

## **Black-tailed prairie dog** *Cynomys ludovicianus*

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**Status:** Designated as a candidate species February 4, 2000 (65 FR 5476).

**Description:** Black-tailed prairie dogs are stout, burrowing ground squirrels approximately 14-17 inches long and weighing 1-3 pounds. They are generally yellowish tan in color, but with a slightly lighter colored underside. They have large eyes, short ears, and a short tail that is tipped in black.



**Habitat:** In Texas, the black-tailed prairie dog historically occurs in the western half of the state and typically inhabits short grass prairies where they feed on grasses and forbs. They usually avoid areas of heavy brush and tall grass. In the Trans-Pecos area, they favor alluvial fans at the mouths of draws, “hard pan” flats where brush is sparse or absent, and the edges of shallow valleys.



**Distribution:** Black-tailed prairie dogs live in colonies or “towns” in short and mixed grass prairies in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, and Wyoming. In Texas, they occur in most of the counties within their historic range, with a few disjunct populations occurring in central Texas.

**Threats:** Historical estimates indicate that prairie dogs once occupied 100-200 million acres in North America. Current estimates indicate prairie dogs occupy less than one million acres, a reduction in occupied habitat of at least 99 percent. Three major events within the last 100 years have been recognized as significantly contributing to the decline of the prairie dog population in the United States. The conversion of prairie to farmland in the eastern portion of its range from 1890 to 1930 was the first major event to impact prairie dog numbers. Between 1920 and 1970, large scale poisoning occurred on most western rangelands. Finally, the introduction of sylvatic plague into the North American prairie ecosystem around 1900 has severely impacted the species. The disease was first documented in black-tailed prairie dogs from Texas in 1946-47.