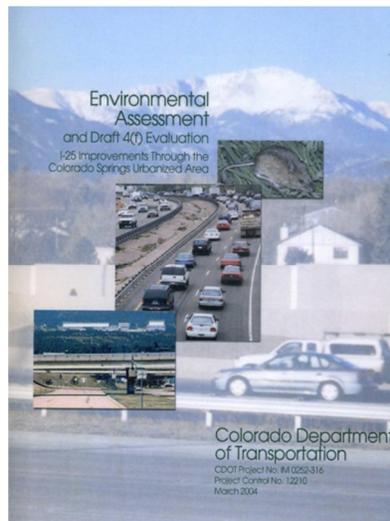




## **RE-EVALUATION, Mileposts 149 to 161**

### **Interstate 25 Improvements through the Colorado Springs Area Environmental Assessment**



### **TECHNICAL MEMO ON WILDLIFE, RIPARIAN AREAS, AND NOXIOUS WEEDS**

March 2012

Revised April 2012

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CDOT Region 2

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## **Introduction**

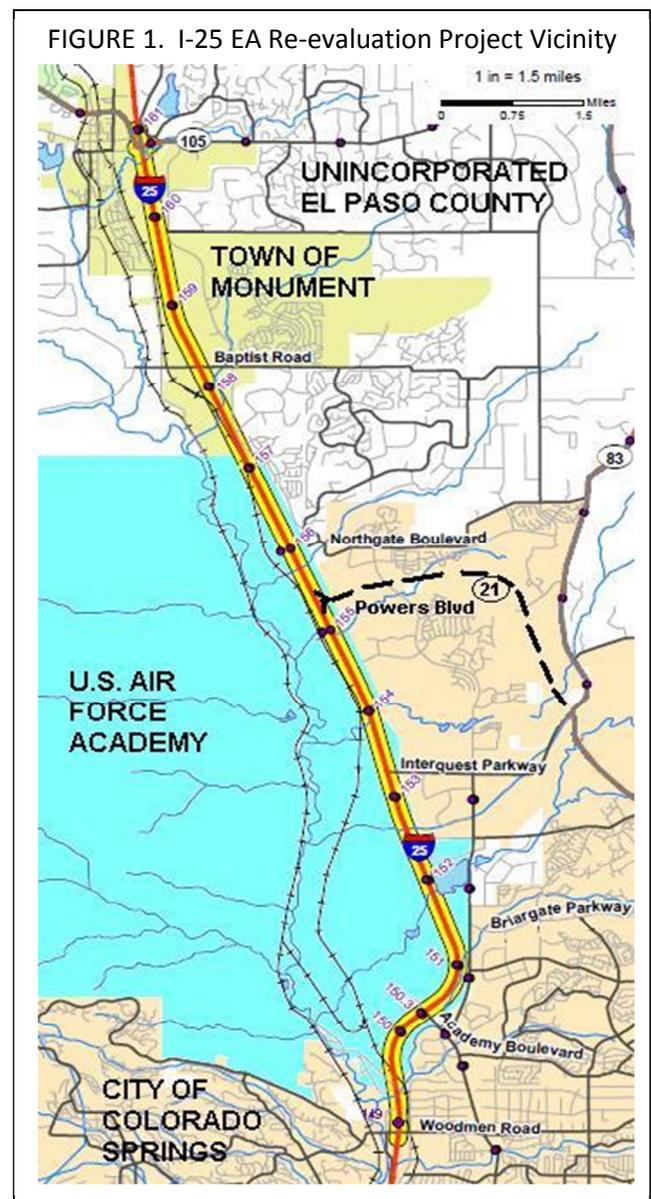
The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has prepared this technical memorandum to update the wildlife findings (including Threatened or Endangered species) described in the original 2004 I-25 Environmental Assessment (EA) with regard to the portion of the Proposed Action between Woodmen Road (Exit 149) in Colorado Springs and State Highway 105 in Monument (Exit 161). The purpose of the EA's Proposed Action is to relieve existing traffic congestion and address projected future congestion on I-25 within the Colorado Springs Urbanized Area.

