

FOREST GUARDIANS

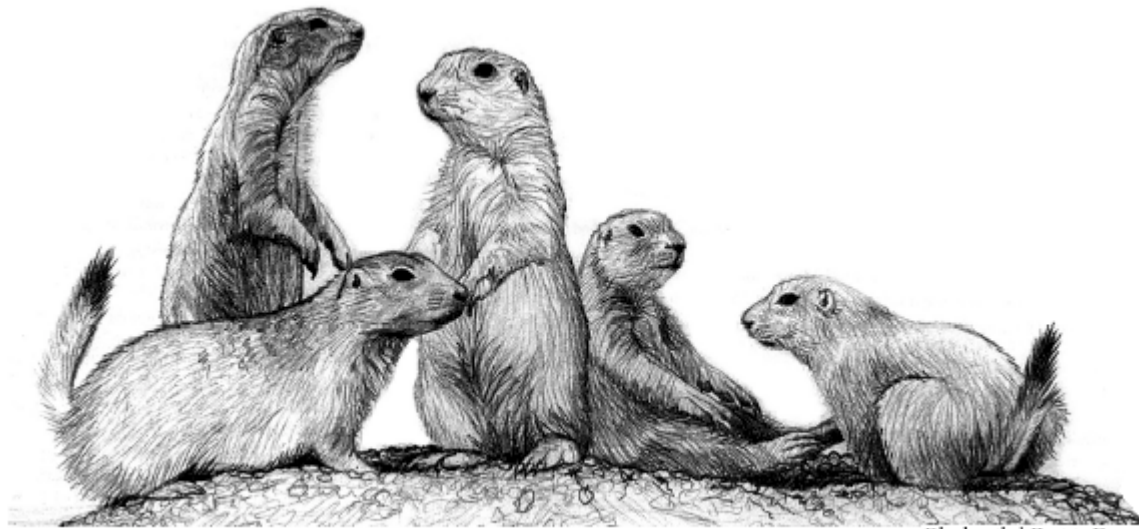


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in architectural design, keystone species sustain ecosystems.
The loss of keystone species may usher in ecosystem collapse.*

Keystone Species Campaign

The present biodiversity crisis, caused by human activities such as oil and gas development, livestock grazing, logging, mining, and urban sprawl, features extinction rates at 1,000 to 10,000 times the natural extinction rate. Under the federal Endangered Species Act, passed by Congress in 1973, species facing imperilment or extinction must be provided with protection by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The Bush Administration's refusal to provide species on the brink with urgently needed ESA listing and protections makes the work of groups such as Forest Guardians absolutely vital if we are to preserve the rich variety and abundance of native animals, plants, and ecosystems in the U.S.

With the overwhelming loss of native species and habitats, Forest Guardians focuses on species whose defense will provide collateral protections to other wildlife, plants, and habitats. Enter keystone species...



MARTIN FING

Black-tailed Prairie Dogs

The Keystone Approach to Saving Species

Keystone species perform important ecological roles through creating habitat and acting as prey or predator. Like the keystone that supports an archway in architectural design, keystone species sustain ecosystems. The loss of keystone species may usher in ecosystem collapse, in the form of waves of secondary extinctions. One of Forest Guardians' primary legal and policy strategies will be to require FWS to adopt an approach to prioritizing species that reflects the ESA's purpose of providing protection to imperiled species and the ecosystems of which they are a part.

Rodent keystones

Many rodents play crucial keystone roles in the habitats where they live. Keystone rodents include beavers, prairie dogs, pocket gophers, and kangaroo rats. Each of these rodents engineer ecosystems by modifying soil structure and fertility, shaping plant communities, providing a prey base for predators, and creating habitat for associated plants and animals. Unfortunately, the ecological labor these rodents perform is, at best, underappreciated by humans. On private and public lands alike, rodents are poisoned, shot, trapped, plowed, or bulldozed.

Our Current Efforts

Forest Guardians' actions on behalf of rodent keystones will include broadcasting to the public the importance of rodent keystones, and pressuring politicians and government agencies to reform backwards policies toward keystone species. Here's an overview of our efforts:



- ◆ **Black-tailed prairie dog.** Forest Guardians has an ongoing campaign to secure ESA listing for this species. We continue to monitor the black-tailed prairie dog's status and will relentlessly advocate for listing at every turn. In addition, we participate in efforts to protect prairie dog associates, such as the mountain plover and the black-footed ferret.
- ◆ **Gunnison's prairie dog.** Forest Guardians is conducting a status review on this species, which will likely culminate in a petition for listing under the ESA. We also participated in successful grassroots efforts to require the relocation of Gunnison's prairie dogs via a Santa Fe, NM city ordinance.
- ◆ **Utah prairie dog.** Forest Guardians has undertaken an exhaustive review of the recovery program for this species. The Utah prairie dog has continued to decline, despite being listed since 1973. We expect to initiate litigation on behalf of the Utah prairie dog in 2003.
- ◆ **Northern pocket gopher.** We are identifying imperiled pocket gopher subspecies in need of protection and will likely pursue a multiple-species listing petition that will highlight the critical role these species play in desert and grasslands across the Southwest.
- ◆ **Beaver.** Our first major initiative seeks to prohibit the federal Animal Damage Control agency from indiscriminately killing and trapping beaver, because of adverse effects to endangered species. Beavers sustain riparian areas in the region that are essential for endangered species, including primarily the Southwestern willow flycatcher.

Visit www.fguardians.org or call 505-988-9126 for more information and to volunteer in the Forest Guardians effort to preserve and restore native wildlands and wildlife in the American Southwest.