

Prairie Dog Management

Colony maintenance notification (Aug. 3, 2018)

The prairie dog population in East Big Dry Creek (west) colony currently exceeds suitable carrying capacity. After Sept. 2, the Metro District will reduce prairie dog populations in this colony site in an effort to:

- minimize health or safety hazards
- manage natural areas for species and ecosystem diversity
- maintain healthy prairie dog colonies
- minimize damage to public and private property
- minimize possibilities for future conflicts between prairie dogs and humans



There are four active prairie dog sites in Metro District owned open space areas. Many of these colonies are adjacent to residential homes, parks, and trails and are considered “fragmented” sites. These fragmented sites limit expansion opportunities, which when left unchecked can:

- contribute to overpopulation of prairie dog colonies
- cause overgrazing of short grass prairie
- create close contact with humans, and damage to private property

The Metro District is committed to managing open space as a healthy natural system by maintaining a rich diversity of native plants and animals. Conservation and management of native wildlife populations through habitat management is crucial to this challenge. The Metro District’s [Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Plan](#) details management practices.

Process

Open Space staff formally survey and assess prairie dog colonies maintained in Metro District open space areas annually. Each survey includes three separate visual animal counts with binoculars at a non-threatening distance from the colony. The counts are then averaged to determine population densities. Staff also monitor the areas for the presence or absence of burrowing owls in prairie dog colonies.

In addition to counting prairie dogs, open space staff observe the seven criteria as outlined in the Prairie Dog Conservation Plan. Staff assess the general health of the colony, the colony size in acres, destruction of private property, human health and safety hazards, noxious weed invasions, and general vegetative health including types of ground cover, planned development of the site, and passive management objectives. Combinations of these factors are considered when determining the need to remove prairie dogs.

| 2018 Prairie Dog Colony Survey (as of July 13, 2018) | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|----------------|-------|---------------|
| Colony Site | Colony Acres | Est. Pop./Ac. | Est. Colony Pop. | Bare Ground | Native Grasses | Weeds | Native Forbes |
| East Big Dry (west) | 20.5 | 14 | 287 | 15% | 10% | 65% | 10% |
| East Big Dry (east) | 17 | 16 | 264 | 15% | 15% | 45% | 25% |
| East Big Dry (north) | 1.5 | 4 | 6 | 5% | 50% | 25% | 20% |
| Dad Clark at Northridge | 12.2 | 7 | 89 | 20% | 15% | 15% | 50% |

Prairie dog sites

In August 2010, the Metro District Board of Directors designated the following four sites as suitable habitat for prairie dogs and established maximum populations for each colony site:



| Colony Site | Pop. | Acres | Pop./ac |
|-------------------|------|-------|---------|
| E. Big Dry- West | 287 | 20.5 | 14 |
| E. Big Dry- East | 306 | 17 | 18 |
| E. Big Dry- North | 21 | 1.5 | 14 |

| Colony Site | Pop. | Acres | Pop./ac |
|-------------------------|------|-------|---------|
| Dad Clark at Northridge | 220 | 12.2 | 18 |

Prairie dog colonies on Metro District owned open space areas are monitored on an ongoing basis and annually surveyed. Burrows, associated burrows and prairie dogs will be removed as outlined in the [Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Plan](#), Section III. Colony sites will be maintained so as to not exceed carrying capacity.

Contact

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