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Questions and Answers Regarding the Revised Endangered Species Listing for the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is removing Endangered Species Act protections for Preble's meadow jumping mouse populations in Wyoming and amending the listing for Preble's to indicate the subspecies remains protected as a threatened species in the Colorado portion of its range.

The Service has determined the best commercial and scientific information available demonstrates that the Preble's meadow jumping mouse is a valid subspecies and should not be removed from the list of threatened and endangered species based upon taxonomic revision.

Why does the Service believe Preble's populations in Wyoming do not need the protection of the Endangered Species Act?

In Wyoming, Preble's populations appear to be much more widely distributed than previously assumed, while current and future impacts to the subspecies' habitat and range appear limited. Land use across Preble's habitat in Wyoming is dominated by agriculture, mostly haying and grazing. Continuation of these long-standing activities does not appear to pose a significant threat to existing Preble's populations. There is also no indication that these agricultural practices are likely to change in the foreseeable future in ways that would affect Preble's populations. A low projected human population growth rate is predicted for the four Wyoming counties (Albany, Laramie, Platte, and Converse) that support Preble's populations. Consequently, few of the development-related impacts occurring in Colorado's portion of the Front Range urban corridor will impact Preble's populations in Wyoming.

Why does the Service believe Preble's populations remain threatened in Colorado?

The primary factor affecting Preble's populations in Colorado is the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of suitable habitat. Much of Preble's riparian habitat in Colorado has been severely altered or destroyed by development-related activities. Current and future trends including increases in human population and rural development indicate the loss and alteration of riparian habitat will continue in much of the Preble's range. The Service believes that without the protection of the Endangered Species Act, most of the habitat could be lost or altered in the foreseeable future. The loss of Preble's populations in Colorado would meaningfully decrease the ability to conserve the subspecies.

Does this decision affect existing protections for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse in Colorado?

No. The Preble's meadow jumping mouse will continue to be protected as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in Colorado. Existing protections will be

continued for the mouse, including designated critical habitat and a special rule under Section 4(d) of the Act that exempts certain ongoing activities (rodent control, agricultural activities, landscape maintenance, and current use of existing water rights) from liability under the Act.

How can the Service protect the Preble's in only a portion of its range?

The Endangered Species Act gives the Service the authority to protect a species throughout all of its range, or within a significant portion of its range. After the Service determined that the Preble's meadow jumping mouse does not meet the definition of threatened or endangered in all of its range, the agency evaluated whether there are any significant portions of the subspecies' range in which it is in danger of extirpation or is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. A portion of a subspecies' range is significant for the purposes of the Endangered Species Act if it is part of the current range of that subspecies and supports populations that contribute meaningfully to its ability to maintain its genetic diversity and viability, and to withstand random and catastrophic events. The Service believes that the loss of Preble's populations in Colorado as a result of habitat loss and modification would meaningfully decrease the ability to conserve the entire subspecies. Based on its importance to the conservation of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse, the Service has determined that the Colorado portion of the range constitutes a significant portion of the mouse's range. The Service is amending the endangered species listing for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse to indicate that the subspecies remains threatened in the Colorado portion of its range.

Where are Preble's found?

Preble's populations are found along the foothills in southeastern Wyoming, southward along the eastern edge of the Front Range of Colorado to Colorado Springs in El Paso County, Colorado.

In Colorado, Preble's populations have been recently documented in portions of Boulder, Douglas, El Paso, Elbert, Jefferson, Larimer, and Weld counties.

In Wyoming, Preble's are found in Albany, Laramie, Platte, and Converse counties.

What is the determination regarding the taxonomy of Preble's?

The Service has determined that the best scientific and commercial data available supports the conclusion that Preble's is a valid subspecies. Specifically, the Preble's meadow jumping mouse's geographic isolation from other subspecies of meadow jumping mice has resulted in the accretion of genetic differentiation that meets or exceeds numerous, widely accepted subspecies definitions.

When Preble's was listed in 1998, it was widely accepted as a valid subspecies by the scientific community. When the Service proposed to delist Preble's in 2005, heavy emphasis was given to unpublished genetic research which indicated that Preble's was

not a valid subspecies. As a result of peer reviews of this research and public comments on the proposed rule, several issues potentially critical to the final decision were identified, prompting the Service to commission the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct an independent genetic analysis of several jumping mouse subspecies.

Because the conclusions of these two bodies of research differed significantly, the Service contracted with Sustainable Ecosystems Institute (SEI) to convene an expert panel of scientists to review all of the available science regarding the taxonomy of Preble's. In particular, the panel was asked to analyze, assess, and weigh the reasons why the data, findings, and conclusions of these two bodies of research differed. The final SEI report supported the original description of Preble's as a valid subspecies. The full SEI report is available at:
http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/preble/Prebles_SEI_report.pdf

Are conservation actions being developed to help recover Preble's populations?

In June 2000, the Service designated a Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse Recovery Team composed of scientists and various stakeholders. In 2003, the team produced the first draft of a recovery plan, a draft that included recommended recovery actions to help ensure the long-term existence of the subspecies. That draft is available at the Service's Mountain-Prairie Region website: <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/preble/RECOVERY/RECOVERYindex.htm>. In 2004, the Service received petitions from the State of Wyoming's Office of the Governor and Coloradans for Water Conservation and Development seeking removal of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse from the list of threatened and endangered species. Following receipt of the petitions, the work of the recovery team was suspended until a decision on those petitions was made by the Service.

Since the goal of the ESA is to recover imperiled species, the Service intends to ask the Recovery Team to resume their work to develop a final recovery plan to help improve the status of Preble's populations throughout their range.