

Halloween Marks 5th Anniversary of Black-footed Ferret Discovery on Standing Rock Indian Reservation

Columbus- This October 31st and November 1st mark the 5th anniversary when Michael Gutzmer, Principal of New Century Environmental (NCE) of Columbus and Tom Murphy (now deceased) officially documented the first confirmed black footed ferret on the reservation according to Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Game & Fish Director Jeff Kelly. Three individual ferrets were observed. For the past year, Standing Rock Indian Reservation has been in the news because of the DAPL pipeline across the Missouri River and concerns with water quality.

Tribal biologists were conducting nocturnal spotlight surveys in October near the Grand River in South Dakota. The discovery site is only a few miles from where Hugh Glass, mountain man, was mauled by a grizzly bear in the early 1800's just off the Grand River. The movie, *The Revenant*, was testament to Hugh Glass and his incredible quest of survival after the attack by the bear.



Courtesy Photo (M. Gutzmer in 2012, Grand River, SD)

An un-official discovery of ferrets was made by NCE in Sioux County North Dakota in 2013, but no legible photographs could be taken. The discovery of the black footed ferret, *Mustela nigripes*, in 2012 by Gutzmer and investigators initiated interest in the small mammal populations as a prey base for ferrets as a dispersal factor in addition to the black tailed prairie dogs which are common on the reservation.

Tribal Wildlife Grants from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service allowed almost 7,000 trap nights of survey on two reservations. Study results indicated that wetlands and undisturbed grasslands were necessary for small mammal populations to flourish and rare species like the bushy tailed wood rat, meadow jumping mouse, hispid pocket mouse, prairie vole and masked shrew were documented during the effort.

The results of these mammal studies will be published in the *2018 Proceedings of the South Dakota Academy of Science, Volume 97*. The *Proceedings* also published an acoustic bat documentation of the Northern Long Eared Bat by Chris Shank, Kurt Tooley and Michael Gutzmer in 2016 on Standing Rock.

Currently NCE is working on a grant application to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation which focuses on preservation and improvement of all habitats (2.5 million acres) on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation.

The goal of this habitat plan funded by the NFWF's Northern Great Plains Initiative will be the improvement of grassland habitats, and especially the preservation and improvement of grassland/steppe habitats what are used for grazing and haying and ultimately wildlife conservation.

Currently overgrazing and loss of habitat are some of the greatest threats facing the reservation and many of the native species found there.