

Wild Wednesday 1 July 2020

It's Wild Wednesday in the Granite Dells. This week's honorees are the little rodents that call the Granite Dells home. Recently I have photographed Cliff Chipmunks, Rock Squirrels, and a cute little Pocket Gopher, and a couple weeks ago I got a nice portrait of a young Gunnison's Prairie Dog near Paulden.

Why feature three locals and one "outsider"? It's because Prairie Dogs used to live all around the Dells but were wiped out as settlers moved cattle onto the ranges and thought they were competitors for grass. In fact, prairie dogs are keystone species that create conditions that favor much higher diversity of wildlife. With prairie dogs gone locally, badgers, burrowing owls, and other critters suffered and often disappeared. Now with the proliferation of houses in the grasslands, especially when the land is mass-graded and all life is obliterated in thoughtless biogenocide, our Pronghorns are disappearing too. Where will it stop?

The value of extensive interconnected open space, as we are striving for as a Granite Dells Regional Park and Preserve, includes intact ecosystems with most of the living parts, such as our cute but very important rodents. These little animals are links in food webs that support owls, hawks, eagles, bobcats, coyotes, and much more.

While the values to us humans of a regional park and preserve are generally obvious, we must recognize that our wild neighbors need these protected areas too.



