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**Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes to Remove the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse from the Endangered Species List**

After a complete analysis of the petitions to remove the Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) from the list of threatened and endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that the action is warranted and has begun the process to formally delist it. This action is based on new research that indicates that the Preble's meadow jumping mouse should not be classified as a separate subspecies of meadow jumping mouse.

The petitions to consider delisting because of new information were filed by the State of Wyoming's Office of the Governor and Coloradans for Water Conservation and Development. The new data asserts that the Preble's meadow jumping mouse should be considered the same subspecies as the Bear Lodge meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius campestris*).

Until a final determination is made in 2006, the Preble's meadow jumping mouse will continue to be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Additionally, the Service will analyze whether the Preble's portion of *Z. h. campestris* qualifies as a Distinct Population Segment (DPS) in need of protection under the Endangered Species Act before this rule is finalized. 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 populations 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.

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.

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse was listed as a threatened species in May 1998. At that time, Preble's was classified as a subspecies of the meadow jumping mouse based on a 1954 peer reviewed and published study. This classification was widely accepted by scientists from various scientific organizations including the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

The Service received two petitions recommending that Preble's be delisted based on new genetic information. A genetic study, funded by the Fish and Wildlife Service, State of Wyoming, Department of Energy, and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, was conducted through the Denver museum to assist in addressing questions about the validity of Preble's as a subspecies.

Although the 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 available regarding the taxonomy of the Preble's and Bear Lodge meadow jumping mouse. The peer reviews are available at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/preble>.

"The Service is required to make decisions based on the best scientific information available to us at the time of our decision - which we did when we listed the Preble's," said Ralph Morgenweck, the Service's Director of the Mountain-Prairie Region. "But we are always open to consider new information as it becomes available. Fortunately, scientific advancement in genetic research means our knowledge is constantly growing and improving. We expect additional genetics information for Preble's to be available within the next year. All available information, will be considered in the final determination."

Because the Service intends that the final decision resulting from this proposal be as accurate as possible, it is 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. Written comments and additional information will be accepted until (90 days from publication) and may be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Colorado Field Office, Ecological Services, 755 Parfet Street, Suite 361, Lakewood, Colorado 80215.

If the Preble's is removed from the list of threatened species, all current ESA special regulations and designated critical habitat for the species will be eliminated.

The Preble's meadow jumping mouse is 8 to 9 inches in length with a tail that accounts for 60 percent of its measurement. It has coarse fur with a dark back, paler sides tending toward yellowish brown and a white belly. Its hind feet are long and adapted for jumping small distances.