

# **County starts to poison prairie dogs**

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**RUSSELL SPRINGS — The first shot in the Logan County prairie dog war was fired this weekend, when two Wyoming-based, for-hire exterminators quietly started spreading poison on land targeted for reintroduction of the federally endangered black-footed ferret.**

**The weekend move by Logan County prompted Larry Haverfield, a prairie dog and ferret supporter, to contact his attorney Monday to make plans to fight the poisoning should it continue.**

**The poisoning comes slightly more than a week before a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-sponsored open house that is designed to provide area residents with additional information about ferrets and the effort to reintroduce them in Logan County.**

**That meeting will be from 1 to 7:30 p.m. Nov. 28 in the Logan County 4-H Building in Oakley.**

**Several groups, including the Smithsonian, will set up booths, and a live ferret will be on display.**

**That ferret is being transported from Wyoming to the Hutchinson Zoo, which lost its ferret, and will stop in Oakley for the event.**

**The open house is an outgrowth of a desire by the federal wildlife agency to attempt the reintroduction of ferrets — the most endangered mammal — in Logan County.**

**That desire has been met with strong resistance, primarily by the Logan County Commission that has rebuffed any overtures to work in partnership with them.**

**In fact, just last week, the county commission rejected without comment a prairie dog management plan offered by Haverfield. Two days after the plan was submitted, he received a letter from Logan County Attorney Andrea Wyrick stating that the plan had been deemed unacceptable and the county would proceed with efforts to eradicate prairie dogs on his land — and bill him accordingly.**

That will be a big bill, Haverfield said, given that he already has accumulated an \$8,000 poisoning bill for a border area included in his management plan. If the county poisons his entire ranch, the cost could exceed \$100,000.

Saturday's poisoning, Haverfield said, first started at about 11 a.m. on neighboring land owned by ferret-reintroduction partner Gordon Barnhart.

Haverfield contacted Barnhart, who lives in Haven, and was told that he had permission to ask them to leave. That's what Haverfield did, and the two loaded up their all-terrain vehicles and headed out.

But they returned about four hours later, accompanied by a Logan County sheriff's officer.

"He didn't want me to go in and talk to this fella," Haverfield said of the officer. "When I started on my motorcycle, he stepped in front of me. Luckily, the fella was close enough that I waved at him, and he came over."

That's when he told him that cattle were going to be moved into the pasture.

It is illegal — under terms of the application label — to spread the poison in pastures where there are cattle.

The two men left again, saying they had plenty of ground to cover, Haverfield said.

Haverfield said the sheriff's officer was attempting to contact someone by telephone but was unable to do so because of the poor cellular reception in the valley where Haverfield ranches in southwest Logan County.

Barnhart said he had not been aware they were going to poison Saturday.

"They apparently just went in," he said.

For now, Barnhart is depending on Haverfield.

"He's doing it out there," he said. "I'm not out there. He lives there. I'm three hours away."

Barnhart also submitted a prairie dog control plan.

"I got a letter from the county attorney that my control plan was not good

enough, and they were going to eradicate the prairie dogs," he said.

"It surprised us," Haverfield said of the weekend poisoning effort. "We just didn't have any idea."

He also didn't expect them to return Saturday, with a sheriff's officer in tow.

Instead, he expected them to return Monday with an officer.

Until his attorney is able to take action, Haverfield said he hopes to delay the poisoning by scattering the 1,600 calves that he overwinters around his ranch and on Barnhart's land.

"We've got a lot of cattle on hand," he said. "Hopefully, they won't be poisoning where we have cattle."

"I don't know if they can trump the cattle."

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