

NUMBER: CO-WRFO-02-17-EA

APPLICANT: Chevron Production Company

T&E

Affected Environment: Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret.

Burrowing owl are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. BLM has no records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area, and subsequent survey on 6/4 revealed no active nest activity. Although these wells are scheduled for drilling prior to the arrival of breeding owls, there is otherwise virtually no likelihood of owls selecting the few burrows available on the 3 well sites that are occupied by prairie dogs (collectively 7 multiple entrance mounds and 19 unrounded single-entrance burrow entrances). Pad reconditioning and shrub clearing would involve a total of about 2.3 acres and would have little positive or negative effect on the subsequent availability or suitability of prairie dog burrow habitat during the nesting season.

Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, ferrets have been released in Coyote Basin, a minimum 8 miles southwest of the project site, on an annual basis since 1999. Reintroduced ferret populations in northwest Colorado are being managed through a cooperatively developed Management Plan that was finalized in October 2001. Although no ferrets are known to have dispersed to and occupied the Rangely Oil Field, there is certainly potential that ferrets may have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin. Most of the proposed activities would be completed prior to ferret breeding activities that begin in early March.

Impact of the Proposed Action: The five proposed locations, involving a total of about 2.3 acres, were field checked on 6/4/01 and prairie dog burrow systems potentially involved with subsurface disturbance (i.e., light pad grading) were tabulated. This project involves the use of small existing and naturally reclaimed circa-1940 pads, 3 of which were found to support modest prairie dog burrowing activity (average 2.3 multiple entrance mounds and 6.3 unrounded single entrance burrows per pad). Subsurface and surface disturbance within prairie dog towns would be confined to about 1.4 acres and involve relatively short term (1 week) periods of intense activity. During this period of general prairie dog hibernation, it is thought unlikely that brush clearing and slight grading required to level these pads would involve substantial disruption of occupied portions of prairie dog burrow systems (i.e., below frost line), although shallow underground structure could conceivably be damaged directly beneath the drill rig. Overall damage to any involved burrow system would likely be minor and confined to the levels immediately below the surface. Because prairie dogs and

ferrets are fully capable of excavating burrow plugs, escape from alternate entrances or damaged burrow systems over the course of activity (particularly ferrets) seems likely. It is thought unlikely that prairie dogs occupying these well pads would be entirely displaced. Immediately following rehabilitation, the pads would support equal, if not greater, populations of prairie dogs (i.e., seeded reclamation species and brush clearing).

Chevron's proposed drilling schedule precedes the beginning of ferret breeding activities.

This project would have no conceivable short or long term influence on prairie dog abundance or distribution by itself or as habitat for black-footed ferret.

Impact of No Action Alternative: The no action alternative would have no adverse impacts on wildlife or T&E Species.

Mitigative Measures: Although the probability of these activities involving a prairie dog burrow system occupied by an individual ferret would be extremely remote (about 2 hundredths of 1%), to reduce the risk of having drilling activity extend into the more vulnerable ferret breeding season due to unforeseen delays, the BLM will request that Chevron voluntarily schedule drilling of those pads devoid of prairie dogs (the Hagood A2 and A7) last in the sequence. This method of cooperatively minimizing risk to ferrets outside designated ferret management areas is consistent with the Wolf Creek Ferret Management Plan.

12-6-01

NUMBER: CO-WRFO-02-87 EA

APPLICANT: Chevron Pipe Line Company

Affected Environment: The project area (line replacement site) consists of a heavily used pipeline corridor (4 parallel pipelines within 150') that parallels a gravelled oil field access road and skirts 2 existing well pads and an industrial site. The section of line would be replaced as a surface line and would involve little to no excavation.

Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (State threatened) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret. Under the auspices of a non-essential,

experimental population rule, ferrets have been released annually southwest and northeast of the Rangely Oil Field since 1999. The rule applies to any ferrets that may occupy or eventually be released in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah. Although there are lesser physical barriers and habitats unoccupied by prairie dog between the release sites and the project site, there is potential that ferrets may have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin. Burrowing owl are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a maintained prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. No burrowing owl nesting activity has been recorded in this immediate area. No birds were seen in this vicinity during an on-site inspection, and no indications of nesting were found during inspection of burrow entrances (see below).

