

SITLA and Little Horse Valley Conservation Banks (Utah)

I. OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND – SITLA

Location:	West of Cedar City, Iron County, Utah
Date established:	September 2005
Size of bank:	758 acres
Species:	Utah prairie dog (<i>Cynomys parvidens</i>) The species is currently present on the bank site.
Credits available:	All 154 credits have been sold. Additional credits may become available if the site is occupied by additional prairie dogs.
Interesting features:	Both this bank and Little Horse Valley are under one authorizing mechanism, the Iron County HCP (West Desert RU); species has been unpopular with ranchers and farmers because of crop damage and federal restrictions as enforced through the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND – LITTLE HORSE VALLEY

Location:	West Desert Recovery Unit, adjacent to BLM-administered lands in Iron County, Utah
Date established:	February 2010
Size of bank:	220 acres
Species:	Utah prairie dog (<i>Cynomys parvidens</i>) The species is not currently present on the bank site.
Credits available:	All 77 credits have been sold. Additional credits may become available if the site becomes occupied by prairie dogs.
Interesting features:	Established under a Memorandum of Agreement.

II. INTRODUCTION / SITE SELECTION

Most prairie dog habitat is on or adjacent to farm lands on private property. A portion of Utah prairie dog habitat is on private lands planned out for urban development. Conservation banks are able to mitigate losses of the habitat of the Utah prairie dog by permanently protecting other important habitat across the species range. The United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) uses conservation banking as a tool to proactively mitigate impacts to prairie dogs and to reach the USFWS's recovery goals. The USFWS approved the Iron County Habitat Conservation Plan (West Desert Recovery Unit) as the authorizing mechanism for using conservation banks to offset incidental take of the Utah prairie dog. The SITLA Conservation Bank and the Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank are two banks authorized under the Habitat Conservation Plan. Figure 1 shows two examples of the Utah prairie dog.



Figure 1. The Utah prairie dog (*Cynomys parvidens*).

SITLA Conservation Bank

SITLA Conservation Bank is located on Parker Mountain within the Awapa Plateau Recovery Unit, and was established in 2005 under a conservation banking agreement between Utah's School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) and the USFWS. SITLA is an independent state agency that manages 3.4 million acres of trust land for the benefit of public institutions, including state schools. The SITLA Conservation Bank contains approximately 758 acres of prairie dog habitat that SITLA enhanced through mechanical shrub removal, burning, and seeding. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) holds a conservation easement on the site.

Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank

The Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank (Little Horse) is a 220-acre parcel of land owned by Iron County. The property is west of Cedar City and is in the West Desert RU. Little

Horse was finalized through a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between Iron County and USFWS. The Utah Department of Natural Resources (UDNR) holds a conservation easement on this site. The purpose of the MOA and the associated conservation easement is to ensure, in perpetuity, the protection of the 220-acre parcel for conservation of the Utah prairie dog and its habitat.

III. SERVICE AREA DETERMINATION

SITLA Conservation Bank

The SITLA Conservation bank includes three parcels of land: Flossie Knoll at 254 acres, South Butte at 282 acres, and the Tanks at 222 acres. These parcels contain land occupied by or suitable for the Utah prairie dog. The FWS has evaluated them for use of conservation credits and agreed that the property provides biological values that support this agreement's conservation credits. Per the Iron County HCP, the service area for offsetting impacts to prairie dog habitat through SITLA Conservation Bank credits is all of Iron County.

Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank

While the Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank does not support active Utah prairie dog burrows at this time, it is surrounded by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. The property is also adjacent to the Minersville 3 Complex, a particularly large, persistent colony of Utah prairie dogs, which is in the West Desert Recovery Area. Like the SITLA Conservation Bank, the service area for offsetting impacts to prairie dog habitat through Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank is all of Iron County, under authority of the Iron County HCP.

