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Groups protest Thunder Basin prairie dog poisonings

Conservation and animal welfare organizations plan to submit written comments urging the U.S. Forest Service to consider an alternative to poisoning prairie dog colonies on Thunder Basin National Grassland within a quarter mile of private or state land.

The Humane Society of the United States, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, WildEarth Guardians and others claim poisoning could threaten thousands of prairie dogs, according to a news release.

In 2009, after years of planning and public input, officials set aside 85,000 acres in the Thunder Basin National Grassland as an area where prairie dogs would be protected from poisons and shooting. The groups claim the proposed poisoning plan could shrink the protected area by about 22,000 acres.

They also contend the anticoagulant poisons intended to kill prairie dogs could also affect other wildlife, such as hawks, eagles, badgers and foxes. It could also postpone the reintroduction of black-footed ferrets into the area, the groups claim.

Alternatives to poisoning could include building vegetative barriers to deter prairie dogs from expanding onto neighboring lands, or possibly relocating some prairie dog colonies, according to the news release.