

Prairie Dogs at Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm

Black-tailed prairie dogs are the most apparent and readily observable small mammal species on Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm. They are a keystone species in the grassland eco-system that have attracted burrowing owls, bald eagles and other raptors to nest on this open space.

While the black-tailed prairie dog plays a vital role in the grassland ecosystem, its incompatibility with agricultural uses and neighboring landowners result in it being considered a pest by some residents. These divergent values make population management necessary to alleviate conflicts while maintaining healthy prairie dog populations.

The Boulder County [Parks & Open Space Prairie Dog Habitat Element of the Grassland and Shrubland Policy](#) strives to achieve wildlife habitat protection goals while also preserving agriculture and maintaining good neighbor relations. This plan lays out the parameters and guidelines for maintaining appropriate habitat, including designating habitat areas to support active prairie dog colonies, as well as guidelines for removing prairie dogs when necessary to preserve diverse grassland ecosystems and maintain healthy and vital prairie dog populations and agricultural activities.

About the Boulder County Parks & Open Space

Prairie Dog Habitat Element of the Grassland and Shrubland Policy

- Boulder County open space lands serve multiple uses. Policies and management decisions affecting these lands are guided by the [Boulder County Comprehensive Plan](#) (Boulder County, 2013), which contains goals relating to preserving open space and wildlife habitat, protecting wildlife species, and promoting the county's viable agricultural production and heritage.
- The black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) is a vitally important native species in Colorado.
- In Boulder County over 95% of black-tailed prairie dog habitat has been lost to human development and their needs are not compatible with many current human land uses.
- With the loss of prairie dog habitat, there is also a decline in many important associated species, like burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, and black-footed ferrets.
- In accordance with the policy, all Boulder County owned open space properties are classified into one of three unique categories based on their suitability to support active prairie dog colonies:
 1. **Habitat Conservation Areas** (HCA) are designated areas of sufficient size that are highly suitable and have the right habitat for prairie dogs. Most HCAs can be found in areas of large contiguous grassland habitat where prairie dogs can thrive, and the habitat can sustain populations of prairie dogs over the long term. For more information read [Section 6](#) of the policy.
 - The objective of HCA sites is to maintain prairie dog populations with little or no control. These colonies have high wildlife value for raptors, mammalian predators, and burrowing owls. Population management may be used in situations where prairie dog populations fall below 5% coverage or if an area of an HCA is extremely impacted by prairie dogs and must be restored.
 2. **Multiple Objective Areas** (MOA) are designated properties where prairie dog populations co-exist with other uses and their habitat must be balanced with other management. This category is more complex and requires judgement in best management practices to achieve a balance for different purposes. For more information read [Section 7](#) of the policy.
 3. **No Prairie Dog Areas** (NPD) are areas not appropriate for prairie dog habitat because of unsuitable ecological conditions or existing agricultural uses. The goal is to discourage colonization and remove prairie dogs from these properties through multiple strategies. For more information read [Section 8](#) of the policy.

Management strategies are discussed in [Section 9](#) of the policy and may be employed on all classifications of open space properties.