

## Mammals Podcast Transcript

Addison Fisher (A) - Welcome once again to the Prairie City podcast. My name is Addison and today I am joined by Peter Ostroskie (P), Interpreter 1 at Prairie City, and I'm Max (M), happy to be here again guys.

A - Alright Max, so I know we've covered your qualifications and your position, why don't you go ahead and remind us of them, give us a quick lowdown.

M - Sure, so my title is environmental scientist, I work at Prairie City State Vehicle Recreation Area and Clay Pit State Vehicle Recreation Area for California State Parks.

A - So the last two times we interviewed you we talked about the snakes and birds of the park. I was hoping today we could focus on the mammals of the park.

M - Sounds great.

A - How many different types of mammals are there in the park?

M - We have a few different types. First, we have small mammals, there are a bunch of different types of small mammals, like deer mice, and voles. Then, we see a few different types of larger mammals in the park too. Like coyotes, bobcats, and black tailed deer. There are also black tailed jackrabbits and brush rabbits, cotton tail rabbits. This area is also potential habitat for mountain lions. We see them in the area every once in a while, but we have yet to record one at Prairie City.

A - Okay, so what are the different types of environments, or the special type of environments that some of these mammals live in.

M - For the small animals, like the mice and voles, they typically dig holes into the ground and burrow into the ground. Coyotes and bobcats, on the other hand, make dens, sometimes those are abandon holes from other animals, sometimes they are digging out their own new dens for their families. That is what you will mostly see for the mammals here. Also, for black tailed deer, you will see bedding down in the grass, typically for their home site

A - Okay. With the different sorts of mammals, what are their typical diets per species that are recognizable.

M - For the bobcat, it eats a lot rodents, but it also munches often, especially the larger ones, on rabbits. So, both the black tail jack rabbit and the brush rabbit. Coyotes will hunt various rodents and squirrels, whereas the small mammals are typically herbivores, they will eat grasses, sedges and plants.

A - So you have mentioned bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions. How dangerous are these mammals?

M - The mountain lion can be dangerous, again, we have yet to see one at Prairie City. But this is potential habitat for one. But even those there are very few examples of human danger. It

will sound cliché but the most dangerous mammal is the human. So, watch out for other riders on those trails. The other large mammals at Prairie City, bobcats, coyotes, black tail deer, they rarely pose any danger. The most dangerous mammalian animal we'll have in this park, is actually probably the smallest, the deer mouse. Its droppings can really be an issue due to the spreading of the hantavirus, which is a virus with the potential for major complications, even occasional fatalities.

A - Wow, okay. How many animal and human attacks have happened in the United States with these specific animals.

M - I remember reading once that either California fish and wildlife put out this stat before. Roughly one person gets bit by a coyote per year in California. So, if you think we have about 40 million people in California, that gives you about a one in 40 million chance of getting bit by a coyote each year. There are very few bobcat attacks as well. The mountain lion attacks that do happen, they are typically children, and they are rare. There is only a couple a year at that. The mostly likely animal attack at Prairie City, would most defiantly be from a domesticated pet dog. Of which, there are a million bites a year in American. So, that really is your likeliest chance of having any issues with animals in the park.

A - So it would be fair to say, that it is pretty safe to come out here, regarding the animals.

M - Most definitely. Most people are not scared of their dogs in their homes. So, if that is the most likely chance you have of being hurt by an animal at Prairie City you should not be worried about coming out here at all.

A - Alright. How do we recognize that some of these animals might be nearby.

M - If you are lucky you might see some tracks. Especially if there was a recent rain. Coyotes and other canines show claw marks in their tracks. Bobcats and other felines, whose tracks are relatively similar size to coyotes, they do not show those claw marks. You can also hear coyotes howling. Especially if you are at the park after dark, so that can be quite enjoyable.

A - Do these animals have any recognizable features?

M - Yeah they do. A bobcat is about twice the size of a domesticated cat, with a short stubby tail. In contrast to a mountain lion, which is about two or three times the size of a bobcat and has a very long tail, about the same length of its body. Coyotes typically look like a scraggly dog with a long bushy tail. Black tailed deer are a sub-species of the mule deer, which is found throughout California and has what you would expect, a black mark on its tail.

A - With all these animals in the park, what would you say would be the best way to ride our OHV's safely around them.

M - If you see a large mammal, stop your vehicle, give the animal some space, and it will leave you alone. It will almost definitely run away. With rodents, make sure you wash your hands when you think you might have encountered rodent droppings. the hantavirus from mouse and rat droppings, is the most likely chance of anyone getting sick or having any issues. So make sure to wash your hands if you think you may have encountered any rodent droppings at the park.

P - One other thing to add into that is for our riders. Please do not chase the animals with your vehicle. I know that sounds like something that is pretty apparent, but making sure the animals has space and able to away from you. How would you feel if a 250 pound person on a motorized thing came chasing after you. That is another really important thing about the animals here in the park, I think. Right Max.

M - You are definitely right about that Peter.

A - With that in mind, how do we minimize our impact on these animal habitats?

M - The biggest thing I would say, is to please stay on trail. Staying on established trails ensures efficient natural habitat for mammals at Prairie City. Which is grassland, shrub, to tree cover, to hide from or to hunt from. Depending on which animal they are. You can also make sure not to litter and maintain your spark arrester. We do not want any unwanted fires that could cause devastation in the park. So, maintain your bike properly and have fun while you are out here.

A - Is there anything else you think we should know about the mammals in the park?

M - The mammals of Prairie City can coexist with riding opportunities at the park. I know some people hear me say bobcat or mountain lion, and it can make people fearful, but understand that these animals very, very rarely have any kind of negative interactions with humans. By using Tread Lightly principals and staying on trail, we, on our hand, the humans, can make sure to encourage wildlife to enjoy Prairie City as much as we do.

A - Now, I have a two part question for you. What is your favorite thing about your job?

M - My favorite thing about my job is how much I get to work with other members of our staff. Whether it is the interpreters, maintenance staff, rangers, admin or superintendents. We get to work on really comprehensive projects that make improvements to the land. I love being able to make improvements to the land with rehabilitation and restoration projects. Where we can see a hillside that has had some issues with erosions maybe, we will temporarily close that area, put sediment back on the hillside, revegetate it with hydro seed and hydro mulch. Then open it back up to our riders, after the restoration process. That's probably what I enjoy the most.

A - The second part of that is, what is your favorite thing about Prairie City?

M - Prairie City I think is just an excellent multi-use OHV park. You come out here on a Saturday or Sunday and you will see people on the dirt oval track, go carts, jeeps and ATV, motorcycle and mountain bike races. The amount of different activities for families, for adults, for everyone involved, who loves OHV, is just enormous. I think we have some beautiful areas and animals here as well. I have been really happy to have had the time to work here. I am thankful.

A - Well thank you for joining us. Once again my name is Addison and I am here with, (P) Peter Ostroskie, Interpreter 1 at Prairie City. (A) And we were joined by Max who is an environmental scientist here at Prairie City.

M - Thank you so much again guys, always fun.