

November 19, 2013

The special meeting of the Weston County Commissioners convened at 1:30 p.m. with Chairman Seeley presiding. Present for the meeting were Commissioners: Lenard D. Seeley, Jerry Shepperson, Randy Rossman, Marty Ertman and County Clerk, Mamie C. Krank. Commissioner Tracy Hunt was not present. The purpose of the Special Meeting was Coordination with the United States Forest Service (USFS).

USFS Coordination

Tom Whitford, USFS and Tim Byer, USFS Biologist, met with the Commissioners to discuss the 2013 Thunder Basin National Grassland Prairie Dog Amendment Plan.

Commissioner Tracy Hunt joined the meeting at 1:31 p.m.

Mr. Byer discussed the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) which allows for the management of "desired species" by the USFS. Commissioner Shepperson rebutted claims by Mr. Byer that prairie dogs were beneficial to grasslands and provided for greater regeneration. Mr. Byer quoted the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) and explained that prairie dogs are not endangered, however; they play a large role in providing habitat for black footed ferret introduction. Mr. Byer explained that while the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&W) will control ferret introduction, it is the role of the USFS to provide the habitat for the ferrets. Commissioner Ertman requested documentation showing that black footed ferrets were ever located in the Thunder Basin National Grasslands (TBNG). Mr. Byer agreed to provide the documentation. Mr. Byer stated that even without the introduction of ferrets, there were other species including the Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, Swift Fox and Ferruginous Hawk that would benefit from prairie dog management. Chairman Seeley questioned why humans are not being considered as part of the habitat diversity in the plan amendment; adding that cattle grazing and prairie dog shooting are a part of the habitat diversity. Mr. Whitford stated that this would be considered during the analysis period. Commissioner Hunt asked what the USFS contingency plan was in the event that the quarter-mile buffer zone to keep prairie dogs away from private property does not work. Mr. Whitford stated that he does not know of a contingency plan. Commissioner Shepperson requested the funding distribution for donated funds of approximately \$30,000.00. Chairman Seeley asked if the plan amendment would enhance the human experience on TBNG. Mr. Whitford stated that he believed it would be enhanced. Jim Darlington, private citizen, questioned categories 3 and 4 which are not mentioned in the new amendment. Mr. Whitman stated that these areas would be re-treated. Bob Harshbarger, Resident Expert, discussed a letter mailed to Mr. Jiron, Regional Forester, in February 2013 by the Weston County Commission requesting funding distribution. Mr. Harshbarger stated that this letter had gone unanswered to date. Jean Harshbarger, Resident Expert, expressed concerns that the NGO's had such varying and opposing views from the local citizenry regarding prairie dogs.

Senator Ogden Driskill and Representative Hans Hunt were in attendance and recognized by Chairman Seeley. Senator Driskill addressed funding issues needed to control prairie dog populations. Mr. Whitford stated that funding is being cut and this is a concern. Senator Driskill expressed concerns for citizens to continue to have multiple-use on the TBNG due to the USFS intervention.

A motion was made by Commissioner Shepperson, seconded by Commissioner Rossman, to authorize Chairman Seeley's signature on a letter regarding the Black Footed Ferret Draft Recovery Plan to the United States Fish & Wildlife Service. Carried.

Mr. Whitford discussed "cooperating agency status" with the Weston County Board of Commissioners and urged them to participate.

There being no further business to come before the Commission the meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Attest: Mamie C. Krank
County Clerk

Lenard D. Seeley
Chairman