

## Mind your own business

Those of us who come nose to nose with prairie dogs on golf courses while trying to putt with our golf clubs or push our children around on a tire swing at the playground are not amused by the protest of Forest Guardians from Santa Fe, N.M., against removing the pesky rodents from our recreational areas in Iron County.

The environmental activist group issued its complaint on the final day during the final hour of the July 14 public comment portion of the proposed permit application that calls for the relocation of 204 prairie dogs from the Cedar Ridge Golf Course and 84 from the Paiute Tribal land in the Habitat Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment. They claim approval of the permit is, "little more than an extermination plan," and violates the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Administrative Procedures Act.

What the assertion is really indicative of is another clear case of extremists bullying a community in which they do not reside, and, therefore, have no clue as to the impact these nuisance animals have on the daily lives of Southern Utahns with their endless burrowing that destroys agricultural fields, reduces the amount of forage available and leaves gapping ground holes where people are susceptible to injury from falls; not to mention their incessant barking and rodent-carrying diseases.

The dogs are host to fleas that carry the sylvatic plague - more commonly known as the Bubonic plague - that since the start of the 20th century in North America has been the world's largest reservoir of infection causing severe illness and even death to people who've contracted it. The opportunity of spreading this disease is heightened with the dogs in interminable contact with humans at the Cedar Ridge Golf Course and the Paiute Tribe's children's park. The removal of the dogs, no matter how threatened, is a public health issue and a far cry from a calculated maneuver to expedite the extinction of the small mammals.

While Forest Guardian contends the removal of the dogs is unnecessary because the current Iron County HCP is sufficient, permitting the take of 300 dogs annually, the group is ignorant to the fact that the HCP is outdated and has dramatically stifled economic development, which in turn has kept wages low and hindered the quality of living with few affordable housing choices.

The Iron County Commission, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Bureau of Land Management, has been vigilant since before 2003 when the same group along with other environmental agencies petitioned to reclassify the Utah prairie dog from threatened to endangered, in rewriting the current HCP to perpetuate the recovery and survival of the prairie dog, not the contrary as argued.

Prairie dogs are a natural part of the ecosystem, but so are humans. Endless hours over a period of years have been dedicated to striking a balance between the human economy and the prairie dog ecology of Iron County. Forest Guardians' opposition is an insulting

slap in the face to all of those who've worked hard to come up with solutions and an insinuation that we can't be trusted to manage our own HCP.

We declare it would be more advantageous for Forest Guardians to focus its efforts in its own state with the protection of the lynx, especially with the licensing of a new uranium enrichment plant in southeastern New Mexico that will surely have an immense environmental impact. Put bluntly, mind your own business and don't stick your nose into ours.

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