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December 15, 2010

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Front Range rivers and streams to receive added protection from Endangered Species Act habitat protections for Preble's meadow jumping mouse

Federal agency corrects many omissions from the past; leaves Wyoming off the map again

Denver – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service added significant protection to more than 400 miles of streamside habitats along the Front Range of Colorado today by updating their critical habitat designation for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

“This is a good day for Front Range residents, and anyone who cares about clean water and healthy wildlife and grasslands in Colorado,” said Josh Pollock, Conservation Director at Center for Native Ecosystems. “Today’s rule will protect the most important places for the survival and recovery of the Preble’s meadow jumping mouse, and in doing so, ensure the Front Range continues to be a great place to live for all of us.”

Preble's meadow jumping mouse, a threatened species, lives in the tall grasses and brush along streams and rivers from south of Pueblo to southern Wyoming. Today's rule designates 411 miles of streams and rivers

and 34,935 acres of streamside habitat as critical for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse. These stream corridors are distributed across federal, state, and private land in Boulder, Broomfield, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, and Teller counties.

The revision announced today represents about a 40% increase over the first habitat designation made in 2003. Since that date, the Fish and Wildlife Service has acknowledged that a political appointee, former Deputy Assistant Secretary Julie MacDonald, forced the omission of several qualifying areas during the original consideration.

"Today's announcement finally corrects one of the Fish and Wildlife Service's critical missteps of the past that left the Preble's meadow jumping mouse underprotected," said Pollock. "Now what remains is to extend the same Endangered Species Act protections into Wyoming. Preble's should not lose their protections just because they jump over the state border."

A coalition of conservation organizations, including Center for Native Ecosystems, are in federal court challenging the exclusion of Wyoming from the Endangered Species Act listing of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse in 2008.

The updated habitat designation maintains or restores critical habitat protections in several places where special interests attempted to have them removed or excluded in order to pave the way for development projects that could threaten Front Range waterways and streamside open spaces. On the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River, the City of Greeley argued against designation of critical habitat along a stretch targeted for building a new and much larger Seaman reservoir. But in 2010, the Fish and Wildlife Service found and captured a Preble's mouse in the exact area proposed to be inundated by the new Seaman reservoir project – the Fish and Wildlife Service thus concluded it would be "inappropriate to exclude this reach [of river] from critical habitat" designation.

"It is a benefit to all Coloradoans and all Americans that we protect the Poudre River and all the species that depend on it, including the Preble's meadow jumping mouse," said Gary Wockner, of Save the Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper in Fort Collins. "The City of Greeley should not get an exemption for a water project that would drown important endangered species habitat and forever change the Poudre River ecosystem."

On the east side of the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge, proponents of a multilane tollroad proposal have argued to keep critical habitat designation away from the grassland corridor targeted for the roadway. The Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that "the area in question contain the physical and biological features essential to conservation of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse."

"Critical habitat is absolutely vital for bringing imperiled species back from the brink. Science and common sense would suggest that the best way to save endangered species is to protect the places they live. For the Preble's, that need for habitat safeguards is especially urgent," stated Nicole Rosmarino of WildEarth Guardians.

Preble's meadow jumping mice are approximately 3 inches long but with a 4 to 6-inch long tail. As the name suggests, they can jump 18 inches into the air and even change direction mid-flight.

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More background information about the Preble's meadow jumping mouse, including high resolution digital images available for download, can be found at <http://nativeecosystems.org/species/mammals/prebles-meadow-jumping-mouse>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's media release, Frequently Asked Questions, and other materials can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/preble>