IV. CREDIT DETERMINATION / METHODOLOGY

SITLA Conservation Bank

The banking agreement provides that the maximum number of credits potentially available in the SITLA Conservation Bank shall be equal to the number of acres preserved—758 credits. Credits were granted based on the bank meeting certain performance criteria. The initial number of credits equaled twice the number of adult prairie dogs observed in the two most recent spring counts. Additional credits become available in increments of 50 for each increase in 25 Utah prairie dogs that is sustained for two consecutive years. Each prairie dog taken in the Service Area requires at least a purchase of 2 bank credits. The number of prairie dogs a development takes will be calculated by using the highest spring adult count of the past five years, plus projected productivity. The bank's entire initial allotment of 154 credits was used to offset the loss of 15 acres of habitat and the take of 78 Utah prairie dogs due to development in Iron County. No additional credits have been granted to date.

Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank

Because there were no prairie dogs on the parcel, the credit calculations were based solely on area; each acre of habitat is one credit. Accordingly, the site had 220 credits. There is, however, a high mitigation ratio with respect to debiting. Depending on the quality of the prairie dog habitat at the impacted site, the mitigation ratio was 10:1 or 12:1. Thus, the 220 credits could be used to offset impacts of up to 22 acres of habitat occupied by prairie dogs in Iron County. The MOA does include incentives to lower mitigation ratios and grant additional credits if habitat improvements are done that cause the occupation of the parcel by prairie dogs.

V. FINANCIAL ASSURANCES

SITLA Conservation Bank

Per the conservation banking agreement, SITLA established a dedicated interest-bearing endowment fund, the income from which is to be used exclusively to fund the permanent management of the conservation bank lands. Based on the results of a Property Analysis Record (PAR analysis)—a software program designed by the Center for Natural Lands Management to determine the costs of management of lands held for conservation purposes—SITLA was required to deposit an endowment of \$80,980. SITLA agreed to make an initial deposit of \$58,000 and additional payments of \$100 per credit sold thereafter.

Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank

Like SITLA, there is a permanent conservation easement placed on this property, which is held by the UDWR. The memorandum of agreement did not provide for financial assurances or the long-term management of the Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank. This aspect of the bank was left between Iron County and UDNR. An endowment of \$7,500 was eventually established, but there is no long-term management agreement as of this date.

VI. MANAGEMENT (CURRENT & LONG TERM)

SITLA Conservation Bank

UDWR is the long-term manager of the SITLA Conservation Bank property. Under the conservation banking agreement, UDWR is required to provide the USFWS with an annual Property Management Report (PMR). The PMR should include a description of the status of the Utah prairie dogs on the property, the results of any biological monitoring conducted on the property, a description of the management activities taken on the property, a description of any problems encountered, and a description of future management activities for the coming year.

Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank

In the MOA, the County and USFWS both agreed to look for potential opportunities and funding for enhancement of vegetation on the parcel. Livestock grazing—the historic use of the property—was to continue, but the MOA stated that grazing would be managed in such a way as to not negatively impact the prairie dogs. Iron County agreed to enter into a livestock agreement with a permittee that will allow the permittee to graze the bank lands in conjunction with the neighboring BLM lands. The permittee will also be required to enter into an Exchange of Use Agreement with the BLM that will allow BLM to manage the grazing in conjunction with the adjacent BLM grazing permit. This arrangement was necessary because the bank parcel was unfenced and encompassed by public lands.

VII. LESSONS LEARNED

The SITLA and Little Horse Valley Conservation Banks demonstrate that the USFWS can work collaboratively with local partners to establish conservation banks on state and local government lands even in the case of unpopular species. In addition, the Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank illustrates that bank lands may still be able to be used for pre-existing activities. For example, grazing continues to be conducted on the Little Horse Valley Conservation Bank in accordance with the conservation easement. BLM manages this grazing as part of its overall management of the surrounding federal lands.

VIII. APPENDIX

Appendix

Service Area Map for SITLAA