

Questions and Answers Regarding the Proposal to Remove the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse from the List of Threatened and Endangered Species

What action is the Service taking?

Based on new, currently available genetic research which indicates that the Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) should not be classified as a separate subspecies of meadow jumping mouse, the Service is proposing to remove Preble's from the list of threatened and endangered species.

The Service will also analyze whether the Preble's portion of *Z. h. campestris* qualifies as a Distinct Population Segment (DPS) in need of protection before this rule is finalized.

The public is invited to comment on this proposal and to provide any additional information until (90 days from publication). After an evaluation of all the available scientific information, the Service will make a final decision on whether Preble's should be delisted.

A final decision is due early in 2006. Until that time, the Preble's meadow jumping mouse will continue to be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Who funded the genetics research and what do the results tell us?

Due to questions regarding the genetic relationship of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse to other meadow jumping mice, the Fish and Wildlife Service, State of Wyoming, Department of Energy, and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science provided funding for a genetic analysis of several subspecies.

The first phase of the research used an analysis of mitochondrial DNA. Results indicate that the Preble's (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) is likely the same subspecies known as the Bear Lodge meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius campestris*). The range of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse corresponds largely to the rapidly developing Front Range Urban Corridor running from Colorado Springs, Colorado, to Cheyenne, Wyoming. The Bear Lodge meadow jumping mouse is found in the Bear Lodge Mountains of northeastern Wyoming and the Black Hills of southwestern South Dakota, northeastern Wyoming, and southeastern Montana.

Although this new genetic information is unpublished at this time, it has been peer reviewed and the Service considers it to be the best scientific and commercial information currently available regarding the taxonomy of the Preble's and the Bear Lodge meadow jumping mice. The peer reviews are available in their entirety at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/preble>.

Upcoming nuclear DNA microsatellite work will provide more data regarding the genetic relationship among jumping mice and will be evaluated when making the final decision.

What information is considered when proposing to delist a species?

Delisting a species must be supported by the best scientific and commercial data currently available and only considered if such data substantiate that the species is: neither endangered nor threatened because the species is considered extinct; the species is considered recovered; and/or the original data available when the species was listed was in error (i.e., subsequent investigations show that the best scientific or commercial data available when the species was listed, or the interpretation of such data, were in error).

In this case, the research indicates that Preble's meadow jumping mouse is likely to be the same subspecies as the Bear Lodge meadow jumping mouse (*Z.h. campestris*).

What is a Distinct Population Segment?

A Distinct population segment (DPS) is a subdivision of a vertebrate species that is treated as a species for purposes of listing under the Endangered Species Act. Three elements are considered in a decision regarding the status of a possible DPS as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. They are: discreteness of the population segment in relation to the remainder of the taxon; the significance of the population segment to the taxon that it belongs to; and the population segment's conservation status in relation to the Act's standards.

What happens next?

Because the Service intends that the final decision resulting from this proposal be as accurate as possible, we are soliciting information from the public, other governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning the taxonomic classification and population status of Preble's and Bear Lodge meadow jumping mouse.

Also, we expect additional genetics information regarding Preble's relationship to other jumping mice to be available within the next year. This, and all other available information, will be considered in the final determination.