

experimental population, it may be returned to the Reintroduction Area or to a captive facility.

(B) If an animal is determined to be genetically unrelated to the experimental population, then under an existing contingency plan, up to nine black-footed ferrets may be taken for use in the captive-breeding program. If a landowner outside the experimental population area wishes to retain black-footed ferrets on his property, a conservation agreement or easement may be arranged with the landowner.

(iii) The North-central Montana Reintroduction Area is shown on the attached map for Montana and will be considered the core recovery area for this species in north-central Montana. The boundaries of the nonessential experimental population will be those parts of Phillips and Blaine Counties, Montana, described as the area bounded on the north beginning at the northwest corner of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation on the Milk River; east following the Milk River to the east Phillips County line; then south along said line to the Missouri River; then west along the Missouri River to the west boundary of Phillips County; then north along said county line to the west boundary of Fort Belknap Indian Reservation; then further north along said boundary to the point of origin at the Milk River. All marked ferrets found in the wild within these boundaries prior to the first breeding season following the first year of releases will constitute the nonessential experimental population during this period. All ferrets found in the wild within these boundaries during and after the first breeding season following the first year of releases will thereafter comprise the nonessential experimental population. A black-footed ferret occurring outside the experimental area in Montana would initially be considered as endangered but may be captured for genetic testing. Disposition of the captured animal may be done in the following manner if necessary.

(A) If an animal is genetically determined to have originated from the experimental population, it would be returned to the Reintroduction Area or to a captive facility.

(B) If an animal is determined not to be genetically related to the experimental population, then under an existing contingency plan, up to nine ferrets may be taken for use in the captive breeding program.

(iv) The Aubrey Valley Experimental Population Area (see Arizona map) will be considered the core recovery area for this species in northwestern Arizona. The boundary of the nonessential experimental population area will be those parts of Coconino and Yavapai Counties that include the Aubrey Valley west of the Aubrey Cliffs, starting from Chino Point, north along the crest of the Aubrey Cliffs to the southeast boundary of the Hualapai Indian Reservation. The area's boundary continues southwest along the Reservation boundary to U.S. Highway Route 66; then southeast along Route 66 for approximately 5.2 km (3.5 miles) to mile post 116; then along the 5,300-foot elevation contour east and north of the Juniper Mountains and then back to the point of origin at Chino Point. Any black-footed ferrets found in the wild within these boundaries will be considered part of the nonessential experimental population after the first breeding season following the first year of releases of ferrets into the reintroduction area. A black-footed ferret occurring outside the experimental area in Arizona would initially be considered as endangered but may be captured for genetic testing. Disposition of the captured animal may take the following action if necessary:

(A) If an animal is genetically determined to have originated from the experimental population, it may be returned to the reintroduction area or to a captive facility.

(B) If an animal is determined to be genetically unrelated to the experimental population, then under an existing contingency plan, up to nine ferrets may be taken for use in the captive-breeding program. If a landowner outside the experimental population area wishes to retain black-footed ferrets on his property, a conservation agreement or easement may be arranged with the landowner.

(10) The reintroduced populations will be continually monitored during the life of the project, including the use

of radio telemetry and other remote sensing devices as appropriate. All released animals will be vaccinated against disease prevalent in mustelids, as appropriate, prior to release. Any animal that is sick, injured, or otherwise in need of special care may be captured by authorized personnel of the Service or appropriate State wildlife agency or their agents, and given appropriate care. Such an animal may be released back to the appropriate reintroduction area or another authorized site as soon as possible, unless physical or behavioral problems make it necessary to return the animal to captivity.

(11) The status of each experimental population will be reevaluated within the first 5 years after the first year of releases of black-footed ferrets to determine future management needs. This review will take into account the reproductive success and movement patterns of the individuals released into the area, as well as the overall health of the experimental population and the prairie dog ecosystem in the above described areas. Once recovery goals are met for delisting the species, a rule will be proposed to address delisting.

(12) This 5-year evaluation will not include a reevaluation of the "nonessential experimental" designation for these populations. The Service does not foresee any likely situation which would call for altering the nonessential experimental status of any population. Should any such alteration prove necessary and it results in a substantial modification to black-footed ferret management on non-Federal lands, any private landowner who consented to the introduction of black-footed ferrets on their lands will be permitted to terminate their consent, and at their request, the ferrets will be relocated pursuant to paragraph (g)(4)(iii) of this section.

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§ 17.84 [Amended]

4. It is proposed to amend § 17.84 by adding a map to follow the existing map at the end of paragraph (g).

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