Based on an on-site inspection on 5/16/02 prairie dogs occur sparingly within the project area. Two single-entrance burrows are located 40' north of the pipeline and another 6 single-entrance burrows occur within 100' north. No burrows exist south of the line. It appears that the suitability of this site for prairie dog habitation is limited by soil type. All recent diggings associated with these burrows were of a brittle, blocky or flaggy consistency.

Impact of Proposed Action: There are no prairie dog burrows within 40' of the pipeline scheduled for replacement, and no excavation is proposed. Cross-country vehicle travel within 25' of the pipeline would have no conceivable influence on the integrity of these burrow systems as habitat for ferrets or owl. The probability of these few single-entrance burrow systems being occupied by ferret or owl are extremely remote. The entire project site is heavily industrial and presumably would hold little attraction for fulfilling reproductive activities of either species. There is no reasonable likelihood that this project would have any adverse influence on individual ferrets or owls or ongoing reproductive efforts.

Impact of No Action Alternative: Failing to replace this pipeline segment would dramatically increase the probability of a rupture and an undesirable release of crude oil to the surrounding area. Although it is unlikely that an event such as this would involve ferrets or owls, the generalized effects on terrestrial habitats would be unacceptable.

Mitigative Measures: none

5/17/02

NUMBER: CO-WRFO-02-106-EA

T&E

Affected Environment: The project area is occupied by prairie dogs. Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferrets. Burrowing owls are uncommon in this

Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon thereafter. The BLM has no records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area. Burrowing owls have been noted near the McLaughlin 35 location by Chevron personnel in the past, but no activity has been noted over the last 4 or 5 years.

Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, black-footed ferrets were released 8 miles southwest of the project area in Coyote Basin, Utah in 1999 and 2000, and on the Colorado side of Coyote Basin in 2001. During the spring of 2000, monitoring indicated successful ferret reproduction in Coyote Basin. At least 2 ferrets are known to have dispersed north from Coyote Basin, but there has been no verified sightings of animals in Coal Oil Basin. Although there is no direct continuity between Coyote Basin and the project area (i.e., lesser physical barriers and habitat unoccupied by prairie dogs), there is potential that individual ferrets may have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin. Ferret breeding activities begin in early March, with birthing in early May. Young ferrets generally begin to emerge from nest burrows by mid-July.

Impact of Proposed Action: No substantial impact is expected. The proposed pipelines occupy areas of previous disturbance (i.e., power lines or other pipelines). In all, 10 active prairie dog burrows were observed on within the immediate project area, with an additional seven found directly above existing pipelines. Only two mounded burrows were observed within the rights-of-way. An estimated 90% of the activity occurred within the eastern half-mile of pipeline running east-west. The remainder of the proposed pipelines were largely devoid of prairie dog burrows.

Impact of No Action Alternative: No adverse affect.

Mitigative Measures: In general, it is recommended that pipeline construction not occur between the dates of April 1 and July 15 to avoid the peak breeding activities of prairie dogs. However, after consultation with Chevron, it was agreed upon that work on the eastern half of this project be deferred until after July 15, while work on the western half of the pipeline (largely absent of prairie dog burrows) be allowed to begin and proceed prior to July 15. Chevron has agreed to these terms following a meeting on 18 June 2002.

6-19-02

1. **NUMBER** CO-WRFO-03- 073-EA

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED ANIMALS: (This includes all information related to animals in Public Land Health Standard 4.)

Affected Environment: All pipeline corridors involved with this project are actively colonized by prairie dogs. Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret.

Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, ferrets have been released annually southwest and northeast of the Rangely Oil Field since 1999. The rule applies to any ferrets that may occupy or eventually be released in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah. Although there are lesser physical barriers and habitats unoccupied by prairie dog between the release sites and the project site, there is potential that ferrets have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin.

Burrowing owl are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. Young birds are normally fledged by late July with family groups remaining together through September, when the birds leave for southern wintering grounds. BLM has no historical records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area. Although all breeding birds have probably not yet returned to this area, no birds were seen in this vicinity during an on-site inspection, and no indications of previous year nesting were found during inspection of burrow entrances.