The I-25 EA originally evaluated impacts for the widening of I-25 between South Academy Boulevard (Exit 135) and SH 105, together with reconstruction of various I-25 interchanges within this corridor. Page 2-10 of the EA stated that, "Consistent with projected traffic demand in the I-25 corridor, the conceptual phasing for the Proposed Action calls for:

- (1) initially six-laning through central Colorado Springs, then
- (2) six-laning in northern El Paso County, and finally
- (3) adding HOV [High-Occupancy Vehicle] lanes through central Colorado Springs and widening to six lanes south to South Academy Boulevard."

The first of these conceptual phases was undertaken in central Colorado Springs, completed in 2007. The so-called COSMIX project resulted in 12 miles of six-lane freeway, between South Circle Drive (Exit 138) and North Academy Boulevard (Exit 150). It included major reconstruction at several interchanges, notably not including the Cimarron interchange (Exit 141) or the Fillmore Street interchange (Exit 145). Additional funding will be needed to complete Phase 1.

For the year 2012, CDOT has received funding to begin the second phase, meaning to widen I-25 to six lanes in northern El Paso County, within the area shown in Figure 1. The EA calls for eventually widening I-25 all the way to SH105. Total funding for this project is yet to be determined. Currently enough is available to widen I-25 from Woodmen Road to Interquest Parkway (Exit 153). Nevertheless, to be prepared for possible additional funding being available to complete the widening to SH 105 with this project or available in the near future,



CDOT's current EA re-evaluation effort is covering all Phase 2 improvements. Therefore, the study area for this re-evaluation extends northward all the way to Monument.

The I-25 EA included a new connection with Powers Boulevard (now State Highway 21), following SH 21 eastward to just past the Powers Boulevard/Voyager Boulevard interchange. The design and analysis of this connection in the I-25 EA superseded what was proposed earlier in the North Powers Boulevard EA that was approved in 1999. The current EA re-evaluation also includes this portion of Powers Boulevard from I-25 to just east of Voyager Parkway.

### **Summary of the 2004 EA Resources, Impact, and Mitigation for Wildlife, SB40 Certification and Noxious Weeds**

The 2004 EA indicated that wildlife within the I-25 study area is highly influenced by the existing interstate and regional urban development of the Colorado Springs area. I-25 is the most-heavily traveled roadway in Colorado's second most-populated metropolitan area. Since its construction in 1960, I-25 has been a barrier to east-west wildlife movement. In the intervening fifty years, vacant land along the route has given way to urban development. As a result, wildlife along the corridor has declined and has become increasingly dependent on riparian areas for habitat and movement. In the 26-mile I-25 corridor studied in the EA, there are 14 creeks and numerous other drainages. These are an important focus for highway impacts.

#### **Wildlife**

A variety of wildlife species inhabit the study area. Species adapted to urban conditions are found in developed areas. Deer, raccoons, foxes, coyotes and skunks are common. Bears and mountain lions occasionally stray into the area from their mountain homes. Prairie dogs can be found along I-25 both north and south of the city of Colorado Springs. The EA mentioned a five-acre mule deer concentration area along I-25, south of the Rockrimmon Boulevard, where I-25 crosses Monument Creek, several miles to the south of the 2012 re-evaluation study area.

Another notable wildlife issue mentioned in the EA was the presence of two colonies of Gunnison's prairie dog, one at Teachout Creek, a half mile north of Baptist Road (Exit 158), and the other in the northwest quadrant of the I-25/Northgate Boulevard interchange (Exit 156). The colony at Teachout Creek would not be affected, as it is outside the construction area for the Proposed Action (see Figure 2).

The I-25 would affect only the latter, which is on the CDOT easement within U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) boundaries. The EA indicated that CDOT would coordinate with USAFA staff to determine mitigation conforming to USAFA's policies and/or preferences. This species of prairie dog did not have any threatened or endangered status as of 2004.

The key wildlife focus of the 2004 EA was the occurrence of the Preble's meadow jumping

FIGURE 2. Gunnison's Prairie Dog Colony at Teachout Creek



mouse (PMJM) in all drainages that cross I-25 in northern El Paso County. This animal, Federally listed as a Threatened Species, is discussed in a separate technical memorandum.

Regarding the nests of raptors and other birds that are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the EA stated that although no migratory bird nesting sites were identified at the time of field surveys, the Proposed Action has the potential to affect future nesting sites.

