

## Rare New Mexico meadow jumping mouse populations discovered

November 1 2016, by Susan Montoya Bryan

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This June 2014, file photo provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows Debra Hill weighing a New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, which was trapped during survey efforts on the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, N.M. Biologists who spent weeks in three New Mexico national forests searching for signs of the elusive, endangered mouse that looks somewhat like a tiny kangaroo have found what they call irrefutable evidence that it still lives in the state for which it is named. U.S. Forest Service District Ranger Beth Humphrey said Tuesday, Nov. 1, 2016, confirming the rodent's existence provides hope that the species can recover over time. (Stacey Stanford/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

via AP, File)

Biologists who spent weeks in three New Mexico national forests searching for signs of an elusive, endangered mouse that looks somewhat like a tiny kangaroo have found what they call irrefutable evidence that it still lives in the state for which it is named.

The biologists trapped New Mexico meadow jumping mice and collected fur and fecal samples during summertime surveys in the southern Lincoln National Forest, the northern Santa Fe National Forest and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests along the New Mexico-Arizona border, Beth Humphrey, a district ranger with the U.S. Forest Service, said Tuesday. They had not been seen for years in those places.

With a tail that makes up for most of its length, the rodent is called a jumping mouse because it can leap more than 2 feet into the air when frightened. Super-long tails help the mice keep their balance, especially when they scale plant stems to reach ripening seeds, one their main food sources.

The New Mexico meadow jumping mouse was listed as an endangered species in 2014, prompting the U.S. Forest Service to fence off streams and watering holes in the Lincoln and Santa Fe forests to protect habitat thought to be ideal. That spurred criticism from ranchers and others that the federal government was trampling private access to public lands in New Mexico.

Small populations of New Mexico meadow jumping mice have been found previously in New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado.

But last summer's surveys turned up the first hard evidence that they still

live in areas where they had not been spotted in years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said in an emailed statement.

The discoveries provide "hope that this species can recover over a period of time," said Humphrey, who works in New Mexico's Sacramento Mountains.

Humphrey said her district will collect public comments this fall on proposals for long-term strategies aimed at trying to protect and boost New Mexico meadow jumping mouse populations.

The mice live near streams and depend on tall grass to hide from predators. They hibernate for about nine months, emerging in the late spring to gorge themselves before mating, giving birth and going back into hibernation. They normally live three years.

Jack Williams, a wildlife biologist based in the Sacramento Mountains, said the mouse is difficult to trap. His crew surveyed five sites over six weeks and set up more than 5,000 traps.

Biologists blame drought, wildfires, flooding and grazing in the habitat of the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse for the rodent's declining numbers.

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