Impact of Proposed Action: The 3 pipeline segments were field checked on 4/7/03 and prairie dog burrow systems potentially involved with subsurface disturbance (i.e., within 30' of centerline) were tabulated. With the exception of 400 linear feet (center segment in 5 separate segments) where the pipeline corridor intersects or lies on the margin of prairie dog towns situated on native rangeland, prairie dog occupation along these corridors is confined and solely attributable to existing pipeline trenches. The breaking of heavy soils and claypans from earthwork apparently aids prairie dog burrowing, and is not an uncommon situation in the Rangely Field. Due to the paucity of burrow entrances adjacent to areas directly overlying the existing pipeline trenches and the lack of mound development, it is uncertain whether these burrows extend lateral to the original trenching to any substantive degree. The center and western pipeline segments (about 3350' or 85% of project) support comparable burrow densities; together involving 100 single-entrance burrows. The center segment also involves 2 mounded burrow systems. The eastern segment supports only 4 single entrance burrows along its length.

Surface (i.e., ROW preparation) and subsurface (i.e., trenching) disturbance within occupied prairie dog habitat would be confined to about 3.5 acres and 0.18 acre, respectively. Surface clearing would have no substantive influence on prairie dogs along this corridor (see Terrestrial Wildlife section). Although the probability of subsurface disturbance intersecting a prairie dog burrow system occupied by a ferret in Coal Oil Basin would be remote (about 3 thousandths of 1% based on areal extent), Chevron has voluntarily deferred pipeline replacement until after July 15, which provides time for the emergence and dispersal of young from a potential nest site. This method of cooperatively minimizing risk to ferrets outside designated ferret management areas is consistent with the Wolf Creek Ferret Management Plan.

This project would have no short or long term influence on prairie dog abundance or distribution by itself or as habitat for black-footed ferret. Proposed construction would occur well beyond the prairie dog reproductive season when young are independent and dispersing. Because prairie dogs and ferrets (in the highly improbable event of an intersected burrow) are fully capable of excavating burrow plugs, it is believed that escape from burrow systems damaged by excavation would generally be successful. Construction would also avail a parallel trench for occupation by prairie dogs adjacent (within about 10') to the original trench. It is likely that immediately following rehabilitation, the corridors would support equal, if not greater, populations of prairie dogs (i.e., additional parallel trench, seeded reclamation species) as a ferret habitat base.

Project scheduling would also defer construction outside the normal nesting timeframes of burrowing owl. Although more highly developed, multiple entrance, mounded burrows are thought to be preferred by owls for nesting and roosting (2 associated with this project), these alignments will be checked prior to construction to ensure burrowing owl broods are not roosting in affected prairie dog burrows. This project would involve diminutive levels of short term surface and subsurface disruption within prairie dog towns and would have no conceivable adverse affect on the availability or suitability of prairie dog burrow systems for future nesting attempts.

Impact of No Action Alternative: Although by denying this application there would be no possible involvement of prairie dog burrow systems as potential habitat for burrowing owl or black-footed ferret, it is uncertain what type of habitat alternative routes may traverse or how delays would affect project timing. Denying this application may also detract from the continued cooperation extended to BLM by Chevron in adjusting project work to accommodate important ferret timeframes (e.g., breeding), since the Experimental Non-Essential Rule governing ferret recovery efforts in northwest Colorado does not require special protective provisions outside designated ferret recovery areas (i.e., Wolf Creek or Coyote Basin Management Areas).

Mitigative Measures:

-To avoid the involvement of a burrow being used for post-fledge roosting by burrowing owl broods (considered a remote possibility), these alignments will be surveyed just prior to construction by a BLM biologist. In the event owl use is found to occur along the corridor, construction activity would be deferred until the owls vacate the area.

-Although the probability of these activities involving a prairie dog burrow system occupied by an individual ferret would be extremely remote (about 3 thousandths of 1%), Chevron has voluntarily deferred pipeline replacement until after July 15, which provides time for the emergence and dispersal of young from a potential nest site. This method of cooperatively minimizing risk to ferrets outside designated ferret management areas is consistent with the Wolf Creek Ferret Management Plan.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED ANIMALS: (This includes all information related to animals in Public Land Health Standard 4.)

Affected Environment: The project area is occupied by prairie dogs. Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferrets.

