

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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For Immediate Release:

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DESIGNATES CRITICAL HABITAT IN COLORADO AND WYOMING FOR THE PREBLE'S MEADOW JUMPING MOUSE

Today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated critical habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse, a threatened species, along the front range in Colorado and Wyoming.

As a listed species under the Endangered Species Act, the Preble's meadow jumping mouse is already protected wherever it occurs and Federal agencies are required to consult on any action they take that might affect the species.

"The impact to landowners in Colorado and Wyoming from this critical habitat designation is expected to be minimal," said Ralph Morgenweck, director of the Service's mountain-prairie region. "This designation encompasses areas that are known to be occupied by the mouse, and are already subject to consultation under the Endangered Species Act."

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), a relatively small rodent with an extremely long tail, large hind feet and long hind legs, inhabits the foothills in southeastern Wyoming. Its habitat extends southward along the eastern edge of the front range of Colorado to Colorado Springs. It has a distinct, dark, broad stripe on its back that runs from head to tail and is bordered on either side by gray to orange-brown fur.

In Wyoming, approximately 125 miles of rivers and streams, which run through approximately 10,540 acres of streambanks, were designated as critical habitat in four counties (Albany, Converse, Laramie and Platte). In Colorado, 234 miles of rivers and streams and approximately 20,680 acres of streambanks in four counties (Douglas, Jefferson, Larimer and Teller) were designated as critical habitat. Based on the best information available, all lands designated as critical habitat are occupied by the Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

Three major river drainages in Wyoming and Colorado are known to harbor the Preble's meadow jumping mouse. These include the North Platte River drainage in Wyoming, the South Platte River drainage in Wyoming and Colorado, and the Arkansas River drainage in Colorado. Along the waterways designated as critical habitat, a set distance outward from the river or stream edge was included within the designation, varying with the size of the waterway and

approximate average flood plain width. This distance ranges from approximately 360 feet to 460 feet outward from the edge of a river or stream.

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse was listed as a threatened species in 1998. By law, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required to designate critical habitat for a species when it is listed as threatened or endangered, unless it is not prudent or not determinable.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act identifying geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations. 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.

This critical habitat designation was completed in response to a lawsuit filed by the Biodiversity Legal Foundation, several other conservation groups and several individuals.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife management areas.

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse is closely associated with riparian ecosystems, which are those narrow areas of land that are adjacent to streams, creeks or rivers. Habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation resulting from urban development, flood control, water development, agriculture and other human uses negatively impact the survival of this mouse.

The riparian areas at the U.S. Air Force Academy and F.E. Warren Air Force Base were not designated as critical habitat because they are adequately protected by an approved management plan. Also not designated as critical habitat was Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site because it is slated to become a national wildlife refuge in the near future.

The Service has excluded from the designation lands covered by several approved and pending HCPs, all in Colorado. These are: the El Paso County HCP, the Boulder County HCP, the Douglas County HCP, the Denver Water HCP; the Lefever Property HCP in Black Forest, and the Dahle Property HCP in Colorado Springs.

The Endangered Species Act requires that the Service evaluate the economic impacts of

designating critical habitat before finalizing the boundaries. The Service may exclude any area from designation if it determines that the benefits of such exclusion outweigh the benefits of designation – unless it determines that failure to designate the area as critical habitat will result in the extinction of the species. A draft economic analysis and draft environmental assessment were made available for public review and comment before the critical habitat designation was finalized. An addendum to the economic analysis and final environmental assessment for the rule are now available.

A draft recovery plan for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse is being developed in cooperation with a recovery team that includes representatives from the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department; the U.S. Air Force; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and representatives from the environmental, agricultural, business and industry communities. Information from the draft recovery plan was used to help determine critical habitat.

Copies of the final rule designating critical habitat, as well as the draft economic analysis, the addendum to the economic analysis and the final environmental assessment for the rule, are available from the Service's Ecological Services office at P.O. Box 25486, Denver, CO 80225-0046 or 755 Parfet St., Suite 361, Lakewood, CO 80215 or may be obtained from the Service's Web site: <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/preble>.

Additional information on the Preble's meadow jumping mouse can be found on the Web site, <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/preble>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our home page at <http://www.fws.gov>