

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2007

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Kempthorne:

I am writing with regard to the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret into Wind Cave National Park.

Over the past several months, several of my constituents near Wind Cave National Park and other areas of South Dakota have expressed serious concerns over the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret. These concerns have escalated since the issuance of the "Finding of No Significant Impact Statement" in March 2007.

I appreciated your responsiveness earlier this year to my request for an extension of the comment period. However, I am deeply disappointed with the National Park Service's unilateral decision to change the designation of the black-footed ferret from "nonessential experimental" to "endangered" as part of its final decision.

Enclosed is a letter from the Fall River County Commissioners. This letter describes several concerns that are shared by a coalition of residents, landowners, and public officials in the Wind Cave National Park area.

I am requesting that the concerns presented in the enclosed letter be fully and satisfactorily addressed before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issues its Biological Opinion and the National Park Service proceeds with the black-footed ferret reintroduction.

Specifically, I am requesting, Mr. Secretary, that prior to the reintroduction of black-footed ferrets into Wind Cave National Park, you or your designee provide written confirmation to owners of state and privately owned land adjacent to Wind Cave National Park of the following:

- If introduction of the black-footed ferret at Wind Cave National Park proceeds under a 10(a)(1)(A) scientific experimental/recovery permit as endangered species rather than under the 10(j) permit that adjacent state and private landowners will be provided with adequate economic and technical support from the U.S. Department of Interior for the purposes of defending their individual economic losses, rights, and interests regarding any issue related to black-footed ferrets.

- State and private landowners will not be required to independently acquire a section 10 Incidental Take Permit from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in order to defend against any future court proceedings initiated by any person or entity for the purpose of stopping prairie dog poisoning on any land adjacent to Wind Cave National Park.
- The U. S. Department of Interior will indemnify state and private landowners for any future forage losses attributed to prairie dog encroachment from populations originating at Wind Cave National Park and hold landowners harmless, defend their interests, and reimburse them for all attorney's fees and related expenses they incur for any adverse action taken against them by any individual or entity relating to prairie dogs or black-footed ferrets.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
United States Senator