Burrowing owls are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon thereafter. The BLM has no records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area. Although this pipeline is scheduled for installation prior to the arrival of breeding owls, there remains no realistic likelihood of owls selecting the two single entrance burrows available on the recommended (see mitigation) pipeline route.

Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, black-footed ferrets were released 8 miles southwest of the project area in Coyote Basin, Utah in 1999 and 2000, and on the Colorado side of Coyote Basin in 2001. During the spring of 2000, monitoring indicated successful ferret reproduction in Coyote Basin. At least 2 ferrets are known to have dispersed north from Coyote Basin, but there have been no verified sightings of animals in Coal Oil Basin. Although there is no direct continuity between Coyote Basin and the project area (i.e., lesser physical barriers and habitat unoccupied by prairie dogs), there is a strong likelihood that ferrets have colonized and successfully breed in Coal Oil Basin. Ferret breeding activities begin in early March, with birthing in early May. Young ferrets generally begin to emerge from nest burrows by mid-July.

The project site is typical of the salt desert community in Coal Oil Basin. For most of the proposed route, the pipeline would traverse a saltbush type with an annual-dominated understory. The exception is a small constructed basin on the northwest corner of the existing A21X pad (i.e., berm of stockpiled soil or an old reservoir) that supports a dense grass sod. Associated with this swale is a small (1-2 acre), dense colony of prairie dogs. This colony is well established and comprised of a number of larger multi-entrance mounds. Beginning on the southwest corner of the A21X pad (100 feet from the wellhead and 90 degrees from proposed alignment), an existing pipeline corridor parallels the proposed route and converges on the same A13 wellhead. This corridor is previously disturbed and vegetated almost entirely with annual herbaceous species (lower end used sporadically as a road). This alternate right-of-way skirts the edge of the noted prairie dog town and involves only 2-3 single entrance burrows within 30' of the corridor's margins. Two active headcuts have originated in response to this right-of-way.

Impact of Proposed Action: Right-of-way preparation and headcut repair would involve less than 1 total acre involving up to 3 single entrance prairie dog burrows.

As mitigated, this action would maintain the current character of local prairie dog habitat. As such, this action would have no conceivable influence on the subsequent availability or suitability of prairie dog burrow habitat for burrowing owl or black-footed ferret. Although there is no reasonable likelihood of these activities interfering with potential ferret breeding activities in nearby prairie dog towns (calculated as 3/100 of 1 percent), Chevron is requested to finalize construction prior to the beginning of the ferret nesting season (April 1).

Impact of No Action Alternative: No potential influence on prairie dogs as habitat for burrowing owl and black-footed ferret.

Mitigative Measures: In order to minimize the short term involvement and perhaps longer term modification (i.e., swale feature) of occupied prairie dog habitat as potential breeding habitat for black-footed ferrets, it is recommended that the proposed pipeline alignment be modified to parallel an existing pipeline corridor that intersects the two target wells--see Mitigation under Terrestrial Wildlife. It is further recommended that, if possible, pipeline installation activities be finalized prior to April 1 to avoid the remote chance of disrupting potential breeding activities of black-footed ferrets in nearby prairie dog burrow systems.

3/11/03

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED ANIMALS: (This includes all information related to animals in Public Land Health Standard 4.)

Affected Environment: Prairie dogs are widely distributed in the project area, occupying about 6,000 acres of the 21,000 acre basin. Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret.

Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, ferrets have been released annually southwest and northeast of the Rangely Oil Field since 1999. The rule applies to any ferrets that may occupy or eventually be released in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah. Although there are lesser physical barriers and habitats unoccupied by prairie dog between the release sites and the project site, there is potential that ferrets have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin.

Ferret breeding activities begin in early March, with birthing in early May. Young ferrets generally emerge and begin to disperse from nest burrows by mid-July.

Five (1 reentry, 4 new) of the 12 proposed well pads will be located on sites that support prairie dogs; at an average density of about 3.6 burrows per acre (i.e., 2 multiple-entrance mounds, 18 single-entrance burrows). The originally proposed pipeline network would intersect about 14 mounds and 83 single-entrance burrows, including 19 burrows (23%) associated with existing pipeline trenches. About 75%

of the burrows inventoried in the project area showed evidence of current prairie dog activity.

