

Explosive technique approved to kill prairie dogs

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GUNNISON — Montrose Regional Airport has a new tool for exterminating prairie dogs.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife Commission approved the Rodenator at Thursday's meeting. The device combines propane and oxygen, which is pumped into the burrow and detonated.

Jeff Precup, Montrose Regional Airport operations manager, said after the meeting that prairie dogs are a major problem at the airport. Because the facility is located within the city limits, it is limited in the methods it can use to reduce the rodent's numbers.

Precup said the new method will help the airport increase safety because it can limit the number of prairie dogs on the runways.

Ron Dent, a representative of the Colorado Airport Operators, said airports around the state could benefit from the tool. He runs the La Plata County Airport and said prairie dogs are a problem.

"We can shoot the dumb ones, but the smart ones duck when they know we are coming," Dent said.

Before approving the Rodenator, Wildlife Commissioner Robert Bray said he supported the technique but wanted people to be properly trained. He said the device has the potential to cause significant damage.

"I just have visions of Caddyshack and Bill Murray," Bray said.

Assistant Attorney General Tom Monahan said the commission could direct staff to develop rules for when the device can be used.

"It is probably good for the division to get out in front of this issue," he said.

The commission chose not to follow Bray's suggestion and approved the technique without stipulations.

Suzanne O'Niel, Colorado Wildlife Federation executive director, said she

opposed the Rodenator. She said the device could indiscriminately kill other animals and specifically cited the burrowing owl, saying it could be inside prairie dog tunnels.

Commissioner Rick Enstrom said the Rodenator was for professionals and cannot be used for recreational purposes.

“The Rodenator isn’t a recreational method,” Enstrom said.

Rancher Dean Wingfield said the prairie dog population is growing in Colorado and farmers and ranchers can benefit from the Rodenator.

“We are looking for anything you can do to help us,” Wingfield said.

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