



# Talking Points for Key Prairie Dog Issues

The Prairie Dog Coalition has provided several key talking points for use in educational settings or public meetings with city council members or legislators.

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## At least nine wildlife species depend on prairie dogs for food or shelter

I think we can all agree that preserving wildlife and our natural heritage is important to Americans.

The prairie dog has a special place in the hearts of Coloradans. It also has a special place in nature as a key species for so much other wildlife, including songbirds, owls, foxes, badgers, and more. People appreciate that key role, which is why we've seen so much support for providing strong protections for prairie dogs and their habitat, so much of which has been lost to development.

We want decisions concerning their protection to be based on science, not politics. The scientific evidence is clear that prairie dogs and their habitat need protection.

Our research shows strong public support for prairie dogs. For example:

- ▶ 65% of Colorado voters oppose poisoning prairie dogs on public lands.
- ▶ 68% of Colorado voters oppose allowing recreational shooting of prairie dogs on public land.

## The topic of poisoning

- ▶ We do not think we should be poisoning wildlife on our public lands. I think I speak for most Americans when I say that we oppose using taxpayer dollars to scatter dangerous poisons across the landscape all for the purported benefit of a few special interests.
- ▶ Other animals—such as burrowing owls, rabbits, and songbirds—are being killed, illegal poisons are being used, and required precautions are not being followed.
- ▶ Worst of all, poisoning is cruel and inhumane and requires that people reapply the poisons on a regular basis, continually putting these dangerous chemicals into our environment.
- ▶ *Urban:* We believe that relocating prairie dogs to other sites and implementing other non-lethal options provides a better alternative to using poisons.
- ▶ *Rural:* Prairie dogs survive on only <2% of this region. We promote restoring the balance and letting prairie dogs and the many animals they support survive in a small corner of our public lands.
- ▶ Poisoning/gassing our wildlife, including prairie dogs, is cruel and inhumane. Poison causes tremendous pain and suffering through internal bleeding that can last up to 72 hours.
- ▶ We have to stop sending the message to our children that it is okay to poison their wildlife and destroy their natural heritage. The fact is that these practices are cruel and inhumane.

- ▶ Poisoning prairie dogs turns our public lands into killing fields and the prairie dogs' own burrows and homes into torture chambers.

## **The topic of population increase and decrease**

- ▶ Nine species of wildlife are directly affected by the decline of the prairie dog population. What we do to the prairie dog affects all these other animals.
- ▶ Over the last 150 years, prairie dogs have declined by over 95%. Declines continue today. In the last 15 years, there has been a further 60% decrease of large prairie dog complexes.
- ▶ Although prairie dogs are visible on the landscape and many small towns have increased, many more have declined or vanished. For example, last year alone, almost all of the 100,000 acres on Pine Ridge Reservation vanished, a colony larger than all Front Range colonies combined.
- ▶ This is about balance: Prairie dogs exist on less than 1% of the Great Plains. Scientists say that if this downward trend continues, burrowing owls and other species will disappear.
- ▶ As good stewards of the land, we need to ensure healthy populations of wildlife for our future generations.

## **Prairie dogs are a key species**

- ▶ Prairie dogs are like a canary in the coal mine. If their population declines and dies, other species will soon follow. The loss of prairie dogs has implications that go beyond just having a thriving prairie dog population.
- ▶ Prairie dogs are a key species to nine other species, such as hawks and owls, foxes and ferrets, and many others that depend on prairie dogs for food or their burrows for shelter. If we want all these Great Plains species to survive, we need a healthy prairie dog population.

## **Putting the science in and taking the politics out**

- ▶ Decisions on protecting wildlife such as prairie dogs need to be based on sound science and research, not politics.
- ▶ Scientists agree that the population of prairie dogs is declining rapidly and is now only 5% of what it was over a century ago. Scientists agree that prairie dogs are a key species on which many others are dependent for survival, so that if the prairie dog becomes extinct, many other species will be threatened.