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Contact

Karen Foerstel, 703-841-3932, kfoerstel@tnc.org

The Janos Grasslands, located in the northwestern corner of Chihuahua, Mexico, just south of the Arizona-New Mexico border, is one of the most biologically diverse and threatened landscapes in the vast Chihuahuan Desert.

The Janos grasslands provide critical habitat for numerous declining species, including the largest complex of black-tailed prairie dog colonies in the world. In addition, 50 species of mammals, 30 species of reptiles and 7 species of amphibians can be found in Janos, including the rare white-sided jackrabbit, kit fox, jaguarundi, pronghorn and even a small herd of free-ranging bison.

Black-footed ferrets, the most endangered mammal in North America, were recently successfully introduced in Janos, making it one of only a handful of sites where ferrets are found in the wild.

The Janos grasslands also provide important breeding, migration and wintering habitat for 222 species of birds. The area is believed to house the largest breeding population of burrowing owls in North America. The grasslands are also a refuge for ferruginous hawks, aplomado falcons, golden eagles, long-billed curlews, mountain plovers and a variety of sparrow species.

But the rich grasslands of Janos face serious threats from overgrazing and land conversion to agriculture. Overgrazing throughout the Janos region has caused shrubs like mesquite, Mormon tea and tree cholla to invade and overtake many grassland areas.

The increased extraction of ground water for irrigation is also threatening the grasslands and the wildlife that depend upon them for survival. The electrocution of raptors due to the introduction of power lines and the intentional poisoning of prairie dogs are also threatening the health of the Janos grasslands.

Because the grasslands are such an integral part of the ranching community in the Janos region, conservationists are working closely with local ranchers to find ways to protect the natural landscape and their traditional way of life.

The partnership between conservationists and ranchers includes community ranching networks, grass banking, and educational outreach to develop sustainable management practices for livestock grazing.