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By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

On June 1, Seward County commissioners executed a resolution formally asserting the county's authority to insist on coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, regarding listing of the black-tailed prairie dog as an endangered species.

According to a letter commissioners approved Monday to send to the agency, that resolution calls for coordination with the county by the federal office regarding the listing.

The letter went on to state the resolution is not limited to the issue of the prairie dog.

"It calls for coordination 'regarding any other action taken in or contemplated in our county regarding species,'" the letter read. "But the issue of imminent importance is the listing proposal related to the prairie dog."

The letter discussed the statutory basis for the county's assertion of coordination authority, particularly the National Environmental Policy Act requirement of coordination and the requirement NEPA issued by the Council on Environmental Quality.

"So we will not reiterate the authority of our resolution," the letter continued. "We rest on the same authorities which have been previously stated in detail by Logan County."

Commissioner Jim Rice said Monday that the county has a severe prairie dog infestation, and a species of ferret has been introduced to control that problem.

“Now, there seems to be quite the little mess they’ve got because the ferret is the predator to prairie dogs,” he said. “The National Fish and Wildlife Service is at odds with them. They want to place the prairie dog on the endangered species list, yet they have introduced the ferret up there to control them.”

In meetings in September in Oakley and Goodland, Rice said attorney Fred Kelly Grant, who has several years of experience dealing with federal rules, regulations and guidelines regarding endangered species, explained many different avenues he had taken in regards to protection of rights on a variety of species.

“In his remarks, he said it started in about 1957 in an effort for the National Fish and Wildlife Service to gather information in hopes of placing the prairie dog on the endangered species list,” Rice said. “The wildlife service had accumulated some 30,000 pages of documentation concerning the prairie dog. That’s kind of what we’re up against.”

Grant also discussed ways to go about preventing the prairie dog from being on the endangered species list and some of the ramifications if it were to take place, according to Rice.

The commissioner said the best road to take on the issue is to continue the county’s contacts with Logan County and advise officials in that county that Seward officials are following their lead and consider forming a coalition of counties.

“That’s one of the things Mr. Grant thought would be of value – to create a coalition of counties,” he said. “That would speak louder than each one of us trying to fight it ourselves. We want to just notify Logan County we’re gonna just follow their lead, and if they should decide to create a coalition of counties, we’d be interested in participating.”

In the final motion made by commissioners, the word “eradicate”

caught the attention of some, including commissioner Toby Hale, who said he would have liked

to replace it with the word “control.”

“Everybody likes them on everybody else’s land,” he said referring to the prairie dog. “I certainly don’t want to see them eradicated. I’d like to see them controlled when they’re out of control. I’ve got mixed emotions about the whole deal. There’s too many of them. A lot of people have them where they don’t want them. I agree with all that, but still, it isn’t something we want to eradicate.”

Rice said in the county’s resolution, the word “eradicate” had been changed to “control.”

“I think that’s what the wildlife service is concerned about,” he said. “A lot of these counties are talking about eradication. I think they’re interested in just kind of controlling them.”

County counsel Dan Diepenbrock said the way the resolution reads merely is an expression against characterizing the prairie dog as an endangered species, which would likely prohibit any form of control.

“By signing this letter, you will create a coalition with the other counties, which merely means you will receive any information on this issue that the other counties receive,” he said.

Commissioner Steve Eisenhauer said the motion did not say the county is trying to eradicate the prairie dog.

“It simply states that we’re joining a coalition on the topic of eradication of the prairie dog,” he said.

The commission voted 4-1, with Hale voting against, to approve the letter to the Secretary of the Interior, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mountain Prairie Region and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Kansas Field Office regarding the eradication of the black tailed prairie dog.

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