Chevron-Texaco adopted BLM recommendations to offset and relocate features that would reduce the involvement of mounds and burrows by about 20% (i.e., 3 mounds, 16 burrows) from their original plans. As a result, the proposed action (pads and pipelines) would involve a total of 13 mounds and 85 single entrance burrows. Eighty-five percent of mounded burrows and 60% of simple burrows are attributable to 2 well locations (about 3.5 acres) and 3 pipeline segments (about 4750 linear feet). Due to the widespread distribution of prairie dogs in these areas, there was no reasonable means for minimizing prairie dog involvement (i.e., realignments) in these instances.

Of the nearly 30,000 linear feet of proposed pipeline, almost 50% (14,200') parallel existing and reclaimed pipelines. About 55% (7800') of these existing pipeline trenches are densely colonized by prairie dogs where there is limited or no occupation of surrounding native rangeland. The breaking of heavy soils and claypans from earthwork is not an uncommon situation in the Rangely Field and apparently aids prairie dog burrowing. Due to the paucity of burrow entrances adjacent to areas directly overlying the existing pipeline trenches and the lack of mound development, it is not considered likely that these burrow systems extend lateral to the original trenching to any substantive degree. Five pipeline segments (about 4800') that would closely parallel right-of-ways densely colonized by prairie dogs were identified by BLM for slight offsets (5-10') to minimize the involvement of existing burrow systems and continue to avail trenches for further colonization. Chevron-Texaco has agreed to these offsets which have been integrated into the current proposed action. Remaining pipelines along colonized rights-of-ways were sufficiently separated from existing trenches and required no additional offset.

Burrowing owls are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. Young birds are normally fledged and disperse by late July with family groups remaining together through September, when the birds leave for southern wintering grounds. During field surveys of this project (6/19/03), BLM found one active burrowing owl nest within about 50' of a proposed pipeline route. One 2-3 week old chick accompanied the 2 adults on the mound during a brief inspection on 6/26/03.

Impact of Proposed Action: Implementation of the proposed action would result in approximately 23 acres of surface disturbance, and 4.5 acres of subsurface disturbance within occupied prairie dog habitat.

Surface clearing on pipelines would have no substantive influence on the short-term utility or longer term suitability of prairie dog habitat (see Terrestrial Wildlife section). Because vegetation is routinely cleared from active well pads, most of the core acreage devoted to well pads (about 4 acres) would be of reduced utility for prairie dogs for the life of the well.

Although the probability of subsurface disturbance intersecting a prairie dog burrow system occupied by a ferret in Coal Oil Basin would be remote (about 7 hundredths of 1% based on aerial extent), to further minimize the extremely low likelihood of disrupting potential ferret nesting activities, Chevron-Texaco has voluntarily agreed to defer construction of project features that intersect areas with more abundant prairie dogs (i.e., 2 pads and 3 pipeline segments discussed above) until after 15 July. The ferret recovery partners commonly recognize this date as a safe date when ferret kits have emerged and dispersed from the natal burrow. This method of cooperatively minimizing risk to ferrets outside designated ferret management areas is consistent with the Wolf Creek Ferret Management Plan.

This project would have no measurable short or long-term influence on prairie dog abundance or distribution in Coal Oil Basin by itself or as habitat for black-footed ferret. Construction that would involve occupied prairie dog habitat would occur after the prairie dog and ferret reproductive seasons when young are independent and dispersing. Because prairie dogs and ferrets (in the highly improbable event of an intersected burrow) are capable of excavating burrow plugs, it is believed that escape from burrow systems damaged by excavation would generally be successful. Pipeline construction would also avail a parallel trench for occupation by prairie dogs adjacent (within about 10') to the original trench. It is likely that immediately following rehabilitation, those corridors currently colonized by prairie dogs would support at least double the number of prairie dogs (i.e., additional parallel trench, seeded reclamation species) as a ferret habitat base.

Project work in the vicinity of the burrowing owl nest would be deferred until after August 1, when the nestlings are fledged and dispersed from the nest burrow. This project would involve relatively minor levels of surface and subsurface disruption within prairie dog towns and would have no measurable adverse affect on the availability or suitability of prairie dog burrow systems for future nesting attempts.

