

# Plains spotted skunk

*Spilogale putorius interrupta*

## Guidelines for Landowners Using Conservation Practices

Missouri Department of  
Conservation

Common name ▪ Plains spotted skunk  
Scientific name ▪ *Spilogale putorius interrupta*  
State status ▪ Endangered  
Federal status ▪ None

### Ecology

Plains spotted skunks historically occurred statewide in Missouri, and recent surveys suggest they may still occur in all regions of the state, but nowhere are they likely abundant. They have a smaller, more slender body than striped skunks. Plains spotted skunks typically can be identified by a white spot or square patch on the forehead, a solid black tail and four to six broken white stripes extending from the neck along the back and sides. Spotted skunks inhabit open prairies more than striped skunks do, although the two may be found in many similar habitats. The den of a spotted skunk is customarily in the ground, but occasionally is located in a stump, refuse dump, cave, rock pile, crevice in a cliff, farm building, wood pile or haystack. Spotted skunks hunt in fields during good winter weather and forage in barns or similarly protected locations during wet or very cold weather. Spotted skunks mate in late winter and the young are born from April to July; possibly a second litter is produced in late summer. A litter usually contains five young. Plains spotted skunks are nocturnal and omnivorous in nature; they will eat insects, mice, rats, some birds and vegetables.

### Reasons for Decline

The plains spotted skunk was formerly most common in western Missouri, but their populations began declining in the mid-1900's. The decrease may be related to the changes in agriculture that stressed clean farming, thereby leaving little cover for skunks to live in. It also is possible that

increased pesticide use in agricultural areas has affected insect abundance, which plains spotted skunks commonly eat.



### Recommendations

Plains spotted skunks contribute to the natural control of insects and rodents and should be considered an asset around farms. Promote land management activities that restore or maintain native plant communities, especially native grasslands and early successional habitats. Avoid clearing possible den sites.

Consider the balance between adverse and beneficial practices when determining the overall effect of a conservation practice.

### Beneficial Practices

- Restore or maintain areas with a diverse mixture of native warm-season grasses and forbs or with a mix of wildlife-friendly cool-season grasses, such as redtop or timothy, mixed with legumes. Native prairie should be maintained or restored whenever possible.
- Controlling invasive plants in habitats where this species occurs.
- Implement a patch burn grazing system or prescribed grazing system on native prairie or other wildlife-friendly grasslands where this species occurs. For a prescribed grazing system to benefit this species grasslands should be managed for greater plant diversity and heterogeneous stands of vegetation.

- Burn fields if needed to control heavy litter accumulation or brush invasion on a three-five year interval rotation; burning should be done prior to March 15 or after July 15. Avoid impacting greater than 75% of the practice acres annually.
- Develop and maintain edge habitat, early successional forest or other similar habitats through edge feathering, temporary forest openings, shrub plantings or other similar practices.
- Planting or maintaining hedgerows or windbreaks.

### **Adverse Practices**

- Burning or clearing hedge rows, woody draws, brush piles and downed logs or trees where skunks may be present.
- Destruction or degradation of prairies or open fields.
- Unmanaged application of pesticides, animal waste or fertilizers that destroy or degrade habitats that support populations of this species.
- Establishing invasive vegetation, such as tall fescue, Bermuda grass or sericea lespedeza on sites or nearby where it could spread into the native plant community, and thus degrade or destroy habitat for this species.
- Unmanaged application of pesticides, animal waste or fertilizers that destroy or degrade habitats that support populations of this species.
- Uncontrolled livestock access that destroys or degrades habitat structure.
- When prescribed burning, mowing, haying or other disturbances occur on grassland acres between May 1 and July 15 and more than 75% of the practice acres are disturbed.

### **Legal**

The Missouri Department of Conservation prepared these guidelines for conservation practices with assistance from other state agencies, contractors, and others to provide guidance to those people who wish to voluntarily act to protect wildlife and habitat.

Compliance with these management guidelines is not required by the Missouri wildlife and forestry law or by any regulation of the Missouri Conservation Commission. Other federal, state or local laws may affect construction practices.

“State Endangered Status” is determined by the Missouri Conservation Commission under constitutional authority, and specific requirements for impacts to such species are expressed in the Missouri Wildlife Code, rule 3 CSR 10-4.111.

### **Information Contacts**

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