

Statement by Rebecca Barnhardt, Bucklin , Kansas

In Opposition to Senate Resolution 1711

February 14, 2013

Forty-two years ago, I prepared and presented a talk entitled “Predators Need to Prey” for the Cowley County 4-H Days. It discussed the balance of nature and how Mother Nature provided a method to control the population of plentiful herbivores. Very simply, herbivores served as a food source for the less-abundant predators. Although I was only 9 years old, I understood this delicate balance that the earth had created. Sadly, a few residents of Logan County, Kansas mistakenly believe they can totally “improve” Mother Nature’s design and use the poison Rozol to not only control but also ERADICATE the native prairie dog from the short grass prairie.

Logan County currently has a population of prairie dogs living on private land. Prairie dogs are THE keystone animal in the prairie ecology, and many prairie species rely on prairie dogs not only for food but also for housing. Swift foxes, snakes, Ornate Box Turtles, several species of toads, frogs and salamanders, several species of reptiles including lizards and snakes, and a diversity of invertebrates including tumble bugs use prairie dog burrows at various times of the year. In the summer, Burrowing Owls nest and raise their young in prairie dog holes, as do Swift Foxes when they modify the burrows as dens.

Raptors, including Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles and Bald Eagles, Swift Foxes, Coyotes, Badgers, and yes, the Black-Footed Ferret, rely on the prairie dog for food. Without the prairie dog, many of these animals will become scarce or disappear altogether from some parts of our prairie landscape.

The prevailing attitude in Logan County is that poisoning with Rozol is the answer to control the prairie dog population. It IS effective, but what many people don’t realize is that Rozol is a second-generation poison. This means that a predator that eats a poisoned prairie dog is also poisoned, and many die the same excruciating death as a poisoned prairie dog. Federally protected species such as

Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, and Bald Eagles have all been victims of secondary Rozol poisoning, as have been imperiled species including Swift Foxes.

Black-footed Ferrets are THE MOST endangered mammal in North America. Kansas is LUCKY to have a reintroduction site and private landowners willing to host them. My parents, Gordon and Martha Barnhardt, along with Larry and Betty Haverfield and Mrs. Blank are these landowners. They also want to control the population of prairie dogs but want to do it without spreading toxins throughout the environment. Black-footed Ferrets are an obligate predator of prairie dogs—and part of the natural method of prairie dog control that they prefer.

Neighbors are provided, at no cost to themselves, control of prairie dogs that stray onto their land. Additionally, a variety of measures, including special fencing, have been put around the BFF reintroduction sites to substantially diminish movement of prairie dogs onto neighboring property.

Gordon and Martha Barnhardt are private landowners who have the right to manage the prairie dog population on their property in the manner that they choose. They did not introduce prairie dogs to this property. Prairie dogs have lived in this area for millions of years.

It is important to keep and preserve examples of the different native bio-types. The short grass prairie is the one at hand. We have a responsibility to future generations to keep some examples of native North America as close to how it originally existed as we can. Buffalo herds are gone, replaced by cattle as the large grazers. Prairie dogs are the small grazers, and more importantly, the keystone species that many other species of conservation concern depend on.

It would be foolish and shortsighted to drive prairie dogs to extinction, which appears to be the goal of the Logan County Commissioners, the Kansas Farm Bureau, and some local politicians. The loss of the prairie dog will result in the loss of much of the richness of wildlife on the short grass prairie as we know it. And future 9-year-olds will no longer be able to see Mother Nature's ingenious design at work.