



U.S. Forest Service - Thunder Basin National Grassland Plan Amendment Bulletin #3 October 2019

Summary. This Bulletin is the third in a series of updates that summarizes the status of the current planning effort to amend the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan). This bulletin provides updates on evaluations for potential species of conservation concern and the project timeline.

Potential Species of Conservation Concern Evaluations.

Thunder Basin National Grassland staff have completed evaluations for potential species of conservation concern related to the Thunder Basin 2020 Plan Amendment project. Potential species of conservation concern are plant and animal species native and known to occur on the Thunder Basin National Grassland that fit one of the categories listed for at-risk species in the Forest Service land management planning handbook (FSH 1909.12, Ch. 10, 12.52d).

The potential species of conservation concern evaluations present a review of existing literature and data for 47 plant and animal species to show which species could be affected by proposed changes in prairie dog management. This is not an analysis or decision document, rather it is a presentation of the available scientific information that will be used for analysis and decision-making. The evaluations were used to inform the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, modification of alternatives, and biological evaluation during the planning process. The biological evaluation, potential species of conservation concern analysis, and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) will document a full analysis of whether implementation of alternatives for prairie dog management would be expected to cause substantial adverse impacts to or substantially lessened protections for those species in the plan area (36 CFR 219.13(b)(6)). Unlike the plan revision process, this proposed plan amendment will not result in formal identification of species of conservation concern by the Regional Forester.

Potential species of conservation concern evaluations, project reference materials, and maps are available on the project web site at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=55479. Species evaluations are filed under “Supporting” documents.

Estimated Planning Timelines. The interdisciplinary team has completed analysis of the no action and three action alternatives (described in Plan Amendment Bulletin #2 from July 2019), which will be presented in the DEIS. The DEIS is scheduled to be released in October 2019 for a 90-day formal comment period. A public meeting and a public webinar will be scheduled during the comment period. The final Record of Decision (ROD) is planned for completion by the end of Fiscal Year 2020.

Current information related to restoration work and prairie dog colony management efforts on the Thunder Basin National Grassland is posted at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/MBRTB/PrairieDogs>.