

ranging from 2,200 m (7,300 ft) to 2,400 m (8,000 ft). Although surveys from these riparian areas have produced jumping mice that are potentially the Preble's, none have been verified as Preble's through genetic or morphological means. It is likely, based on elevation, that many of these are western jumping mice. We will continue to work with the Forest Service regarding potential Preble's populations on their lands and will encourage further survey effort and collection of jumping mouse specimens for species verification.

In the Cache La Poudre HUC, we have designated critical habitat along the lower portions of the North Fork of the Cache Le Poudre River and its tributaries, consistent with the large recovery population called for in our conservation strategy. In addition, further south in this subdrainage we have designated a second area limited largely to National Forest System lands along the main stem of the Cache Le Poudre River and on selected tributaries. While additional stream reaches that support Preble's populations are present on National Forest System lands in the upper reaches of the North Fork of the Cache Le Poudre and its tributaries, including Bull Creek, Willow Creek, Mill Creek, and Trail Creek, the extent of contiguous stream reaches in Forest Service ownership is very limited. A checkerboard pattern of land ownership, resulting in no significant contiguous reaches of Federal lands, convinced us that designating additional critical habitat centered on Federal lands is not warranted; therefore, we designated no critical habitat in this area.

In the Big Thompson HUC we designated critical habitat on Buckhorn Creek and its tributaries consistent with the medium recovery population called for in our conservation strategy. We also assessed National Forest System lands along the Big Thompson River and Little Thompson River for possible inclusion as critical habitat. Potential areas along the Big Thompson River and the North Fork of the Big Thompson River were largely in private ownership, with substantial human development occurring in many places. We originally proposed one additional area as critical habitat, centered on National Forest System lands on portions of Dry Creek and its tributaries. However, for reasons discussed previously, we have removed the Cedar Creek unit from this designation as the drainage contains no mice verified as Preble's through morphological or genetic means. Forest Service holdings along the Little Thompson River and its tributaries are

highly fragmented by non-Federal lands or represent only short stream reaches near the 2,300 m (7,600 ft) elevation. No critical habitat has been designated on the Little Thompson River.

Within the St. Vrain HUC, our conservation strategy calls for a medium recovery population on South Boulder Creek.

At the request of representatives from the City of Boulder we considered designating critical habitat along the St. Vrain River between Hygiene and Lyons. We have little evidence to support designation of critical habitat for the Preble's population on the St. Vrain River as a preferable alternative to designation of critical habitat on South Boulder Creek, nor did we find reason to designate critical habitat on a second population on non-Federal lands within this subdrainage. We considered designating critical habitat for the Preble's on National Forest System lands at higher elevations along the North St. Vrain Creek and the Middle St. Vrain Creek. However, since no trapping efforts targeted at the Preble's have been conducted in these areas and we are aware of no records of the Preble's occurrence in these watersheds, neither has been designated as critical habitat.

The Department of Energy's Rocky Flats site spans portions of the St. Vrain HUC and the Middle South Platte-Cherry Creek HUC. Rocky Flats has been a focus of research on the Preble's and monitoring of populations has taken place for several years. The Department of Energy and the Department of the Interior are concluding an agreement mandated by Congress under which the Rocky Flats site will become part of the National Wildlife Refuge system and will be administered by the Service. The Service will manage the refuge in a manner to conserve the Preble's. For that reason, we find that the Rocky Flats site is not in need of special management measures. Furthermore, there is no benefit to including a National Wildlife Refuge in a critical habitat designation under the circumstances presented here. Therefore we have excluded the Rocky Flats site under sections 3(5)(A) and 4(b)(2) of the Act.

Our conservation strategy calls for three small recovery populations or one medium recovery population within the Clear Creek HUC, the Preble's has been captured along a segment of Ralston Creek above Ralston Reservoir. Based on limited occurrence of habitat components needed by the Preble's and the absence of other captures, we limited proposed designation of critical habitat within the Clear Creek HUC to

this single population. In the summer of 2002, a single jumping mouse, confirmed as the Preble's through morphological examination, was captured on Elk Creek, a small tributary to Clear Creek. Past trapping efforts on Clear Creek and its tributaries have failed to document Preble's presence. After review of the site, we have decided not to designate the reach at the site of the Elk Creek capture as critical habitat.

Our conservation strategy calls for a medium recovery population along Cherry Creek in the Middle South Platte-Cherry Creek HUC. Preble's habitat in the upper reaches of the Cherry Creek basin appears extensive. We proposed critical habitat in an area that includes a segment of Cherry Creek, Lake Gulch, and its tributaries. However, for reasons discussed previously, we have removed the Cherry Creek unit from this designation as the drainage contains no mice verified as Preble's through morphological or genetic means.

We examined other areas of Preble's habitat on Federal lands within the Upper South Platte HUC, and have designated critical habitat on Army Corps of Engineers lands upstream of Chatfield Reservoir along the South Platte River and on three areas centered on National Forest System land in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest within the South Platte River watershed. Though National Forest System lands in the Upper South Platte HUC are extensive, much of the South Platte itself is not federally owned. On National Forest System lands on some of the major tributaries of the South Platte River, habitat components required by the Preble's have been degraded by catastrophic fire, flooding, or both. The Buffalo Creek watershed has been highly degraded by fire, followed by flooding, accompanying erosion, and sedimentation. Critical habitat has not been designated in the Buffalo Creek watershed. The Wigwam Creek subunit, proposed as critical habitat in the draft rule, has not been designated as critical habitat following intense burning by the 2002 Hayman Fire. In contrast, the Trout Creek subunit was lightly to moderately burned in the same fire, is expected to recover relatively quickly, and is designated as critical habitat. Combined, the four areas of designated critical habitat should help assure that a viable population of the Preble's is maintained in the portion of this HUC upstream of Chatfield Reservoir on the South Platte River.

While our conservation strategy calls for either three small populations or one