Impact of No Action Alternative: Although by denying this application there would be no possible involvement of prairie dog burrow systems as potential habitat for burrowing owl or black-footed ferret, it is uncertain what type of habitat alternative routes may traverse or how delays would affect project timing. Denying this application may also detract from the continued cooperation extended to BLM by Chevron-Texaco in adjusting project work to accommodate important ferret timeframes (e.g., breeding), since the Experimental Non-Essential Rule guiding ferret recovery efforts in northwest Colorado does not require special protective provisions outside designated ferret recovery areas (i.e., Wolf Creek or Coyote Basin Management Areas).

Mitigative Measures: Recommended means of mitigating this project's influence on prairie dogs, burrowing owls, and black-footed ferrets have been voluntarily adopted by Chevron-Texaco and have been integrated into the proposed action.

Signature of specialist: Ed Hollowed 6/30/03

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: Much of the project area is broadly encompassed by prairie dog habitat. Based on recent site inspections in December and February, prairie dogs are distributed at low density along, and adjacent to the proposed flowline in section 14, and sparingly west along remaining portions of both the flowline and CO₂ line. Prairie dog activity along the existing flowline is primarily associated with an existing pipeline trench (eight single entrance burrows on the trench, four single entrance burrows adjacent to the trench that would likely be involved during right-of-way clearing). The breaking of heavy soils and claypans from earthwork apparently aids prairie dog burrowing, and is not an uncommon situation in the Rangely Field. No prairie dog activity was found along the proposed CO₂ pipeline route south of the proposed two-well pad.

The proposed 2-well pad sits in a narrowly confined valley supporting a basin big sagebrush-shadscale saltbush community. The pad would occupy a small flat (1.5 acres) that shows evidence of prairie dog occupation (37 burrow entrances; six mounded burrow systems). At the present time, this small town appears to be largely inactive with a small number of prairie dogs continuing to occupy the valley northeast of the pad. Prairie dogs are distributed north and east of the Mellen #2 pad, but the pad itself is heavily overgrown with basin big sagebrush and offers little habitat suited for prairie dog occupation.

Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret. Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, ferrets have been released annually southwest and northeast of the Rangely Oil Field since 1999. The rule applies to any ferrets that may occupy or eventually be released in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah. Although there are lesser physical barriers and habitats unoccupied by prairie dog between the release sites and the project site, there is potential that ferrets have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin. Ferrets breed in February and March with parturition in mid- to late-May. Kits emerge from natal burrows in mid-July.

Burrowing owls are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. Young birds are normally fledged by late July with family groups remaining together through September, when the birds leave for southern wintering grounds. BLM has no historical records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Surface (i.e., ROW preparation) and subsurface (i.e., trenching and pad cuts) disturbance within past or

recently occupied prairie dog habitat would be confined to about 5 and 1.1 acres, respectively. Surface clearing would have no substantive influence on prairie dogs inhabiting this corridor (4 active burrows). Because the proposed flowline is offset 10 feet north of the existing flowline, the 8 active burrows on the existing trench would likely experience no subsurface disruption. Although BLM has no evidence to suggest that ferrets currently occupy Coal Oil Basin, the probability of subsurface disturbance (associated with this project) intersecting a prairie dog burrow system occupied by a ferret in Coal Oil Basin would be remote (e.g., assuming random ferret distribution: 1.1 acres of 7,000 acres of occupied habitat = 0.015%). Further, female ferrets during the reproductive season tend to select the larger and more densely populated prairie dog towns available in the area—this project locale fulfills neither of these criteria.

Until burrowing owls arrive on these breeding ranges in April, there is no credible means of assessing impacts to nest activity. In the event earthwork associated with this project cannot be completed prior to early April, BLM would conduct nest surveys on affected pipeline segments and pads and conditions of approval would be applied to defer activities that may interfere with successful nest outcomes (under provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act).

In both the case of the owl and ferret it would be advantageous to schedule earthwork outside the period between April 1 and July 15. Avoiding this timeframe would provide sufficient time for the rearing, emergence, and dispersal of young from natal burrows and effectively eliminate the likelihood of adversely affecting owl or ferret reproductive efforts. This method of cooperatively minimizing risk to ferrets outside designated ferret management areas is consistent with the Wolf Creek Ferret Management Plan.

