

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility * Defenders of Wildlife
Humane Society of the United States * Forest Guardians
Great Plains Restoration Council * Animal Legal Defense Fund
Llano Estacado Audubon Society

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Suit to Halt Prairie Dog Extermination

CONSERVATION GROUPS CHARGE LUBBOCK REMOVAL PLAN IS ILLEGAL

Austin — A coalition of conservation groups today filed suit in Travis County District Court to block a state-approved plan to destroy one of the largest black-tailed prairie dog colonies in the Southwest. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), Defenders of Wildlife and others charge that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) improperly approved a plan by the city of Lubbock to eradicate up to 50,000 prairie dogs in a misdirected effort to address the city's growing groundwater problems.

The colony on the Lubbock Land Application Site (LLAS) has been at the heart of a statewide controversy since June, when TCEQ declared that prairie dogs were a threat to groundwater underneath the site, and ordered their removal. The city responded with a "compliance plan" featuring "chemical and/or concussive control" to exterminate the colony.

The state's own wildlife experts immediately condemned the plan. In September, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department fired off a critical letter stating that "TCEQ admitted having no evidence that prairie dogs were creating problems at the LLAS," and asked the agency to "revise" its notice of violation to the city. To date, TCEQ has ignored these pleas and multiple attempts by local conservation organizations to suggest alternative plans that do not threaten prairie dog populations. The suit cites the complete absence of scientific study to support the plan and demands that the prairie dog removal action halt.

Black-tailed prairie dogs are a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Three years ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided that prairie dogs warranted listing as a threatened species under the ESA, but failed to list the species, citing higher priorities and lack of funding. Large-scale eradication efforts have imperiled the black-tailed prairie dog in Texas. Over 150 species of plants and wildlife are closely associated with black-tailed prairie dogs, and many of these are declining as well.

"We are filing this lawsuit because the City of Lubbock refuses to listen to reason," said Juan Mancias, member of the Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribe, and a plaintiff. "If we listen, we will recognize that when we take care of the prairie dogs and all of their relations, then we will take care of the land, the air, the water and all peoples."

"When the gas clears and there are 200,000 pounds of dead prairie dogs in the ground, Lubbock's water will still be polluted," said Texas PEER director Scott Royder. "We hope that this lawsuit will force the city to admit that the 14 million gallons of wastewater dumped daily is the true contamination source."

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Additional Contacts:

**Bill Snape, Defenders of Wildlife
Washington DC * (202) 682-9400**

“It is outrageous that the TCEQ would allow the mass carnage of ecologically important prairie dogs on public lands that will inevitably lead to the deaths of other wildlife species such as the imperiled burrowing owl,” said Defenders of Wildlife’s Vice President William Snape.

Defenders of Wildlife is a leading nonprofit conservation organization recognized as one of the nation's most progressive advocates for wildlife and its habitat, with more than 430,000 members and supporters

**Bette Stallman, Ph.D., The Humane Society of the United States
Washington, DC * (301) 258-3147**

“Science, not speculation, should drive management actions intended to reduce groundwater nitrate levels,” commented Bette Stallman, a wildlife scientist with the Humane Society of the United States.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has seven million members and constituents. With active programs in companion animals, wildlife, animals in research, and farm animals and sustainable agriculture, The HSUS works to protect all animals through legislation, litigation, investigation, education, advocacy and fieldwork.

**Jarid Manos, Great Plains Restoration Council
Ft. Worth, TX * (817) 335-0122**

"Prairie Dogs have been here for a million years," said Jarid Manos of the Great Plains Restoration Council. "Like the buffalo, they have been killed almost to extinction and now are being scapegoated for problems created by people."

Great Plains Restoration Council is a multiracial non-profit organization building the Buffalo Commons by bringing the wild buffalo prairies back and restoring healthy sustainable communities to the Great Plains, from the Indian reservation to the prairie outback to the inner city and beyond.

**Ellen Roots McBride, Llano Estacado Audubon Society
Lubbock, TX, (806) 785-1876**

“Science protects us from the randomness of personal opinion. As affected citizens, we insist science be the basis of regulatory decisions,” said Ellen McBride, president of the Llano Estacado Audubon Society.

The Llano Estacado Audubon Society's mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems - focusing on birds, other wildlife and habitat - for the benefit of human heritage and the earth's biological diversity.

**Nicole J. Rosmarino, Ph.D., Forest Guardians
Pritchett, CO * (719) 523-6296**

“Its time for TCEQ and the city of Lubbock to obey the law and act reasonably, rather than base public decisions on faulty prejudices against prairie dogs,” said Nicole Rosmarino of Forest Guardians.

Forest Guardians seeks to preserve and restore native wildlands and wildlife in the American Southwest through fundamental reform of public policies and practices.