



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Ecological Services  
Colorado Field Office  
P.O. Box 25486, DFC (65412)  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0486

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
ES/CO: T&E/PMJM/Block Clearance  
TAILS 65412-2012-TA-0078

FEB 8 2012

Kirsta Scherff-Norris  
Wildlife Biologist  
Colorado Springs Utilities  
P. O. Box 1103, Mail Code 940  
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80947-0940

Dear Kirsta Scherff-Norris:

This responds to your letter of November 10, 2011 requesting a "Block Clearance Zone" covering portions of Monument, Cottonwood, and Sand Creeks in El Paso County, Colorado. The Service has reviewed your proposal under authority conferred to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) by the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

The Service concurs with your conclusion that the proposed exclusion area, as modified in your letter of November 11, 2011, meets the criteria for designation as a Block Clearance Zone for Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*). Our concurrence is based on the information provided in the April 21, 2011 Report viz.:

- Between 1997 and 2008 there has been 31 negative presence/absence surveys south of Woodmen Road
- No PMJM have ever been documented south of Woodmen Road except for a single PMJM on Monument Creek and intensive monitoring following for eight years demonstrated that no PMJM were moving down Monument Creek or Cottonwood Creek
- All three major drainages that connect north of Woodmen Road to the south have already received Block Clearances indicating that they are not viable transit corridors and thus all habitat south of Woodmen Road has been isolated
- 234 habitat clearances have been approved within this area documenting the high level of disturbance and confirming that development has established many barriers to movement for PMJM south of Woodmen Road
- All significant drainages have all be evaluated along their entire length to ensure that no potentially occupied habitat has been missed

Therefore the mapped area is designated as a Block Clearance Zone.

In designating a block clearance zone, the Service eliminates the need for individuals or agencies to coordinate with the Service prior to conducting activities in habitats that otherwise would be deemed to have the potential to support Preble's. The establishment of this block clearance zone

is based on the likely absence of Preble's within the area, and it appears to be little likelihood that any of the area would be of importance in any future plan to recover the species. Should Preble's be discovered within the block clearance zone it would be subject to full protection under the Act and the Service would consider modification of the zone.

This block clearance includes the areas currently covered by the Monument, Cottonwood, and Sand Creek block exclusions. Therefore this exclusion eliminates the need for separate block exclusions. It has become clear that Preble's occupy many drainages north of Woodmen Road (runs East-West) but do not exist to the south. With 15 years of negative data and having thoroughly searched for potential habitat throughout the area south of Woodmen Road, there is sufficient evidence to support a block exclusion for all riparian areas within the CSU Service Area that are south of Woodmen Road, with some exceptions (see map). Further, the three major drainages that flow from north of Woodmen Road to south of Woodmen Road (Monument, Cottonwood, and Sand Creeks) have all received block clearance exclusions so it is consistent to clear this remaining area.

Effective the date of this letter, the block clearance zone will be effective for three years, or until a regional habitat conservation plan for the area is approved by the Service, whichever comes first. After three years the Service will review the clearance, any additional information, and may renew the clearance as deemed appropriate. Based on additional information, the clearance zone may be expanded or adjusted periodically. We will have maps of the block clearance zone available on our web site (<http://www.r6.fws.gov/preble>) and at our office. We will also have the supporting data and summaries of the trapping surveys available as part of the administrative record for this project.

The Service emphasizes that while wetlands and riparian habitats within the block clearance zone are not likely to support Preble's, they should be conserved and enhanced for other values including fish and wildlife habitat, flood control, and maintenance of water quality.

Please supply Craig Hansen with the appropriate SHAPE files to enable us to reproduce the block clearance map on the web site. Also you may contact Adam Misztal, of the Colorado Field Office for further assistance at (303) 236-4753 or at email: [adam\\_misztal@fws.gov](mailto:adam_misztal@fws.gov).

Sincerely,



Susan C. Linner  
Colorado Field Supervisor

cc: Pete Plage  
Alison Michael  
Craig Hansen