This is Dr. Paulette Ford.

Dr. Ford is a scientist who studies animals. She studies how animals live in their **environment**.

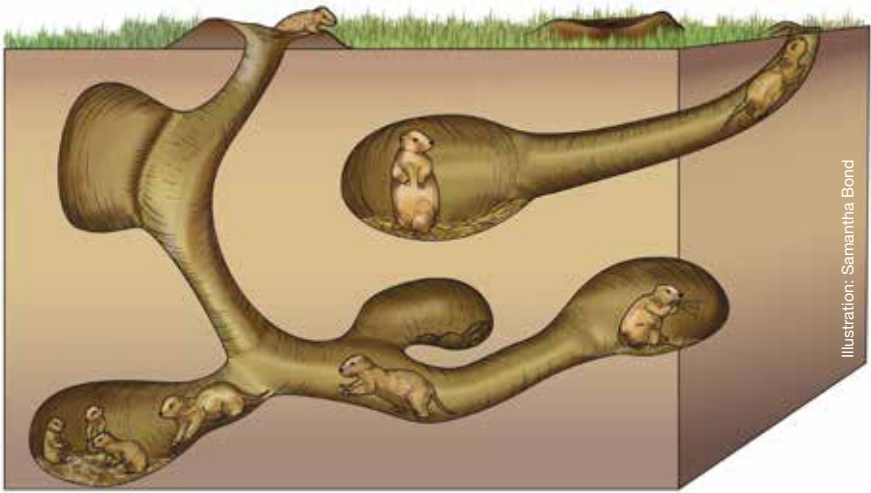Dr. Ford loved to explore and play outside
when she was young.

She wanted to be an explorer when she grew up.

Photo: Paulette Ford

Dr. Ford explores the Great Wall of China.

Dr. Ford closely **observes** things. She likes to find patterns in the world around her.

Like Dr. Ford, these boys closely observe things. They look for patterns in the world around them.

Dr. Ford likes to ask questions about our world. With another scientist, Dr. Ford asked a question about prairie dog **habitat**.

Dr. Ford

Ms. Archuleta

Prairie dogs are a type of ground squirrel. Prairie dogs live in grassland environments. They build **burrows** under the ground. See page 4 to see what a burrow looks like.

Dr. Ford knew that prairie dogs help other animals. Prairie dog burrows provide habitat for other animals. Prairie dogs also serve as food for some animals.

Some of the animals helped by prairie dogs include ferrets, eagles, hawks, and buffalo.

By providing habitat or serving as food for other animals, prairie dogs help the prairie environment to stay healthy.

Before many people lived near prairies, prairie fires sometimes burned. Following these fires, new grasses grew on the prairie. The new grasses provided food for many animals, including prairie dogs.

Green grass provides food for prairie dogs.

Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

People began to put out the prairie fires. They thought putting out the fires was the best thing to do.

With fire, the prairie grasses would grow again and provide food for prairie dogs.

Without fire, tall and **dense** grasses grew on the prairies.

Prairie dogs do not dig their burrows under areas with tall and dense grasses. Tall and dense grasses block their view of **predators**.

Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

With taller and denser grasses, the prairie dogs had fewer areas in which to live.

Dr. Ford and Ms. Archuleta thought about the prairie fires. They wondered if prairie fires would help prairie dogs. Prairie fires might reduce the amount of tall and dense grasses on the prairie.

The firefighter sets fire to the prairie on purpose. The firefighter keeps the fire under control.

Dr. Ford and Ms. Archuleta counted the number of prairie dog burrows in areas that had been burned. They also counted the number of burrows in areas that had not been burned.

Then, they compared the two numbers.

Prairie dogs can enter and leave their burrow from many different spots. How many of these spots do you see?

The scientists observed that prairie dogs built more burrows in areas that had been burned.

Following a prairie fire, new grass grows. The grass is short but provides food for prairie dogs.

The scientists learned that prairie fires improve prairie dog habitat.

Prairie dogs can look for predators because the grass is short.

Dr. Ford helps animals by studying them and their environment.

What kind of animal do you like to study?

This girl likes to study animals and their environment.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- Name two ways that you can help animals.

- The scientists learned that prairie fires help prairie dogs. Name at least one way the fires help prairie dogs.

- Dr. Ford worked with another scientist. Tell about one time when you worked with another person.

- Dr. Ford likes to ask and answer questions. Why do you think it is important to ask and answer questions?

Glossary:

burrow (**bər**-ō): Underground tunnels built by prairie dogs for shelter and protection.

dense (**den(t)s**): Closeness or crowding together of parts.

environment (in **vī** rə(n) mənt): The conditions that affect the growth and health of someone or something.

habitat (**ha**-bə-tat): The place where an animal or plant lives or grows.

observe (əb-**zərv**): To watch something.

predator (**pred**-ct-ər): An animal that eats other animals.