This project would have no short or long term influence on prairie dog abundance or distribution by itself or as habitat for black-footed ferret or burrowing owl. Small incremental gains in perennial grass cover associated with successful reclamation, subsurface tillage associated with 2.5 miles of parallel pipeline installation, and removal of unnecessary utility poles as raptor perches may be expected to bolster local populations of prairie dogs and potentially benefit individual burrowing owl and black-footed ferret.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Although by denying this application there would be no possible involvement of prairie dog burrow systems as potential habitat for burrowing owl or black-footed ferret, it is uncertain what type of habitat alternative routes may traverse or how delays would affect project timing. Denying this application may also detract from the continued cooperation extended to BLM by Chevron in adjusting project work to accommodate important ferret timeframes (e.g., breeding), since the Experimental Non-Essential Rule governing ferret recovery efforts in northwest Colorado does not require special protective provisions outside designated ferret recovery areas (i.e., Wolf Creek or Coyote Basin Management Areas).

Mitigation:

Pad construction and pipeline trenching should be conducted outside the period of April 1 to July 15 to avoid subsurface reproductive activities of ferrets and prairie dogs.

If no longer necessary for field operations, it is recommended that the out-of-service power poles north of the road between the #3 and #4 locations be removed.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: Public Land Health Standards for those special status species associated with white-tailed prairie dogs, including black-footed ferret and burrowing owl, in Coal Oil Basin are currently met. This project would have no adverse influence on populations, available extent of suitable habitat, or the reproductive activities of these three species. Thus, no influence on meeting the land health standard. Small incremental gains in perennial grass cover associated with successful reclamation, subsurface tillage associated with pipeline installation, and removal of unnecessary utility poles as raptor perches may be expected to bolster local populations of prairie dogs and potentially benefit individual burrowing owl and black-footed ferret.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: Much of the Rangely Oil Field is colonized by white-tailed prairie dogs. Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret. Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, black-footed ferrets have been released annually southwest and northeast of the Rangely Oil Field since 1999. The rule applies to any ferrets that may occupy or eventually be released in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah. Although there are lesser physical barriers and habitats unoccupied by prairie dog between the release sites and the project site, there is potential that ferrets have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin. Ferrets are wholly reliant on prairie dogs for food and shelter. This project would be located along an existing well access. Adjacent vegetation is comprised of a sparse stand of greasewood with an annual dominated understory. There is no evidence of prairie dog occupation in the immediate vicinity of the project.

Burrowing owl are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. BLM has no historical records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area. Because there are no prairie dog burrows in the vicinity of the project area, there is no potential for burrowing owl occupation of the site.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Because there is no prairie dog habitat directly or indirectly associated with the project vicinity, there is no realistic likelihood of adversely influencing individuals or local populations of black-footed ferret, white-tailed prairie dog, or burrowing owl, or the utility or condition of their habitat. By siting the replacement line along an existing access road, Chevron avoids having to

disturb and reoccupy an old cross-country pipeline corridor. These old pipeline corridors have a tendency to assume native rangeland character and often support prairie dogs at densities exceeding surrounding rangeland.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Alternative pipeline routes would involve unnecessary increases in corridor length across native or rehabilitated rangeland and increase the likelihood of intersecting greater numbers of prairie dog burrow systems.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: In terms of habitat available for black-footed ferret, white-tailed prairie dogs and burrowing owl, Coal Oil Basin currently meets Standard 4. Although much of the basin's saltbush, sagebrush, and greasewood communities are dominated by annual weeds—a product of inappropriate grazing and reclamation practices in the past--the basin continues to sustain a well-distributed and viable population of white-tailed prairie dogs, which constitutes suitable habitat for burrowing owl and reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret. The proposed action would complement the meeting of this standard by avoiding reoccupation of a cross-country pipeline corridor and confining disturbance to the margin of an existing access road through habitat currently unsuited for occupation by prairie dogs and their associates.

