

Prairie Dog Management

Colony maintenance notification (June 21, 2019)

The prairie dog population in East Big Dry Creek (west) colony currently exceeds suitable carrying capacity. After July 22, 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 Highlands Ranch 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. Expansion contributes to:

- Overpopulation of prairie dog colonies
- Overgrazing of short grass prairie
- 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.

2019 Prairie Dog Colony Survey (as of June 12, 2019)							
Colony Site	Colony Acres	Est. Pop./Ac.	Est. Colony Pop.	Bare Ground	Native Grasses	Weeds	Native Forbes
East Big Dry (west)	20.5	21	424	20%	20%	50%	10%
East Big Dry (east)	17	12	207	15%	25%	45%	15%
East Big Dry (north)	1.5	5	8	5%	55%	10%	30%
Dad Clark at Northridge	12.2	12	145	10%	30%	25%	35%

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

For further information, please contact:

Scott Nelson
 Open Space and Park Ranger Supervisor
 720-240-5924

OR

Nick Adamson
 Natural Resource Manager
 720-240-5917

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