

**Testimony on SR 1711 relating to the Black-Footed Ferret  
To  
The Senate Committee on Natural Resources**

**By Robin Jennison  
Secretary  
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism**

**February 14, 2013**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SR 1711. The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism's testimony is neutral but with some information and observations. As you know we are a member of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) represents 23 states and Canadian provinces, spanning from Alaska to Texas and Saskatchewan to Hawaii - an area covering nearly 3.7 million square miles of some of North America's most wild and scenic country, inhabited by over 1500 premier wildlife species.

WAFWA is a strong advocate of the rights of states and provinces to manage fish and wildlife within their borders. The Association has been a key organization in promoting the principles of sound resource management and the building of partnerships at the regional, national and international levels in order to enhance wildlife conservation efforts and the protection of associated habitats in the public interest.

WAFWA's position on the MOU is that The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies believes this multi-agency effort provides private landowners with the financial, technical and regulatory assistance they need to contribute to conservation efforts, while also maintaining their ranching operations," states WAFWA President Jim Douglas. "Private landowners support a large number and wide diversity of wildlife in conjunction with the food and fiber they produce. With their help, we can expand the amount of habitat available to ferrets with little impact to current operations." The role of WAFWA member states' game and fish departments are assisting in this effort by helping to identify and match interested landowners with other partners, as well as involvement with on-the-ground ferret reintroduction and management.

At the WAFWA Annual meeting July 25, 2012 item number:

**12. BLACK-FOOTED FERRET LANDOWNER INCENTIVE MOU**

Scott Talbott reported on progress made over the past six months to finalize the Black Footed Ferret Landowner Incentive MOU between WAFWA and a number of federal agencies to facilitate cooperative conservation efforts among the parties in concert with willing landowners so as to maintain ranch land in prairie habitats and to maintain the livestock operations that they support, while providing for the conservation and recovery of the endangered black-footed ferret. He indicated the draft MOU had undergone a series of reviews and comments by state and federal agencies and was now at the point

that it needed final approval by WAFWA in order to initiate procurement of signatures and implementation. Mr. Talbott further indicated NRCS was planning to commit up to \$3 million toward this effort in FY 2013.

It was moved by Scott Talbott, and seconded by Joe Maurier, that the directors approved the Black-footed Ferret Landowner Initiative MOU between WAFWA and federal agencies. The motion was approved on a vote of 13-0-1, with Nebraska abstaining.

***In passing this motion, the following action was agreed to by the directors:***

***10) That the directors approve the Black-Footed Ferret Landowner Incentive MOU between WAFWA and multiple federal agencies.***

Mr. Chairman, as you know, Kansas has some history with the Black-Footed Ferret Reintroduction program and I will admit it has been less than satisfactory. It is important that when programs such as this are initiated, we have cooperators that understand the potential impact on neighboring landowners, local economy, and societal implications. In Logan County that has been severely lacking.

I understand the concerns that Logan County and the Legislature have, given our experience with this program, but I do not think we should throw the baby out with the bathwater. Conservation of our natural resources is essential to our future and our way of life. Just as it is important that we not leave our children with mounting government debt it is equally important that we not leave them without the natural resources to sustain their way of life. It is like Theodore Roosevelt said. "Conservation of our natural resources is our fundamental problem, if we are unable to solve that problem it avails us of little else to solve the rest of our problems." The Nation's vast natural resources, to a large degree are what made us great. If that greatness is to continue we must give our children the same opportunities that we have had.

Given the fact that 97% of Kansas land is in private ownership, conservation of our natural resources cannot happen without the private landowner. Given the public's desire to conserve the flora and fauna of this great nation, the private landowner and in fact, agriculture will be called upon to carry part of the load and bear the cost. CRP was the first significant step to recognize and reimburse agriculture for that role. The Safe Harbor provisions of the Black Footed Ferret reintroduction are not unlike the conservation efforts of the farm bill.

I am a firm believer that conservation of our natural resources is crucial to our future but agriculture cannot be called upon to sacrifice for the public good without some compensation. That philosophy is encompassed in the conservation title of our farm program as well as the safe harbor agreement proposed in the Ferret reintroduction program. It is unfortunate that that important concept has been diminished by a program that has not recognized the private property rights of the neighboring landowners.

Mr. Chairman, I would make one comment concerning specifically USFWS plan. Suitability of reintroduction sites should consider more than just size of the colony of prairie dogs. The suggested minimum acreage is 1500 acres for the conservation area with an area no larger than 1500 acres for a management zone surrounding the conservation area. Simple math shows that on that size of a circular site that the management zone or buffer surrounding the conservation area would only be about 0.3 miles wide. We are currently partially funding prairie dog control efforts on a 3 mile wide buffer around

the reintroduction sites in Logan County. Observations from me and Department staff, research from Kansas State University and numerous comments from the surrounding neighbors show that prairie dogs are still dispersing throughout that 3 mile wide buffer zone even with year around control occurring from APHIS Wildlife Services. What makes USFWS believe that a buffer area that is only 10% of that width will be effective in managing the prairie dog dispersal which is the major cause for neighbor complaints? If you use the same logic for the current Logan County sites we would have a management area of only about 0.8 mile buffer.