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MEMORANDUM

TO: Wildlife Board and Regional Advisory Council Members

FROM: Kimberly Hersey, Mammal Conservation Coordinator

DATE: 18 November 2022

SUBJECT: Utah prairie dog conservation strategy

The Utah prairie dog has been listed under the Endangered Species Act since 1973. Conservation, management, monitoring, research, and public outreach actions by state and federal agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners initiated in the 1970s and continuing today facilitated a rebound in the abundance and distribution of Utah prairie dogs. Long-term data demonstrate that the range-wide population of the Utah prairie dog, while variable year-to-year, has been stable or increasing over a period of nearly three decades. Thus, UDWR maintains the species should be federally delisted. The Utah Prairie Dog Conservation Strategy (Conservation Strategy) and associated Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) administrative rule afford protection to Utah prairie dogs while providing tools to prevent excessive depredation and allow landowners to manage prairie dogs as populations grow. While we continue to focus recovery efforts on public lands, the strategy acknowledges the conservation value of Utah prairie dogs on private lands.

The Conservation Strategy establishes biological goals and objectives and an adaptive framework to implement conservation and management. It prescribes actions based on the best available science to maintain and grow Utah prairie dog populations. Through Memorandums of Agreement, UDWR and partners commit to conservation actions in three management areas spread across the range of the species – the West Desert, Paunsaugunt, and Awapa Plateau. Each area will be managed at population levels that are both achievable and adequate to ensure long-term viability. The Conservation Strategy also prescribes ongoing monitoring to inform annual adaptive management decisions and continues to build the existing datasets that track long-term trends.

Taken together, this will ensure Utah prairie dogs occur in multiple resilient populations found in a variety of environmental settings distributed across the historical range – and no longer meet the threshold for federal listing.

The duration of this Conservation Strategy and partnership is long term and will remain in place so long as active management is needed. The Conservation Strategy is also a living document, and UDWR and the conservation partners commit to review and update the plan and the Memorandum of Agreement. Working with federal, local, and nonprofit partners, UDWR feels secure that the future for the Utah prairie dog continues to be bright. With adaptive management, monitoring, research, and coordination, this conservation strategy carries forward the effective program that led to the currently improved status. We expect that upon state management, not only will long-fought gains be maintained, but also without the stigma of Endangered Species Act listing, additional opportunities for collaborative conservation will be realized.