



The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.

December 4, 2009

Public Comments Processing
Attn: (FWS-R6-ES-2009-0013)
Division of Policy and Directives Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Sir or Madam:

Following are the comments from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposal to revise designated critical habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) in Colorado where it is listed as threatened in a significant portion of the range (SPR) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Our comments are specific to our mission within state government: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As this proposal has major impacts upon our agriculture industry, our natural resources and the welfare of our citizens, we believe it is important you continue to inform us of proposed actions and decisions and provide us the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA would like to express our concerns regarding the additional 184 miles of rivers and streams and 18,462 acres to the existing critical habitat designation. The Service states much of the additional critical habitat occurs on federal lands. Our main concern as stated above is the designation's impact on agriculture. Federal lands are an important economic component to livestock grazing operations. The designation has the potential to negatively impact livestock grazing in pastures with riparian areas. Research shows, Preble's mice have and continue to thrive in areas where livestock grazing occurs therefore, we will not support reductions or removal of livestock in these areas.

In Wyoming, we have studies indicating the mouse continues to thrive in federal grazing allotments which also have significant human recreational activity, including All Terrain Vehicle use, hiking, camping and fishing. We do not support the Service increasing critical habitat in areas such as those proposed in Colorado. The Service and petitioner fail to provide the scientific data signifying a significant increase in populations where critical habitat has already been designated. If populations are stable in the proposed areas, we believe there is not an additional concern or need for the designation.

Some of the additional critical habitat is proposed on National Wildlife Refuges. While we understand this designated area may not impact livestock grazing, we question the additional

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need for designation on these refuges. These lands already have strict guidelines and protections and have no possibility of development impacts. In fact, we believe these refuges should already have proven to provide the most pristine habitat and least impact from external uses to Preble's mice possible. Preble's mouse populations in these areas should only be impacted by natural events such as flooding or predation.

Again, we want to reiterate our concern regarding the proposed addition of 184 miles of critical habitat in Colorado. We thank the Service for accepting our comments and urge the Service to continue to keep us informed of the latest information regarding the Preble's mouse in all states where the mouse is present.

Sincerely,



Jason Fearneyhough
Director

JF/jw

Cc: Governor's Planning Office
WDA Board of Agriculture
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
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Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
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