

SANTA ROSA BEACH MOUSE

(*Peromyscus polionotus leucocephalus*)

Status

The Santa Rosa beach mouse is under consideration for federal listing as threatened or endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is not a state-designated protected species.

Life History

This is one of several Florida subspecies of oldfield mouse restricted to coastal sand dune ecosystems. These small, light-colored mice burrow and excavate nests in dunes. Their diet consists of various plant seeds and insects. They prefer sand-covered slopes with patches of sea oats, beach grass, other grasses, and herbs. These mice may also use more densely vegetated scrub dunes bordering the preferred habitat. Unlike the house mouse, beach mice are not known to live in buildings or frequent garbage sites.

Range

This subspecies occurs only on Santa Rosa Island along the northwest coast of Florida. The first specimen was recorded around 1920 near Fort Walton Beach in Okaloosa County. The mouse is found throughout the 78 km barrier island, which extends from Fort Pickens in Santa Rosa County to Eglin Air Force Base "East" in Okaloosa County. This area includes portions of Gulf Islands National Seashore, Eglin Air Force Base, and the towns of Fort Walton Beach, Navarre Beach, and Pensacola Beach.

Impacts

The former continuous range of the Santa Rosa beach mouse has been reduced and fragmented by habitat loss and other factors. The local population at Eglin Air Force Base "East" has declined and others have nearly been eliminated from Pensacola Beach and Fort Walton Beach. Coastal development, intense use by vehicles and pedestrians, hurricanes, and tropical storms have



damaged or destroyed sand dunes. Predation by domestic cats and competition from other rodents may have contributed to local declines and losses. The mouse is fairly abundant elsewhere throughout the island and its future status, particularly on public land, is relatively secure.

Conservation

The continued existence and recovery of the Santa Rosa beach mouse depends largely on the conservation and restoration of a healthy dune

ecosystem. A coastal zone development plan that includes dune preservation can benefit both landowner and wildlife habitat. Snow fences and plantings of sea oats and other vegetation can help restore destroyed or degraded dunes by protecting beach mouse habitat and adjacent lands from storms and coastal erosion. Coastal construction sited landward of the dunes, controlled beach access points, and limited vehicle and pedestrian use will help restore damaged dunes.

Control of free-ranging and feral domestic cats in beach mouse habitat will help reduce losses due to predation. Good sanitation can prevent establishment of house mouse or other rodent populations that compete with beach mice for resources. Poisons, snap traps, glue boards, and similar techniques should not be used in beach mouse habitat.

Further studies are needed to better understand the Santa Rosa beach mouse and its associations in the sand dune ecosystem. This information is vital for our future ability to best protect, conserve, and restore this unique animal and the habitat crucial to its survival.



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