



Fall 2010



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# Northern Great Plains Newsletter

## APR Fence removal project reaches 2010 goal

In an ongoing effort to restore the ecological role of bison on the grasslands and to enhance the value of the grassland for other wildlife, WWF again funded the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) to remove unneeded fence on American Prairie Reserve this summer. Two MCC youth crews worked with American Prairie Foundation staff and WWF’s Dennis Jorgensen for ten days in June to remove approximately 9 ½ miles of fence. To date, they have removed 16 miles of fence since they began in 2009, bringing us to our targeted 2010 goal. In a year where WWF staff observed hundreds of migrating pronghorn trapped behind poor fences during a winter storm, and sharp-tailed grouse colliding with barbed wire fences, the opportunity to restore large landscapes that allow wildlife movement on the Reserve is truly rewarding.

A section within American Prairie Reserve opened up by the removal of a fence. ©Dennis Jorgensen/WWF-US



## Letter from the Field



In the November issue of *National Geographic*, featuring Great Migrations and the work of our own Dennis Jorgensen, the lead article eloquently describes why great migrations are so inspiring to humans: “migrating animals maintain a fervent attentiveness to a greater mission, which keeps them undistracted by temptations and undeterred by challenges that would turn other animals aside.” These amazing migration stories, including a few in the Northern Great Plains, further inspire us to protect North America’s grasslands and the wonderful biodiversity they support through large scale conservation efforts. With two grassland bird species recently added as candidate species to the Endangered Species List, and another expected in 2011, our work is more important than ever.

Thanks to the hard work and collaboration of our many partners in the prairie, 2010 was a successful year. In this newsletter you’ll read about how efforts to remove miles of fence are opening the prairie for unimpeded movement by pronghorn, how the first wild black-footed ferret kits were born this year in Canada, and how our scientists are bringing their knowledge of climate change and prairie biology to local managers to develop long term solutions.

Thank you for joining with us to maintain our “fervent attentiveness” towards protecting the Northern Great Plains in the year to come.

*Martha Kaufman*



Badlands National Park will be one of the sites included in the ecotourism project piloted by WWF and the Pine Ridge Reservation. ©Jill Majerus/WWF-US

## South Dakota ecotourism pilot project

This year, WWF will work with tribal leaders to initiate an ecotourism pilot project on the plains of South Dakota. WWF has identified an interest on the part of the tribe to pilot a wildlife/cultural eco-tour on Pine Ridge Reservation and adjacent private and public lands, including Badlands National Park. Ecotourism provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate the economic possibilities that wildlife conservation can bring. WWF staff will work with tribal members to plan, organize and carry out an eco-tour that highlights the wildlife as well as the environmental and cultural attributes of this area. Jill Majerus, our newly hired program officer stationed in South Dakota, will be the WWF point person on this project.

## Prairie dog colonies expand on APR

Monitoring prairie dog numbers and colony expansion are critical components of WWF's strategy to restore populations of the endangered black-footed ferret on APR as outlined in our forthcoming Biodiversity Management Plan. This summer and fall, we surveyed colonies across the Reserve. Colonies ranged in size from 0.4 to 279 acres and covered a total of 1,753 acres. Comparison of data from last year indicated that colonies expanded by 12.4 percent this year. WWF biologists will continue monitoring and collecting data from APR colonies and remain optimistic that prairie dog colonies will expand further, leading to ferret recovery on the Reserve.

## Climate change workshop

In late June, Anne Schrag, Climate Adaptation Program Officer, led a planning workshop in southwestern Saskatchewan focused on helping land managers identify ways to integrate climate change adaptation into natural resource planning. Canadian federal and provincial managers as well as scientists and planners from universities and other regional organizations participated. The workshop was loosely based on the Adaptation for Conservation Targets Framework, which helps managers move more quickly from analysis of actual or expected impacts due to climate change to specific concrete actions.

Read more about this on the climate blog by visiting <http://bit.ly/eXAANt>.

## NGP migrations featured in *National Geographic*

The November 2010 issue of *National Geographic Magazine* highlights the research of WWF NGP program officer Dennis Jorgensen in an article featuring unique wildlife migrations. Dennis completed his Master's degree in 2009 at the University of Calgary during which he studied the migrations of prairie rattlesnakes in the grasslands of Alberta, Canada, where rattlesnakes migrate further than any other terrestrial snake species in the world. The article also features research supported by WWF's Northern Great Plains program on the migrations of pronghorn in the ecoregion.



Pronghorn migrate south across the C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in Montana. ©Dennis Lingohr/APF

## Canadian Black-footed ferret update

In October 2009, WWF celebrated an historic accomplishment with the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret to Grasslands National Park, Saskatchewan. This achievement was the culmination of five years of bi-national cooperation and conservation planning. This summer, the birth of at least three black-footed ferret kits proved the captive-bred ferrets introduced last year are adapting well to their new home. These are the first wild-born black-footed ferrets to live in Canada in more than 70 years.



