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Revised Critical Habitat Designated for Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced that it will designate approximately 411 miles of rivers and streams and 34,935 acres of streamside habitat in seven Colorado counties as critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the threatened Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others.

This revision to the Service's previous critical habitat designation adds an additional 177 miles of rivers and streams and 14,255 acres of adjacent habitat.

"We're happy to announce the designation of revised critical habitat for Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse," said Steve Guertin, regional director of the Mountain-Prairie Region. "This carefully determined designation targets the habitat most vital to survival of the species."

Areas designated as critical habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse in Boulder, Broomfield, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, and Teller counties include riparian corridors along rivers and streams, adjacent uplands, and areas that provide connectivity between and within populations. Most of the critical habitat occurs on lands that are privately or federally owned, with the remaining areas under state and local municipal ownership.

Approximately 550 acres identified as essential to the conservation of the species have been excluded from critical habitat because they are covered by approved Habitat Conservation Plans that provide

greater benefits. In addition, approximately 3,300 acres of Department of Defense lands are not included in the final critical habitat designation, because they are covered by approved Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans.

Improved mapping technology enabled the Service to eliminate some areas from the proposed critical habitat because they do not contain habitat considered essential to the conservation of the species. These areas include homes, roads, airport runways, and other man-made structures. Mapping is still not precise enough to exclude all such areas, and some of these locations may remain within the final designation. However, even if such developed areas fall within the boundaries of designated critical habitat, they are still not considered actual critical habitat under the provisions of the ESA.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

A new economic analysis of the effects of critical habitat, also released today, identifies the potential incremental cost of the critical habitat designation at approximately \$2.66 million to \$5.98 million per year over the next 20 years. The incremental cost is the estimated economic impact due solely to the critical habitat designation, above and beyond baseline conservation costs associated with listing the Preble's meadow jumping mouse under the ESA. Potential costs are associated with additional requirements under Section 7 of the ESA for proposed projects where there is a Federal nexus. Potential impacts related to residential and commercial development projects account for 96 percent of the estimate.

In June 2003, the Service published a rule designating critical habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse in Colorado. In July 2007, the Service announced it would reexamine the critical habitat designation due to concerns that a former Department of the Interior official inappropriately influenced

the outcome resulting in the exclusion of lands in Boulder, Douglas, and El Paso Counties. Stream reaches in these counties were excluded from the 2003 designation based on Habitat Conservation Plans under development; however, none of the plans were near completion at that time. In October 2009, the Service proposed to revise the amount of critical habitat designated for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse in those counties and examine whether any exclusions were appropriate. The designation of critical habitat in these three counties represents the greatest revision from the 2003 rule.

This final rule was prepared pursuant to the Service's voluntary reexamination of the critical habitat designation and satisfies the settlement agreement resulting from a lawsuit challenging the 2003 designation filed against the Service by the City of Greeley.

A copy of the final rule, economic analysis, and other information about the Preble's meadow jumping mouse is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/preble/> or by contacting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Ecological Services Office at 303-236-4773.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We're working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.