

June 13, 2013

Frequently Asked Questions for the proposed listing and proposed critical habitat designation of the New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse

Q – What action is the Service taking?

A – In order to conserve the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*) and protect its habitat the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to list the jumping mouse as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act and proposing to designate critical habitat.

Q – Why is the Service taking this action now?

A – These proposals are based in part on the May 2013 version of the Species Status Assessment Report (SSA Report), which provides a thorough assessment of the status of the jumping mouse. Based on historical (1980s and 1990s) and current (from 2005 to 2012) data, about 70 formerly occupied locations have been extirpated rangewide. In the SSA Report, we compiled biological data and a description of past, present, and likely future threats (causes and effects) facing the jumping mouse. This recommendation fulfills, in part, the terms of the MDL settlement agreement.

Q – What are the threats to the jumping mouse?

A – Threats to the jumping mouse include grazing pressure (which removes the needed vegetation), water management and use (which causes vegetation loss from mowing and drying of soils), lack of water due to drought (exacerbated by climate change), wildfires (exacerbated by climate change), drought (also exacerbated by climate change), scouring floods, loss of beaver ponds, highway reconstruction, residential and commercial development, coalbed methane development, and unregulated recreation.

We found the jumping mouse is at an elevated risk of extinction now and no data indicate that the situation will improve without significant conservation intervention. Conservation of the species requires the restoration of habitat within each of the eight conservation areas to provide additional areas for local populations to expand and become established. Consequently, current populations should be expanded as rapidly as possible by protecting and restoring (through grazing management and water management) at least 9 to 24 km (5.6 to 15 mi) of continuous suitable habitat along stream reaches, ditches, or canals.

Q – Are the threats substantial?

A – Yes. At the current rate of population extirpations, without substantial conservation efforts, the probability of persistence of the species is expected to be severely compromised in less than 10 years with decreasing viability beyond 10 years, presenting an elevated risk of extinction.

Q – How much critical habitat is the Service proposing to designate?

A – The Service is proposing to designate as critical habitat eight units comprising approximately 14,561 acres in New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona.

Q – Does the New Mexico Meadows Jumping Mouse require special habitat?

A – Yes. The jumping mouse has exceptionally specialized habitat requirements, characterized by tall (averaging 24 in), dense herbaceous riparian vegetation composed primarily of sedges and forbs associated with perennial flowing water, which is required to support its life history and maintain adequate population sizes.

It is imperative that the jumping mouse have rich abundant food sources during the summer so it can accumulate sufficient fat reserves to survive their long hibernation period. In addition, individual jumping mice also need intact upland areas adjacent to riparian wetland areas because this is where they build nests or use burrows to give birth to young in the summer and to hibernate over the winter.

Q - Where is the jumping mouse found?

A – The New Mexico jumping mouse historical distribution likely included riparian wetlands along streams in the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan Mountains from southern Colorado to central New Mexico, including the Jemez and Sacramento Mountains and the Rio Grande Valley from Espanola to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, and into parts of the White Mountains in eastern Arizona.

Since 2005, 29 populations have been located within 8 areas (2 in Colorado, 15 in New Mexico, and 12 in Arizona). All of the remaining populations are small and isolated, and 11 of them have been substantially compromised since 2011 (due to water shortages, grazing, or wildfire and flooding). Another seven populations in Arizona may also be compromised due to post-fire flooding following the 538,000-ac Wallow Fire that burned in 2011.

Q – What is a New Mexico jumping mouse?

A - The jumping mouse is a small mammal that hibernates about 8 or 9 months out of the year, longer than most mammals. Conversely, it is only active 3 or 4 months during the summer.

Within this short time frame, it must breed, birth and raise young, and store up sufficient fat reserves to survive the next year's hibernation period. In addition, jumping mice only live 3 years or less and have one small litter annually with 7 or less young, so the species has limited capacity for high population growth rates due to this low fecundity. As a result, if resources are not available in a single season, jumping mice populations would be greatly stressed.

Q – Will the public be able to comment on this proposal?

A – Yes. There will be a 60 day comment period, ending August 19, 2013. You may submit comments by one of the following methods:

(1) *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS–R2–2013–0023, which is the docket number for this rulemaking. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”.

(2) *By hard copy:* Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R2–2013–0023; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042–PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

We request that you send comments **only** by the methods described above. We will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that we will post any personal information you provide us (see the **Public Comments** section below for more information).