

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 30, 2003

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

We write asking you to seek an extension concerning the upcoming deadline for the designation of critical habitat for the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse.

Due to the potential significant impacts for critical habitat designations in five Wyoming counties (Albany, Converse, Goshen, Platte and Laramie) we believe that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) should wait for the results of two studies which are currently underway regarding the Preble's Mouse.

As you may be aware, the University of Wyoming is finalizing its study into the direct and indirect economic impact that critical habitat designations could have on landowners, communities and the State as a whole. This particular study was commissioned because the communities did not believe the true economic impacts were captured in the initial USFWS study. In fact, preliminary data shows a significant change from the information provided in the initial USFWS economic study. The final report by the University is expected by the end of June 2003.

Furthermore, the State of Wyoming is also waiting for the results of a nuclear DNA study of the Preble's Mouse. The initial results from this study are expected in the next two months and could provide conclusive scientific data as to whether or not the Preble's Mouse is, in fact, a separate subspecies.

These studies will provide prudent scientific information and we believe it is in the best interests of all parties to extend the June 4, 2003 deadline. If your agency is unwilling to extend the upcoming deadline, we urge you to exclude Wyoming from the Final Critical Habitat Rule. Such an exclusion would allow the USFWS to fully evaluate the most current scientific and economic data concerning the Preble's Mouse.

Secretary Norton

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your expeditious response.

Sincerely,



Craig Thomas
U.S. Senator



Michael B. Enzi
U.S. Senator



Barbara Cubin
U.S. Representative

Cc: Tom Sansonetti, Assistant Attorney General
Governor David Freudenthal