

**(Regional)-Ranchers Sought To Help Save Black-Footed Ferret**

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 02/18/2013 09:06 AM

DENVER (AP) - Wildlife officials working to save the endangered black-footed ferret are trying to persuade more ranchers to reintroduce the species on their land.

Yet cattlemen are divided on whether a proposal to encourage them to do so should be finalized. For one thing, saving the black-footed ferret means also saving the animal's main diet: prairie dogs, which can compete with livestock for forage.

The public has until Feb. 22 to comment on a draft of the proposed safe harbor program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It would assure landowners and tribes who voluntarily agree to have ferrets reintroduced to their land that they wouldn't face future regulatory restrictions for protecting the species.

Landowners and their neighbors could keep working on their properties without fear of penalties if a ferret is accidentally killed by farming equipment.

(Associated Press)