

availability is important, historically food has not been a big issue for swift fox. Invertebrates are difficult to measure, and everything is so dynamic in the prairie that what you get this year may not be what's there next year. It would be nice to see the reintroduction proposal long before implementation. We received this proposal after some parts of the plan were already underway. The Team has a lot of expertise and knowledge and Turner ESF should use it. We are all working toward the conservation of swift fox.

Response: Kyran: Hope to have the next phase proposal done by the end of the year. We're not locked into reintroduction, and if it makes more sense to put our money into another facet of conservation, we would be open to do that. It doesn't have to occur on Turner properties. We are interested in carnivore conservation and restoration.

Question: Christiane: Has South Dakota considered using natural expansion or translocation of their current population from Fall River County versus reintroduction? If South Dakota has a population that is unable to increase or disperse, why spend a lot of money to bring foxes in from somewhere else without spending the same amount of money determining why they aren't there in the first place. Or spend the money trying to make the existing population more successful. And, if you can't make it more successful, how can a reintroduced population be more successful?

Response: Paul: The reintroduced population could be more successful.

Response: Kyran: We are still looking at these questions. Has the range been expanding or shrinking? Or is the range expanding only because you are looking?

Comment: Eileen: South Dakota would not support a translocation at this time. The USFS is only looking on federal land and not on private land.

Comment: Paul: The science of reintroduction is an art. You could spend a lot of time doing science to get an answer that is not meaningful. Sometimes you just have to do it and let the chips fall where they may. That's really where we are in our understanding of the science of reintroduction.

Comment: Lu: We need to bring as much science into the art as we can.

Comment: Marsha: Regardless, I'm sure Turner wants to spend his money wisely.

### **Blackfeet/Defenders of Wildlife Reintroduction Program - Minnette Johnson**

The Canadians have been successfully reintroducing swift fox for 16 years and are winding their program down. They had planned to release the remaining captive foxes in Grasslands National Park. In the meantime, there was an absence of swift fox in the state of Montana. So the Blackfeet Tribe, Defenders of wildlife and the Cochrane Ecological Institute entered into a partnership to initiate a reintroduction program in Montana. The swift fox was once common in Montana. There were 43 sightings near Browning, MT, near the release site, but no sighting records have occurred in recent times. Since 1978, swift fox occurrence records were associated with the Canadian reintroduction program. In 1993 a habitat survey was conducted by Brian Giddings, Craig Knowles and Mamo. They identified the best remaining

tracts of grassland on the Blackfeet Reservation. Craig Knowles did a site assessment in 1998 to look at the prey base and habitat availability. He found tons of Richardson's ground squirrels and other small mammals and burrows for swift fox. So, they decided to proceed with the swift fox reintroduction. Thirty juvenile swift foxes from the Cochrane Ecological Institute were brought to the Blackfeet Land via Browning, Montana. Eight protective shelters were placed on top of swift fox burrows, and the foxes were fed and watered for the night.

The first release was last year (1998). None of the foxes were radio collared, partly because of expense and partly because of the Blackfeet's wishes to keep a low profile to keep outside interference to a minimum. Last summer (1999) another 15 swift fox - 3 juveniles and 12 adults - were released. Juveniles had poor survivorship. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks provided eight radio collars for adults. The swift fox were monitored for one month after release. Of the 45 releases - two died from road kills and two died from ranch dog conflicts. The 1998 released foxes produced four successful litters. Sixteen swift fox were seen by spotlighting in one night in the area of the release site during the 30-day period following the release. They lost two of the collared animals. Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Department will be monitoring radio-transmitted foxes with fixed-wing aircraft. Defenders is committed to reintroducing a stable population in the area and will be reintroducing more captive foxes next year. But Defenders is also interested in reintroducing wild foxes, and are looking for a wild fox source. They are also trying to get more radio collars.

Comment: Brian: Montana will put the radio-collar information in the annual report; dispersal, natal den location, direction and distance, survival as well. Den sites are really important. The Blackfeet land is a good site. The breeding stock at CEI came originally from South Dakota and Wyoming.

Question: Eileen: Defenders is committed to a self-sustaining population - do you know what will that be?

Answer: Minnette: Defenders is committed to 3 years of reintroduction and then will assess. A three-year budget is all they can afford at this time.

Comment: Lu: It is good to see Defender's proposal and discussion. Projects should never be carried out in isolation. Can create problems.

## **BREAK**

Eileen went through the guidance that was pre-mailed. The guidance was developed from a telephone brainstorming session between Eileen and Axel, and then incorporating Lu's specific suggestions. Then these ideas/comments were circulated among the subcommittee, and finally organized in a planning mode.

The Team and participants proceeded to go through the guidance document section by section. Eileen took suggested comments for changes and incorporated them into a second draft which was sent out on 12/3/99. Comments on second draft were due December 20. Literature