

White-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys leucurus*)

Conservation Status Rank Summary

September 16, 2024

For details on assessment and ranking methodology, see: [Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species](#)

Rarity and Trends

Rank Factor	Date Assessed	Value	Score	Data Source	Comments
Rarity					
Range Extent	2024-09-10	Y: 2151.6 km ²	2.360	MTNHP Range Maps	None
Area of Occupancy			-		Factor not used in ranking.
Number of Occurrences	2024-09-10	25	2.750	MTNHP Databases	None
Population Size			-		Factor not used in ranking.
# of Occurrences in Good Condition	2024-09-16		2.200		None
% of Area Occupied in Good Condition			-		Factor not used in ranking.
Environmental Specificity			-		Factor not used in ranking.
Rarity is calculated by averaging weighted factor scores: $((2.36 \times 1) + (2.75 \times 1) + (2.20 \times 2)) / 4 = 2.38$					
Trends					
Short-term Trend	2018-09-26		[-0.500, -0.310]	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	In 2016, 5 colonies were occupied and only 4 of 23 historic colonies were active. This may indicate a substantial decline in recent years. Methodology: NS (2003) Original Score: A
Long-term Trend	2016-01-01		-0.140	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	Since Montana is at the northern most distribution of this species, it is unlikely that white-tailed prairie dogs were ever widespread within the state. Declines in both occupancy and abundance have been noted since the 1970, and persecution of this species had likely caused declines before this as well. Methodology: NS (2003) Original Score: D
Trends score is calculated by summing weighted short and long-term trend scores: $((-0.50, -0.31) \times 2) + (-0.14 \times 1) = [-1.14, -0.76]$					

Threats

Rank Factor	Date Assessed	Value	Score	Data Source	Comments
Threats					
Overall Threat Impact		High	1.830		Plague has had substantial negative impacts on this species, and mortality events are still common. Persecution of populations due to perceived competition with livestock and the disruption to agriculture caused by burrows and clipping remains an ongoing threat.
Intrinsic Vulnerability			-		Factor not used in ranking.
Threat score is calculated from Overall Threat Impact when available or Intrinsic Vulnerability if not: (1.83) = 1.83					

Individual Threats Data

Threat Category	Date Assessed	Impact Score	Scope	Severity	Immediacy	Comments
Agriculture & Aquaculture	2024-09-16	Medium	Restricted	Serious	High	Conversion of native shrub and grasslands to agriculture
Natural System Modifications	2024-09-16	Medium	Pervasive	Moderate	High	Risk of fire within the species distribution is high. Impacts of fire may be severe given its small range within the state
Invasive & Other Problematic Species, Genes & Diseases	2024-09-16	Medium	Pervasive	Moderate	High	Plague has the potential to cause local declines
Threat Tally: 0 - Very High, 0 - High, 3 - Medium, 0 - Low Overall Threat Impact* = High						

*See [Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species](#) for calculation of Overall Threat Impact based on the number and impact of individual threats.

Conservation Status Rank Calculation

Raw score

Rarity: $(2.38 \times 70\%)$ + Threats: $(1.83 \times 30\%)$ + Trends: $([-1.14, -0.76]) = [1.07, 1.45]$

Calculated Rank: S1

Accepted Rank	S1
Date Approved	1985-01-01
Approval Authority	Montana Species of Concern Committee
Rank Justification	Within Montana, this species is found only in a small geographic area and the total population exists within a few colonies. The population appears to have declined over the last few decades, and faces ongoing threats from habitat loss due to fire and agricultural practices and sylvatic plague.

Supplementary Information

Montana Natural Heritage Program. 2021. Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species. 18 p.

https://mtnhp.mt.gov/docs/Montana_State_Rank_Criteria_20211201.pdf

Montana Field Guide Species Account:

<https://fieldguide.mt.gov/speciesDetail.aspx?elcode=AMAFB06020>

Predicted Suitable Habitat Model:

<https://mtnhp.mt.gov/resources/models/?elcode=AMAFB06020>

Information Needs

Information needs are assessed by considering the availability of factors used to assess species status as well as the quality of these assessments. Current information availability and quality to inform Conservation Status Rank for this species are highlighted.

Rank Factor	Assessment Category	Value	Criteria
General Status	Status Quality	Adequate	Calculated rank has low uncertainty and is represented by a single rank (e.g. S3); accepted rank may be adjusted to a range rank (e.g. S2S3)
		Poor	Rank assessed as SU or calculated rank has notable uncertainty and corresponds to a range rank with 2 or more values (e.g. S2?, S1S3, or S4S5)
Rarity	Range Quality	Adequate	Range polygon adequately represents area of probable occupancy and does not include substantial unoccupied areas; range may be adequately defined and still include areas of unsuitable habitat (e.g. mountain ranges for plains species)
		Marginal	Range polygon defined, but may include or exclude notable areas where the species may or may not occur on the landscape
		Poor	Range polygon not defined
	Habitat Quality	Adequate	Species-habitat relationship is well-defined (e.g. relevant literature or robust habitat model available)
		Marginal	Understanding of species-habitat relationship is adequate among some but not all habitats (e.g. literature covers similar habitats outside of Montana or habitat model performance is only somewhat adequate)
		Poor	Species-habitat relationship is not well understood
Threats	Threat Quality	Adequate	Threat Impact is a single value (including "Unthreatened")
		Marginal	Threat Impact assessed at more than one value (e.g. "High - Medium")
		Poor	Threat Impact is Unknown but Intrinsic Vulnerability is assessed
		Unknown	Threat Impact is Unknown and Intrinsic Vulnerability is not assessed
Trends	Recency	Current	Short-term Trend assessment date less than 10 years old
		Out of Date but Adequate	Short-term Trend assessment date is more than 10 years old or Unknown, but species is Unthreatened
		Out of Date	Short-term Trend assessment date more than 10 years old
		Not Available	Short-term Trend data are not available
	Trend Quality	Sufficient	Short-term Trend assessed at a single value or multiple values with a minimum trend greater than -10% (stable or increasing)
		Unknown but Sufficient	Short-term Trend is Unknown, but species is Unthreatened
		Poor	Short-term Trend is less than -10% (in decline) with two or more values selected
		Unknown	Short-term Trend is Unknown

Summary of Information Availability

Data to assess status are available. Short-term trend is 8-9 years old and should be reassessed soon

Summary of Information Needs

The number of occupied colonies should be assessed soon to maintain a valid short-term trend.

Additional Threat Details

The table below contains the complete threats assessment for this species. While the Conservation Status Rank Calculation is based on cumulative, broadly categorized (Level 1) threats data, threats are assessed and tracked for more specifically categorized (Level 2) threats when available.

Threat Category	Date Assessed	Assessed By	Data Source	Scope	Severity	Immediacy	Comments
Agriculture & Aquaculture - 2	2024-09-16	Dan Bachen	Expert opinion	Restricted	Serious	High	Conversion of native shrub and grasslands to agriculture
Natural System Modifications - 7.1 - Fire & Fire Suppression	2024-09-16	Dan Bachen	Expert opinion	Pervasive	Moderate	High	Risk of fire within the species distribution is high. Impacts of fire may be severe given its small range within the state
Invasive & Other Problematic Species, Genes & Diseases - 8.1 - Invasive Non-Native/Alien Species/Diseases	2024-09-16	Dan Bachen	Expert Opinion	Pervasive	Moderate	High	Plague has the potential to cause local declines