

## New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse lives to jump another day

Written by Staff Reports

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### Judge rejects challenge to critical habitat

U. S. District Judge James Browning dismissed a lawsuit Oct. 13 seeking to overturn the critical habitat designation of the endangered New Mexico meadow jumping mouse.

In an article by Robin Silver of the Center for Biological Diversity, published in the *Sun* Sept. 4, Silver said the center sued the U. S. Forest Service Aug. 27 to challenge its failure to protect streamside meadows in New Mexico's Sacramento Mountains from cattle because the areas are critical habitat for the mouse.

Two cattlemen's associations sought to overturn the designation with a suit in 2018.

Browning rejected the groups' claim that in its 2016 decision, the Fish and Wildlife Service failed to fully consider the economic impact of designating 14,000 acres of critical habitat for the mouse across New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona on their grazing allotments. They said the failure to exclude their allotments was unlawful.

In his decision Browning wrote, "At worst...the disappearance of these important units of critical habitat designation could result in the irreversible extinction of the remaining Jumping Mouse populations."

Historically these mice lived along streams, but their habitat has been devastated by livestock

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grazing, water mismanagement, drought and fire in the three southwestern states.

“We’re thrilled that the judge upheld essential habitat protections for this adorable jumping mouse that stands on the brink of extinction,” Ryan Shannon, a staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said. “Hopefully now we can focus on its recovery, rather than defending it from cynical attacks.”

The New Mexico meadow jumping mouse is unique, hibernating for up to nine months a year. This leaves only a narrow time frame each summer for them to mate, reproduce and gain enough weight to survive their long hibernation. The mice have highly specialized habitat needs, such as tall, dense grasses and forbs found only in riparian areas along perennial flowing streams.

Cattle concentrate in these riparian areas during the summer months, when the jumping mice are active. Their intensive grazing destroys the riverine habitat and has resulted in isolated, fragmented populations that are highly vulnerable to occasional, yet inevitable, events such as wildfires.

“The imperiled New Mexico meadow jumping mouse is uniquely adapted to streams and wetlands habitats seriously threatened by livestock grazing, stream dewatering, and climate change,” Samantha Ruscavage-Barz, WildEarth Guardians’ managing attorney, said. “Today’s [Oct. 13] ruling will give this endangered species a fighting chance at survival.”