A black-footed ferret is released in Grasslands National Park, SK in the fall of 2009. ©WWF-US/Troy Fleece

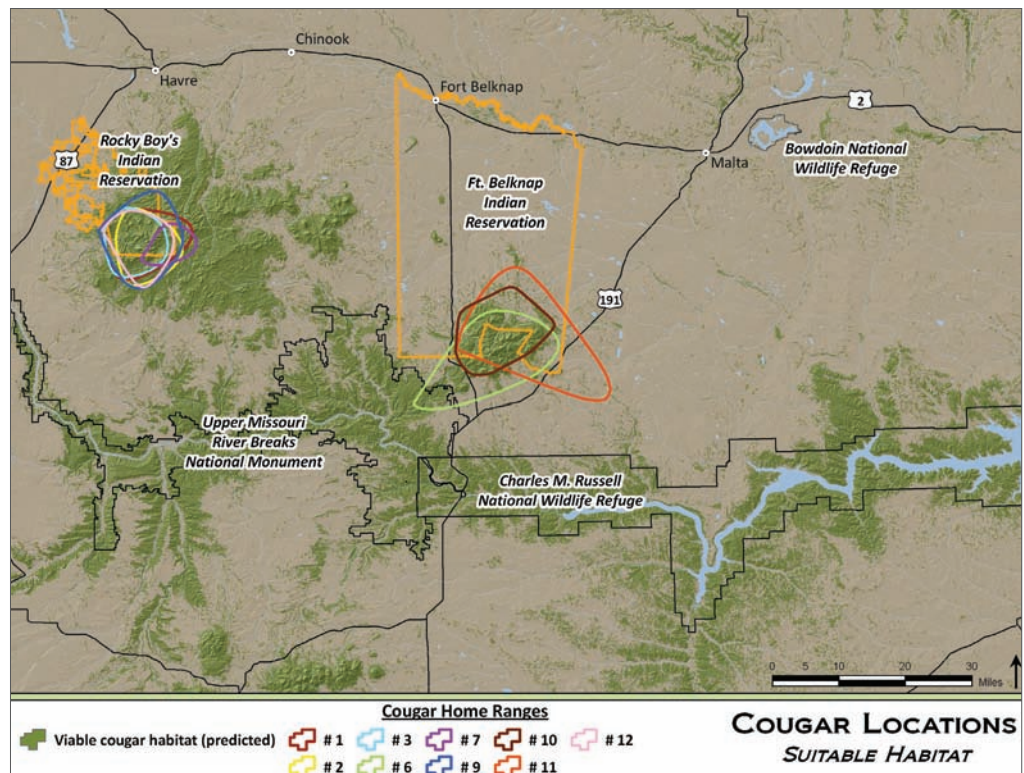
This exciting news was coupled with the unfortunate confirmation that sylvatic plague had erupted this summer within the reintroduction area, with all colonies showing a decline in numbers. Further decline seems likely and Parks Canada has initiated an emergency program to kill fleas that spread plague with the insecticide Deltamethrin which WWF has used successfully to combat plague. Because the prairie dogs have begun their winter dormancy, we will continue monitoring in the spring to determine the success of these measures.

## New Cougar Study Findings

This year, in partnership with the Chippewa Cree Tribal Wildlife Program, WWF completed an interim report on the movements and habitat use of cougars in the Little

Rocky Mountains and Bears Paw Mountains of north central Montana. The data collected from 12 radio-collared animals over two years indicates that human harvest is the primary factor contributing to cougar mortality in this area. Interestingly, no evidence was found that any radioed cougars had conflicts with livestock or humans despite extensive overlap with allotments where cattle were present.

This is the first information of its kind gathered from a grassland ecosystem in Montana and suggests that we can predict with some accuracy the presence of cougars from habitat variables, which will give us a first estimate of the carrying capacity of cougars in eastern Montana grasslands.



Predicted cougar habitat and actual home ranges of collared cougars in WWF study. ©WWF-US

## Prairie dog translocation in Thunder Basin National Grassland



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Learn about WWF's work to spare Wyoming prairie dogs from poisoning this summer at [www.worldwildlife.org/ngp](http://www.worldwildlife.org/ngp).

## New program officer in South Dakota

The Northern Great Plains Program is pleased to welcome Jill Majerus, WWF's first South Dakota-based staff.

Jill comes to WWF from Action for Enterprise, where she served as Country Director for Bangladesh in Dhaka. Jill's expertise in economic development will be directed toward implementing programs designed to capitalize on natural biodiversity amenities on private, public and tribal lands in the Conata Basin, as well as working to expand program initiatives with bison and prairie dog conservation.

Jill holds a Masters degree in Tourism and Natural Resource Management from Colorado State University and has conducted and implemented nature tourism development programs for non-governmental organizations in Senegal, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Vietnam.

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New snow on the C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. ©Dennis Lingohr/APF



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