The no action alternative (alternate pipeline siting) would increase the likelihood of disturbing native or reclaimed rangeland potentially suited for occupation by special status species associated with prairie dogs. Although this alternative would not necessarily detract from meeting the standard, it would fail to act on an opportunity to minimize disruption of rangeland that has undergone long term rehabilitation.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: Much of the project area is broadly encompassed by white-tailed prairie dog habitat. Based on recent site inspections, the ridgeline pipeline route proposed in section 34 supports no prairie dogs. The proposed pipeline in section 14 would bisect several hundred feet of low density prairie dog town on native rangeland, but prairie dog activity in the project area is primarily associated with a previously constructed, parallel pipeline. Burrow occupancy rates were high throughout. Prairie dog burrow entrances within 30 feet of the pipeline's centerline were associated with 14 single-entrance burrows and 2 burrows associated with mounded systems. In contrast, the adjacent reclaimed pipeline trench (about 10-foot width) supports 40 single-entrance burrows and 4 mounded systems. The breaking of heavy soils and claypans from earthwork apparently aids prairie dog burrowing and is not an uncommon situation in the Rangely Field.

Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret. Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, ferrets have been released annually southwest and northeast of the Rangely Oil Field since 1999. The rule applies to any ferrets that may occupy or eventually be released in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah. Although there are lesser physical barriers and habitats unoccupied by prairie dog between the release sites and the project site, there is potential that ferrets have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin. Ferrets breed in February and March with parturition in mid- to late-May. Kits emerge from natal burrows in mid-July.

Burrowing owls are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. Young birds are normally fledged by late July with family groups remaining together through September, when the birds leave for southern wintering grounds. BLM has no historical records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area, nor was any indications of nesting observed during on-site inspections in early July 2004.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Surface (i.e., ROW clearing) and subsurface (i.e., trenching and pad cuts) disturbance within past or recently occupied prairie dog habitat would be confined to less than 1 acre (i.e., section 14 site). Due to the broad distribution of prairie dogs in this area, there were no reasonable alternatives found that would substantively reduce prairie dog burrow involvement. Temporary removal of vegetation along the working corridor would not adversely affect the integrity of the 10 prairie dog burrows lateral to the trench. Pipeline trenching would likely intersect 6 single-entrance burrows. Although BLM has no evidence to suggest that ferrets currently occupy Coal Oil Basin, the probability of subsurface disturbance intersecting a prairie dog burrow system occupied by a ferret in Coal Oil Basin would be remote (e.g., assuming random ferret distribution: 1 acre of 7,000 acres of occupied habitat = 0.015%). Because burrowing tends to be confined to the excavated trench, the proposed pipeline offset is considered sufficient to avoid any subsurface disruption of burrows associated with the existing flowline.

In the case of the owl, prairie dog, and ferret it would be advantageous to schedule earthwork outside the period between April 1 and July 15. Avoiding this timeframe would provide sufficient time for the rearing, emergence, and dispersal of young from natal burrows and effectively eliminate the likelihood of adversely affecting these animals' reproductive efforts. This method of cooperatively minimizing risk to ferrets outside designated ferret management areas is consistent with the Wolf Creek Ferret Management Plan.

This project would have no short or long term influence on prairie dog abundance or distribution by itself or as habitat for black-footed ferret or burrowing owl. Small incremental gains in perennial grass cover associated with successful reclamation and subsurface tillage associated with 0.75 mile of parallel pipeline installation, may be

expected to bolster local populations of prairie dogs and potentially benefit individual burrowing owl and black-footed ferret on an incremental basis.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Although by denying this application there would be no possible involvement of prairie dog burrow systems as potential habitat for burrowing owl or black-footed ferret, it is uncertain what type of habitat alternative routes may traverse or how delays would affect project timing. Denying this application may also detract from the continued cooperation extended to BLM by Chevron in adjusting project work to accommodate important ferret and burrowing owl timeframes (e.g., breeding).

Mitigation: Pipeline trenching and installation will be conducted outside the period of April 1 to July 15 to avoid the remote chance of disrupting the reproductive activities of ferrets, burrowing owl, and prairie dogs.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: Public Land Health Standards for those special status species associated with white-tailed prairie dogs, including black-footed ferret and burrowing owl, in Coal Oil Basin are currently being met. This project would have no adverse influence on populations, available extent of suitable habitat, or the reproductive activities of these three species and would, therefore, have no influence on continued meeting of the land health standard. Small incremental gains in perennial grass cover associated with successful reclamation and offset subsurface tillage associated with pipeline installation may be expected to bolster (on a very small scale) local populations of prairie dogs and potentially benefit individual burrowing owl and black-footed ferret.