

PRAIRIE DOG STATUS --- 1981

The prairie dog census, initiated in 1979, was continued this season. The counts were taken by Resource Management personnel a number of times per month from May through October. The highest counts were taken in June, July, and August. Zone #1 was totally decimated by the Bubonic Plague in September. Total numbers were down approximately one hundred animals after the disease struck. Activity slowed again this year around the middle of October.

This season's highest animal count was taken in June. Of the 245 animals counted 40 were juveniles.

The prairie dogs appeared to be doing very well in all populated areas until all those in Zone #1 died of the plague. Populations in Zones 2 and 4 appear to have increased and spread.

This year only 27 animals were killed by road traffic. The drop in road kills corresponds with the decrease in the amount of contracted construction traffic on park roads. Hawks and coyotes were seen in the areas, but were not seen taking any prairie dogs.

After the plague was diagnosed on 9/18 Resource Management personnel posted the infected areas with "Closed Area" signs and dusted the mouths of all holes in the park with Sevin. It appears, after close monitoring, that the diseases spread has been halted at Zone #1.

Even after the unforeseen disaster brought on by the plague the prairie dog population still appears to be doing well. We'll know for sure next spring when the animals emerge from their burrows.

Tom Biller

