



NEWS RELEASE

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October 2, 2009

CALGARY ZOO HELPS RETURN BLACK-FOOTED FERRETS TO CANADA AFTER 75 YEARS!

Calgary, AB – Officials from the Calgary Zoo and representatives of all partners in the Black-footed Ferret Recovery Implementation Team will participate today in the first release of black-footed ferrets, a species that has been extinct in Canada for more than 75 years. A century ago this cute, but fierce carnivore was plentiful in the prairie ecosystem throughout southern Canada and the U.S. As the only ferret species native to North America, it was thought to be extinct until a small colony was discovered in Wyoming in the 1980s; at that point an international captive breeding effort commenced. Partners in the project include Parks Canada, Calgary Zoo, Toronto Zoo, Environment Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, World Wildlife Fund Canada and World Wildlife Fund US, Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Grasslands National Park in southern Saskatchewan was chosen for the release site because it is habitat for black-tailed prairie dogs. The prairie dogs are the ferrets' main prey species and essential for a successful reintroduction. The established expertise of Calgary Zoo researchers in species reintroduction since 1993 with the reintroduction of swift fox to the same region, has played a vital role in the recovery effort to ensure that the ecosystem in Grasslands will sustain the return of the black-footed ferret.

"Calgary Zoo researchers have been involved with evaluating the feasibility as well as the planning of black-footed ferret reintroductions in this region since 2004 and have conducted prairie dog research in Grasslands since 2007," said Dr. Axel Moehrenschrager. "As the prey species, it was important to monitor the health and population numbers of the prairie dogs to select the best locations to release the ferrets and to decide how many ferrets could be sustained without having a significant negative impact on the prairie dog population."

The Calgary Zoo is proud to be part of this historic event in the conservation of Canadian species and spaces. In recognition of the importance of this species reintroduction, the Calgary Zoo has established a black-footed ferret microsite at: www.calgaryzoo.org/bff which contains educational vignettes and will be

updated regularly with information about their return to Grasslands National Park.

A significant part of the work of species reintroduction conducted by the Calgary Zoo's Centre for Conservation Research is supported through the generosity of Husky Energy, Canadian Wildlife Federation, World Wildlife Fund U.S. and Canada, Parks Canada Agency, and Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada.

Media Information:

Media will be able to download b-roll of the release of the first black-footed ferret to return to Canada by late afternoon on October 2, 2009 at: www.calgaryzoo.org/VideoUpload/bff.zip

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