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Testimony By: Holly Tarry
Presented To: Colorado Wildlife Commission
In Support of: Petition to Ban Recreational Prairie Dog Shooting
Date: May 1, 2008

Good morning commissioners, my name is Holly Tarry and I am the Colorado Director for The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal protection organization with over 10.5 million members and constituents. On behalf of our more than 166,000 members and constituents who reside in the state of Colorado, I urge the Commission to support the petition to ban recreational prairie dog shooting.

Despite studies showing the integral relationship of prairie dogs to ecological diversity, and the species' enrichment of short-grass and mixed-grass habitat and coexistence with ungulate populations, a scientifically unfounded cultural prejudice persists against these crucial animals. Prohibiting the recreational shooting of prairie dogs is a basic protection against an unfortunate attitude among shooters who only value prairie dogs as living targets.

During recreational shooting, participants set up benches at varying distances from a prairie dog colony and fire hundreds of rounds of ammunition at the unsuspecting animals. The fair chase hunting ethic demands that animals be given a reasonable chance to escape the gun. Those shooting prairie dogs violate that ethic when they do not even need to search for the animal, in fact most shooters do not even stand up. Traditional hunters consider themselves the original conservationists, true stewards of the land. They need a reason to shoot an animal and a use for it once they have. The recreational shooting of prairie dogs is not sporting, is not fair, and is not hunting. It is pure violence, for the sake of violence and shows a complete disregard for the species' declining population and crucial ecological role- facts no scientists dispute.

As the number of hunters continues to decline nationwide, hunting practices are increasingly dependent on the views of the non-hunting public. Websites, hunting clubs and events that depict prairie dogs by using terms such as "varmint vapor" causes non-hunters to attribute this behavior to all hunters and further erodes public confidence in any hunting practice.

Additionally, the amount of toxic lead shot fired into these vulnerable ecosystems during one event is enough to prohibit recreational killing. In a study examining recreational shooting of prairie dogs and lead levels, 87 percent of the carcasses shot with expanding bullets, the type usually employed in recreational shooting,

Celebrating Animals, Confronting Cruelty

contained detectable lead levels.¹ Forty-seven percent of the animals shot with expandable bullets contained enough lead to be lethal to raptors and affect the reproductive cycles of predators.² These findings suggest that shooting concentrated in prairie dog habitat could pose a serious threat to the other species, including burrowing owls, swift foxes, and black-footed ferrets.

Commissioners, I realize and respect that you have a difficult task before you. You are charged with striking a balance. You have Colorado citizens to represent and, above all, you have an obligation to this state's wildlife. I'm speaking today on behalf of the 166,000 members and constituents of the HSUS living in this state with you and me.

You have heard here today and received comment that the reasons NOT to shoot prairie dogs aren't good enough. But prairie dogs are native to our prairie landscape. They belong here- shouldn't we need a good reason TO shoot them? Many methods of control would still exist if you accept this petition. We are simply asking that the method of choice by disrespectful, destructive, and violent wildlife killers be taken off the menu. This is an opportunity for Colorado to become a leader in putting politics aside and protecting a critical, imperiled species. Please, adopt a rule prohibiting the recreational shooting of prairie dogs. Thank you

¹ Pauli, J.N. and S.W. Buskirk. 2007. Recreational shooting of prairie dogs: a portal for lead entering wildlife food chains.. *Journal of Wildlife Management*. 71(1):103-1808.

² Ibid.