnall and Byron & Linda Sowers. Chairman Ulrich called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

Sheila Ellis presented the Board with a letter drafted by Fred Grant to Michael Thabault of the US Fish & Wildlife Service regarding the failure of the Service to respond and honor their commitments made during the meeting on October 26, 2012. After much discussion, it was moved and seconded by Commissioners Kvasnicka and Hubert to approve and sign the letter. Motion carried 8-0.

There being no further business discussed it was moved and seconded by Commissioners Hubert and Kvasnicka respectively to adjourn the meeting at 2:30 p.m. Motion carried 8-0.