

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
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Revised Critical Habitat Proposed for the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed to revise the amount of critical habitat designated for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse in Colorado where it is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In total, the Service is proposing to designate approximately 418 miles of rivers and streams and 39,142 acres of adjacent habitat.

The proposed revision would add an additional 184 miles of rivers and streams and 18,462 acres of adjacent habitat to the existing critical habitat designation in Colorado. The proposed revised critical habitat is located in Boulder, Broomfield, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer and Teller Counties.

Critical habitat is being proposed only for those specific areas determined to be essential to the conservation of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse, using the best scientific information currently available. Critical habitat is a term in the ESA used to identify geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management 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.

For this proposed revision, the Service identified habitat units that include river and stream reaches, and adjacent floodplains and uplands, that are within the known geographic and elevational range of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse and are believed to currently support this species.

Areas included in the proposal are:

Unit 1: North Fork Cache la Poudre River, Larimer County;

Unit 2: Cache la Poudre River, Larimer County;

Unit 3: Buckhorn Creek, Larimer County;

Unit 4: Cedar Creek, Larimer County;
Unit 5: South Boulder Creek, Boulder County;
Unit 6: Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge, Jefferson and Broomfield Counties;
Unit 7: Ralston Creek, Jefferson County;
Unit 8: Cherry Creek, Douglas County;
Unit 9: West Plum Creek, Douglas County;
Unit 10: Upper South Platte River, Jefferson and Douglas Counties
Unit 11: Monument Creek, El Paso County

Areas proposed as critical habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse provide the following beneficial habitat elements: a pattern of dense riparian vegetation; adjacent floodplains and vegetated uplands with limited human disturbance; areas that provide connectivity between and within populations; and the necessary hydrology to create and maintain river and stream channels, floodplains and vegetation.

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse was listed as a threatened species in May 1998 with critical habitat designated in June 2003. The Service is re-examining the critical habitat designation due to concerns that a former political official of the Department of the Interior 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. The Service is again proposing critical habitat in those counties and will examine whether any exclusions are appropriate in the final designation.

In July 2008, the Service removed ESA protections, including critical habitat protections, for Preble's meadow jumping mouse populations in Wyoming. The subspecies remains protected as a threatened species in the Colorado portion of its range.

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse is a small mammal with a long tail, large hind feet, and long hind legs. Total length of an adult is approximately 7 to 10 inches, with the tail comprising approximately 60 percent of that length. To evade predators, the mouse can jump up to three feet.

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse is 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. It inhabits well-developed plains riparian vegetation with relatively undisturbed grassland communities and a nearby water source. It has been found to use uplands at least as far out as 100 meters beyond the 100-year flood plain. Habitat alteration, degradation, loss and fragmentation resulting from urban development, flood control, water development and other human land uses have adversely impacted Preble's populations.

The public will have until December 7, 2009 to submit scientific information regarding the proposal to the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> or via U.S. mail or hand delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2008-0026; Division of

Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

All information and comments will be considered in the development of a final rule. After reviewing all available information, the Service may find that areas proposed are not essential to the conservation of the Preble's mouse, areas may be appropriate for exclusion or not appropriate for exclusion; or areas not proposed should be designated as critical habitat.

The Service may schedule public hearings on this proposal, if any are requested, and will announce the dates, times, and places of those hearings in the (Federal Register) and local newspapers at least 15 days before the first hearing.

The Service is updating an economic analysis of the impacts of the proposed designation of revised critical habitat which will be available for public review and comment when complete.

For more information regarding this proposal, please visit the Service's web site at:
<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/preble>

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**.

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