UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management
Colorado State Office
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Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for Management of Sylvatic Plague in Colorado BLM Prairie Dog Colonies

Programmatic EA

DOI-BLM-CO-0000-2023-0004-EA

INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Colorado State Office prepared an environmental analysis DOI-BLM-CO-0000-2023-0004-EA to evaluate statewide management actions to prevent transmission of plague in prairie dog and potential black-footed ferret habitat. The purpose of the proposed action is to undertake activities on BLM lands in Colorado that contribute to prairie dog conservation and the eventual support of ferret recovery, as appropriate.

Alternative 1 (Section 2.1) is the proposed action. Primary activities will include distribution of approved insecticidal treatments to reduce or eliminate flea populations in active prairie dog colonies to limit the transmission of sylvatic plague within and among the prairie dog populations; distribution of approved vaccinations for prairie dogs, other rodents, and ferrets living in prairie dog colonies to protect them from contracting plague and other diseases; potential use of drones or uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) and current use of motorized vehicles (including OHVs) for distribution of plague management tools and population monitoring of prairie dog and black-footed ferret populations.

Alternative 2 is the no action alternative (Section 2.2). Under the No Action alternative there would be no programmatic statewide management program and NEPA analysis for plague management for prairie dogs and ferrets. Management actions such as distribution of vaccines and monitoring would continue at a local or Field Office level, on a smaller scale by foot or ATV, and on a case-by-case basis.

Issues Analyzed in the EA are:

Issue 1: What are the impacts from damage to vegetation due ATVs or people on foot to distribute vaccines and from monitoring?
Issue 2: What is the potential to spread of invasive plants from vaccine distribution and monitoring activities?
Issue 3: What would be the extent of disturbance and habitat damage from distribution of vaccines and monitoring activities?

Issue 4: What are the effects of secondary or inadvertent ingestion of vaccines by other wildlife or livestock?
Issue 5: What are the potential affects to Threatened, Endangered, or BLM Sensitive species from the proposed action?
Issue 6: What types of surface impacts would there be to cultural resources sites?

DESIGN FEATURES AND MONITORING

Applicable design features and monitoring provisions, consistent with the implementation of the proposed action, would require:

- Equipment used to distribute SPV, Deltamethrin, Fipronil grains and/or *FipBits* would be cleaned prior to entering a new treatment site to avoid spread of any noxious or invasive weeds.
- Treatment insecticides would be distributed and overseen by Certified and Trained personnel, properly certified or licensed in proper handling and application of chosen treatment type (i.e., SPV, Deltamethrin, or Fipronil grains and/or *FipBits*).
- Treatments (baits or grains) will not overlap BLM permits or leases with active livestock grazing during periods of treatment and uptake (about one week) to avoid livestock ingesting insecticides. While no impacts to livestock would be anticipated, the treatment would not be effective if not first consumed by the prairie dogs.
- Plague treatments via ATV and UAS will be prohibited in occupied Gunnison Sage-Grouse habitat areas during breeding and nesting periods (3/1-7/15) to avoid any adverse consequences to breeding and nesting behaviors of the species.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based on my review of the attached EA and supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment on BLM lands in Colorado. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. This finding is based on the degree of the effects described in the following sections within the identified affected environment.

Potentially Affected Environment (40 CFR § 1501.3(b)(1))

The proposed action will occur on prairie dog colonies on BLM lands in Colorado. The EA evaluated the effects of the proposed action to implement plague management strategies and conduct surveys of prairie dog colonies. Actions will occur on suitable sites on BLM lands as well as adjacent federal, state, and private lands.

Degree of Effects (40 CFR § 1501.3(b)(2))

In considering the degree of the effects, the following have been considered in evaluating effects appropriate to the specific action:

(i) Both short- and long-term effects.

The EA analyzed the short and long-term effects of implementing the Proposed Action. The BLM analyzed impacts to black-tailed, Gunnison, and white-tailed prairie dogs, and black footed ferret habitats. None of the short or long-term environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant.

(ii) Both beneficial and adverse effects.

The proposed action would impact each of the prairie dog's habitats, and black footed ferret habitat as described in the EA. Implementing plague treatment upon BLM administered lands in Colorado would be beneficial to conservation of prairie dogs as keystone species and to recovery efforts for the ESA listed, black-footed ferret. Design features to reduce impacts to livestock and other wildlife habitats potentially present were incorporated in the design criteria of the Proposed Action. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail within the EA and associated appendices are considered significant.

(iii) Effects on public health and safety.

The proposed action is to utilize fipronil (e.g., grains and/or FibBits), deltamethrin dust and sylvatic plague vaccine (SPV) to manage sylvatic plague. The distribution of Deltamethrin, Fipronil and SPV will not pose a public health and safety hazard.

(iv) Effects that would violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment.

The project does not violate any applicable federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

There are no effects that would violate laws protecting the environment. Any adverse effects would be short-term and localized using equipment that would have a relatively low impact to vegetation, animals, or aquatic or surface resources. Longer-term effects would be conservation of keystone species and contribute to recovery of ESA-listed species through improved habitats and ecosystem stability.

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Doug Vilsack, State Director Date