



New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association

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by <http://www.regulations.gov>.

[comments on Docket No. FWS-R2-ES-2021-0136]

Re: Comments on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Draft Recovery Plan for New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse - Docket No. FWS-R2-ES-2021-0136

Dear Sir or Madam:

The New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association has members in 32 of our state's 33 counties and in 19 other states. We offer the following comments on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Draft Recovery Plan for New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse - Docket No. FWS-R2-ES-2021-0136.

We have reviewed the 25-page Draft Recovery Plan on the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse ("Recovery Plan"). This Recovery Plan is yet another regrettable example of a USFWS listing or recovery plan that seeks to make cattle the primary threat to a species. You have little actual knowledge of this species. You rely on generalizations rather than science. You do not know populations. Your proposal depends on equating habitat size with population vitality. In your deliberate, obvious attempt to make cattle the culprit for a population you do not know and cannot ascertain, you fail to acknowledge the role that elk and feral horses have on the species. Nor do you address your long-standing failure to deal with unmanaged elk or feral horses or hold those who have direct management responsibility accountable for their failure. Your recovery plan is simply to fence off riparian areas permanently from cattle use, which will have no impact on unmanaged elk utilization. You have no ability to monitor objective results on recovery of this species because you know so little about it. You have provided no objective criteria that actually relate to recovery of the species.

More specifically but only by way of illustration,

Draft Recovery Plan ("DRP"), page 12, lines 255-263: "to downlist the subspecies to threatened status and eventually delist it:

1. Ensure that adequate New Mexico meadow jumping mouse habitat is available to support viable populations and genetic representation.
2. Ensure that New Mexico meadow jumping mouse population trends remain stable or are increasing.
3. Ensure that threats to the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse and its habitat are managed such that they are not causing further habitat degradation and declines in population numbers.

LOREN PATTERSON, President, Corona; **BRONSON CORN**, President-Elect, Roswell **JOE CULBERTSON**, Vice-President At Large Amistad, **ROY FARR**, SW Vice-President Datil; **DAVE KENNEKE**, NW Vice-President, Cimarron; **JEFF DECKER**, SE Vice-President, Lovington; **CLIFF COPELAND**, NE Vice-President, Nara Visa; **SHACEY SULLIVAN**, Secretary-Treasurer, Bosque Farms;

DRP Page 16, Lines 411-412: Currently, there is insufficient information available to date to describe how the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse populations will be monitored to meet Criterion 2. However, it will be critically important to develop a population monitoring program once the Recovery Plan has been finalized.”

Comment:

The objectives are based on elements of the population, but there is nothing to measure population in the Draft Recovery Plan, only habitat. This statement shows USFWS has not measured and doesn't know how to measure population of this species. How can this species even be listed? How can the Service develop a recovery plan that sets population objectives or goals that need to be achieved for recovery of the species but the Service doesn't know how to measure the population to meet these goals? Please develop a “population monitoring program” and methodologies, include them in the Recovery Plan for public comment and reopen the comment period on this document.

DRP, page 7, lines 113-120: “Factor A. The loss of suitable habitat is considered to be the greatest threat to the subspecies. This has primarily resulted from grazing that is incompatible with local ecological conditions, especially within riparian habitat. Incompatible grazing can result in overutilization of riparian and upland vegetation and water use and management that degrade riparian habitat and function. These threats can be reduced by implementing changes in grazing practices within riparian habitat that lead to recovery of the physical or biological features required by the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. This can include modification of current livestock management practices or removal of livestock”

Comment:

What exactly is “incompatible grazing” and why do you fail to identify it? Please describe and identify the grazing practices within riparian habitat that lead to recovery of the physical or biological features required by the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. Or, is your position that complete exclusion is a grazing practice? It would appear that the USFWS's single best solution to prevent the extinction of the NMMJM is to fence livestock out of any and all habitat, potential or existing, permanently, therefore increasing likelihood that the untested predetermined habitat will supposedly increase the NMMJM population. You have no authority for such a unsupported solution.

DRP, page 7, lines 92-95: “The primary sources of current and anticipated future habitat losses include: 1) livestock, elk, and feral horse grazing pressure that is incompatible with maintaining needed vegetation structure and diversity (i.e., contributes to riparian herbaceous vegetation loss)”

Comment:

What level of “grazing pressure” corresponds to habitat loss? Why do you fail to identify that? As even the Service recognizes, individually or a combination of the three species is going to have different impacts upon the habitat. Please provide more specific information on incompatible grazing in terms of species, number and type of species, duration of grazing, season of grazing, and utilization levels or residual stubble heights. Livestock grazing is currently managed and regulated to prevent heavy pressure. Elk and feral horses are unmanaged and pressure will depend upon the size of their populations. Without a more specific description of the species populations, level of pressure that negatively affects habitat, and how impacts will be measured and monitored, this overgeneralized threat is meaningless and unactionable. Moreover, nowhere is there discussion about how fencing off riparian habitat it going to affect pressure from unmanaged elk populations.

The Service's Draft Recovery Plan for the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse does not provide the necessary analysis of objectively measurable criteria for evaluation and recovery. Calling cattle the boogeyman is a thin cover for Service's apparent intellectual and scientific laziness. Start over and get it right.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Loren Patterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Loren Patterson, President
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association