

Wildlife Specialties LLC



Ms. Liisa Schmoele
Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Ecological Services
Colorado Field Office
PO Box 25486, DFC (65412)
Denver, CO 80225-0486

March 3, 2022
Via Email

RE: Planet Blue Grass Property Along the North Fork of the St. Vrain River, Lyons, Colorado – Preble’s Meadow Jumping Mouse Habitat Assessment Request for Concurrence

Dear Ms. Schmoele:

The purpose of this letter is to request concurrence with this Preble’s meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei* [Preble’s]) habitat assessment that suitable habitat is not present and that there is currently no means of connectivity with known occupied habitat from either upstream or downstream of the project site (figure 1). Additionally, we request concurrence that the use of the project area will not result in “take” and will have “no effect” on Preble’s or any designated critical habitat(s). The proposed action is for Planet Blue Grass to allow limited camping within the project area for twelve (12) days per year during music festivals.

The project area is located south of the Highway 36 bridge over the St. Vrain River near the intersection of Apple Valley Road and Highway 36 (Figure 1). Prior to 2013 the project area was not used and left predominantly undisturbed. At that time habitat components associated with Preble’s were present, but there was no documentation of their presence within or near the project area. In the early 2000’s CDOT conducted a Preble’s presence/absence survey in the project area with no Preble’s captures and few captures of individuals of other small mammal species. during the 2013 flood the project area was scoured of all vegetation etc. Post-flood the project area was littered with debris including building material, logs, etc. which were cleaned up. After the initial cleanup the Town of Lyons used the project area as a staging area for other flood recovery efforts.

Currently the project area is used to store equipment associated with Planet Blue Grass with no other uses. The project area is mowed once or twice annually. Planet Blue Grass is requesting that the Town of Lyons allow limited camping within the project area for twelve (12) days per year during music festivals.

Habitat for Preble’s along the Front Range of Colorado typically consists of a matrix of riparian vegetation and associated upland grasslands and shrubs (Armstrong et al. 2011; Shenk and Sivert 1999). Riparian vegetation typically is varied with a mixed overstory comprised of willows (*Salix* spp.) and cottonwoods (*Populus* spp.) and an understory of scattered shrubs including snowberry

March 3, 2022

(*Symphoricarpos* spp.). Two major habitat components appear necessary; open water and dense cover, only open water present within the project area.

In addition to these habitat features, suitable habitat must also provide requirements for survival throughout the life cycle (Shenk 1998). This means that habitat for the active period and hibernation period are essential. Active period habitat must provide areas where reproductive activities and daily survival can occur. Hibernation habitat is not just that habitat in which hibernacula are created but also provides adequate food sources for fat storage during hibernation. Habitat for active and hibernating periods does not have to occur in the same location but must be connected. Habitat for the active and hibernating periods is not found within or near the project area. Photos 1 – 4 show the lack of suitable habitat within the project area.

In addition to the absence of suitable Preble's riparian and upland habitat, the project area cannot support Preble's for the following reasons:

- Zero connectivity with suitable habitat/suitable occupied habitat both upstream and downstream and no population source nearby for colonization of the project area by Preble's.
- The project area was scoured during the 2013 flood.
- A Preble's presence/absence survey in the early 2000's resulted in zero captures of Preble's even though suitable habitat was present at that time.

Based on the lack of suitable habitat and the project area being in an area in which colonization cannot occur, it is my opinion that use of the project area would result in no take and would have “**no effect**” on Preble's. Additionally, we request concurrence that the project area is incapable of supporting Preble's.

If you have questions regarding this habitat assessment, please contact me at 303-710-1286. This habitat assessment was completed under Federal Fish and Wildlife Permit No. TE080647-0.

Sincerely,



Jerry Powell, M.S.
Certified Ecologist

Photos



Photo 1. Highway 36 bridge over the St. Vrain River at the eastern edge of the project area.



Photo 2. Looking upstream from the eastern edge of the project area. Note lack of dense riparian habitat associated with Preble's.



Photo 3. Looking west from the western edge of the project area. Note that the neighboring property does not offer any upland or riparian Preble's habitat and the property is regularly mowed.



Photo 4. This is representative of the habitat currently present within the project area. Note the lack of a dense and diverse plant community.