



Legislation Text

File #: Res 2019-80, **Version:** 1

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING COOPERATIVE SERVICE AGREEMENT WITH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FOR RESTORATION AND WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Summary and Background Information:

A presentation regarding restoration activities including wildlife management, specifically prairie dogs in the Second Creek Open Space was provided by staff for City Council at the April 8, 2019 study session. In a subsequent City Council meeting, the restoration and specifically the management of prairie dogs was discussed during public comment and City Council directed staff to complete additional research on the restoration project. Staff met informally with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the United States Department of Agriculture and contracted with Smith Environmental and Engineering for additional evaluation of the Second Creek Open Space conditions resulting in the attached report. Smith Environmental and Engineering provides comprehensive environmental engineering and consulting services and the project manager for this project is an environmental scientist specializing in wetlands and regulatory permitting.

The Smith Environmental report gives information about the ecological sites present in the Second Creek Open Space as well as the soil types. Vegetation (and lack of vegetation) is discussed and a section on black-tailed prairie dogs is included before the restoration recommendations. Smith acknowledges that black-tailed prairie dogs are an important species but also that they can have negative effects on a landscape, especially one that has a history of disturbance, as the study area does. It is noted that in areas where many nonnative or undesirable species of vegetation occur (as is the case in this area) the presence of prairie dogs can lead to a weedy or nearly barren site and that has occurred in the Second Creek Open Space.

There are several restoration recommendations including determining goals, a timeline, budget and monitoring for desired outcomes. Many of these have already been discussed internally and with City Council. A weed management plan is recommended and it is noted that without prairie dog management, significant reduction in weed cover will not be achieved. Further, restoration activities in urban and semi-urban areas will have a very low rate of success with active prairie dog colonies on site and most natural resource managers in the Front Range do not attempt large-scale site restoration where prairie dogs occur. The report states that if an area necessitates aggressive revegetation, the prairie dogs will likely need to be removed until the desired vegetation is established. It is recommended that prairie dogs be either humanely removed and donated or burrow fumigation is conducted in the areas to be restored.

Staff Responsible (Department Head): Carolyn Keith

Staff Member Presenting: Mike Brown

Financial Impact: \$23,300 for initial contract with USDA for prairie dog management outlined in the USDA Wildlife Services Cooperative Service Agreement.

Funding Source: Operating budget

Staff Recommendation: Approval of the resolution authorizing the City Manager or his designee to execute the USDA Wildlife Services Cooperative Service Agreement. Due to the cost of removing prairie dogs and either relocating or donating them (several hundred dollars per prairie dog which would likely total over \$500,000 for the site) staff recommends burrow fumigation to ensure restoration success. If the prairie dogs are not managed in any way, restoration efforts cannot move forward due to an anticipated low rate of success.

Suggested Motion: Approval