



In South Dakota, Thirty Years of Success

For more than 30 years, the Endangered Species Act has helped prevent the extinction of our national treasures. Because of the act, beloved symbols of America such as the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon are thriving, and species native to South Dakota such as the least tern and the black-footed ferret are recovering due to habitat conservation efforts.

Only nine of the 1,800 species protected by the act have been declared extinct since its passage in 1973. Such an astonishing success rate makes the act a true symbol of our nation's commitment to protecting our natural heritage for future generations. It is also an example of the progress that can be made when communities work together to conserve their local wildlife and habitat. With the participation of communities, business and government, less than one percent of development projects reviewed under the act have been halted, proving that we can conserve wildlife without sacrificing progress. With the creation of jobs from tourism and outdoor recreation related to endangered species, it can truly be said that people all over South Dakota benefit from the Act.

South Dakota currently has 12 endangered and threatened species (11 animals, one plant).

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Black-Footed Ferret

Considered one of the rarest mammals in North America, it was thought that no black-footed ferrets were left in the wild until a small population was discovered in 1981 on a ranch in Wyoming. In 1986, these animals suffered an outbreak of canine distemper, and the last 18 were captured to save the animal from extinction by starting a captive-breeding program. Unfortunately, even with a successful breeding program, loss of habitat, conversion of grasslands to agricultural uses, widespread prairie dog eradication programs and plague had reduced ferret habitat to less than two percent of what once existed.

In South Dakota, however, several efforts are underway to restore the species. Captive-bred ferrets were first released in South Dakota in 1994 in the Conata Basin/Badlands area. This reintroduction effort is by far the most successful to date and is close to supporting a self-sustaining population of ferrets. A second reintroduction effort on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in central South Dakota is also



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Least tern

far from well. A promising ferret reintroduction project has also begun in prairie dog complexes on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in south-central South Dakota. All of these recovery programs were conducted under the auspices of the Endangered Species Act and have been conducted with the cooperation of tribal, state, federal, local and private concerns, making South Dakota a model for similar conservation efforts in other states.

Nationwide, biologists hope to establish a wild population of 1,500 adults in 10 or more locations, with no fewer than 30 breeding adults in each location, by 2010. If these objectives are met, the black-footed ferret could be downlisted from endangered to threatened in the near future.

Least Tern

Least terns usually arrive in South Dakota in early May. They select barren beaches along sandy or gravelly river shorelines or islands. Because of the many threats to its nesting success in these areas, the least tern is a true conservation challenge. In addition to the effects of permanent river system changes, the least tern is vulnerable to water level fluctuations during the nesting season and loss of habitat because of vegetation growth. Disturbance of nesting sites by predators, people, pets and livestock all

negatively impact least tern populations. South Dakota's population of least terns was among those listed as endangered in 1985.

In South Dakota, recovery efforts have concentrated on careful inventories of nesting colonies to evaluate likely threats. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Missouri River operation now places greater emphasis on avoiding losses of least terns and their nesting habitats and continues to develop methods to keep predators, people and pets away from nesting areas. Interestingly, many of these new techniques, such as creating new nesting habitat with material dredged from the river, seek to

Black-footed ferret



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mimic what our rivers once did naturally. It is hoped that with these efforts, South Dakota will continue to be a stopping point on the least tern's migratory route for decades to come.

Economic Benefits of Protecting Wildlife and Habitat

Ecotourism represents a huge economic force in the country. Each year, millions of Americans travel and pay to view wildlife and take in all that nature has to offer. Much of this activity takes place on the hundreds of national wildlife refuges spread across the country. Nationwide, visits to wildlife refuges generated more than \$1.3 billion in income for local and state economies and an additional \$150 million in tax revenues. Indeed, national wildlife refuges received nearly twice as many visitors in 2004 than Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Acadia, Grand Teton, and Statue of Liberty national parks combined. And the vast majority of those visitors came from outside the area, further testament to the ability of these special places to draw people and dollars to a region.

In South Dakota alone, 1.1 million people came to visit the Badlands National Park in the year 2000 and pumped more than \$19 million dollars into the local economy.

For more information on the success of the Endangered Species Act, please visit www.saveesa.org.



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