

From Arizona to Canada Others Celebrate the

Return of a Native

In early October 2009 captive-raised Black-footed Ferrets (BFF) were returned to the prairies of Saskatchewan and released into the wild within the Grasslands National Park of Canada and an adjacent privately owned ranch. It was an occasion for celebration by the local community and surrounding area; First Nations of Canada leaders participated and blessed the reintroduction and officials from the province and Parks Canada came together for an inspirational demonstration of support. Regular classes were cancelled for area schools that participated with educational workshops and field trips to view the release, along with



photographers from National Geographic. Three hundred people gathered for the day's festivities; followed by a dinner with an auction to raise funds to restore a historic grain elevator in the ranching and farming community of Val Marie.

We've seen enthusiasm expressed in many areas. In 2006, the president of

the Seligman, Arizona Chamber of Commerce wrote a letter to the BFF Recovery Implementation Team Executive Committee highlighting why that rural community was enthusiastic about the reintroduction project—and the many benefits to Seligman and surrounding areas.

Violet Searles wrote that the reintroduction of the BFF has helped instill a sense of pride in the community because this endangered species is being released in their own "backyard." The project was in its tenth year at the time and the letter went on to underscore that, "the Seligman Chamber of Commerce finds the Black-footed Ferret project to be a positive



addition to both the community and local commerce. We are proud to continue our relationship and to benefit from the Black-footed Ferret reintroduction program in Seligman.” She added that the BFF team is now sought after by local businesses and organizations to give presentations or represent the project during community events. At the Chamber’s request, biologists involved with the project have participated with interactive educational wildlife booths at Seligman Days events.

After dealing with the opposition created in Kansas (yes, created by a few individuals, the chairman of the Logan County Commission, and the Farm Bureau), the events in Canada were particularly reassuring. It was reassuring to be reminded that the vast majority of people support wildlife conservation and recovery of endangered species.

Surveys have shown that this is also true in Kansas! A well-respected national polling firm, Responsive Management, Inc., published findings of two extensive survey reports in 1991 and 2011 on “Kansas residents’

opinions on threatened and endangered wildlife and actions to protect wildlife.” The survey revealed that:

“An overwhelming majority of Kansas residents (91%) agree that the Department [the state’s wildlife agency] should continue to identify and protect habitat critical to the existence of threatened and endangered wildlife.”

We’ve never heard a discouraging word from folks who have businesses in Oakley. Community leaders in Seligman, Val Marie, and Wall, S.D. are all supportive of nature conservation and appreciation and there isn’t any reason to believe it is different in Logan County. They may, in fact, just be part of the “silent majority.” They appreciate the benefits, and many support the BFF recovery project, but prefer to not be pulled into any

contentious issues created by others.

As the welcoming manager of the Kansas Kountry Inn in Oakley has often expressed, local businesses in this western Kansas town also appreciate the scores of college students and others who come out to participate in the spring and fall spotlight ferret surveys, and related field activities.

The excitement of seeing and documenting BFFs keeps participants up all night, searching the landscape with spotlights for a glimpse of the the bright teal-colored eye reflection of the ferrets. Swift Foxes, Coyotes, Bobcats, Jackrabbits and other nocturnal species are also seen on the Haverfield Ranch Complex. Volunteers from as far away as Massachusetts drive out to contribute a few nights of their time, although most come from throughout Kansas, including Emporia State University, KSU, FHSU, zoos within Kansas, the Prairie Park Nature Center in Lawrence and the Milford Nature Center. As the sun rises over the shortgrass prairies, everyone is ready to return to the comforts of a motel room in Oakley or the Logan House in the tiny village of Russell Springs for a “good day’s rest!”



Ron Klataske photos