The EA's mitigation commitments for wildlife impacts were as follows:

- Implement a noxious weed management plan that incorporates appropriate methods (i.e., herbicides, mechanical removal, and, potentially, biological controls) developed for this project for areas of ground disturbance. In sensitive areas such as wetlands, and riparian and habitat corridors, careful selection of appropriate control methods will be required.
- Re-vegetate the project area to replicate or enhance impacted wildlife habitats, using care, however, to avoid using plants that would attract wildlife to the road.
- Minimize construction disturbance to the greatest extent feasible by implementing site-specific construction best management practices.
- Design hydraulic structures (e.g., culverts, box structures, and bridges) to improve corridor east/west movement. To the extent feasible, new or reconstructed stream crossings under I-25 will incorporate a soft, natural bottom and will be vegetated.
- Where feasible, use native grass, shrub, and tree species to create sight and sound buffer zones from I-25.
- Select plants for re-vegetation to avoid enticing wildlife to encroach into the highway area and to not establish hiding places for wildlife adjacent to the roadway, for the safety of the animals and motorists alike.
- Prior to construction, in places where large trees will be removed, field surveys will be conducted to look for bird nests that are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.\*
- As requested by the Air Force Academy, improvements will be designed to avoid creation of any new areas of open water in proximity to the Academy to minimize potential Bird/Aircraft Strike Hazard for flight operations.

\* If an active nest is found, an appropriate buffer (normally 50 feet) will be established in accordance with CDOT construction specifications. The Contractor shall install fence (plastic) at the perimeter of the buffer. Work shall not proceed within the buffer until the young have fledged or the nests have become inactive.

It was noted that conservation strategies designed to enhance, preserve, and restore habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse will also benefit other wildlife species. As an example, the Programmatic Biological Opinion for the mouse requires CDOT to obtain habitat easements and/or purchasing land to preserve 50 acres of habitat for the Preble's mouse.

#### Riparian Areas

CDOT and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (now CPW, Colorado Parks and Wildlife) have a Memorandum of Agreement addressing the requirements of Colorado Revised Statutes 33-5-101, Protection of Fish, Wildlife, and Fishing Waters of Colorado. As established by Colorado

Senate Bill 40 in 1969, interagency coordination is required in cases where a transportation project has impacts on riparian areas. A stream is considered to come under the jurisdiction of SB40 if it meets any one or more of the following four criteria:

1. All perennial streams represented by solid blue lines on U.S. Geological Survey 7.5' Quad maps.
2. Segments of ephemeral and intermittent streams providing live water beneficial to fish and wildlife.
3. Segments of streams at which 25 percent or more of the vegetation is comprised of riparian vegetation such as cottonwood, willow, alder, sedges, or other plants dependent on groundwater. Such segments shall be within 300 feet upstream or downstream of the project. The 300-foot distance shall be measured along the length of the stream.
4. Segments of streams having wetlands present within 600 feet upstream or downstream of the project. The 600-foot distance shall be measured along the length of the stream.

The 2004 EA indicated that the Proposed Action would impact approximately 13 riparian acres, in addition to any impacts to wetlands. The EA indicated that CDOT would endeavor to further minimize impacts during project design, and would coordinate with CPW to obtain SB 40 certification prior to construction.

#### Noxious Weeds

Development of the I-25 EA included a field review that identified more than a dozen species of noxious weeds along the 26-mile I-25 corridor between South Academy Boulevard (Exit 135) and SH 105 (Exit 161). These species are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Noxious Weed Species Found along the I-25 Corridor in 2002

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Status</b>
tamarisk	Priority for eradication
diffuse knapweed	State top-ten priority
Russian knapweed	State top-ten priority
common burdock	State top-ten priority
field bindweed	State top-ten priority
Canada thistle	State top-ten priority
musk thistle	State-listed noxious weed
yellow toadflax	State-listed noxious weed
kochia	State-listed noxious weed
chicory	State-listed noxious weed
common mullein	State-listed noxious weed
common teasel	State-listed noxious weed
poison hemlock	State-listed noxious weed
spotted knapweed	State-listed noxious weed
Russian olive	State-listed noxious weed

The EA noted that diffuse knapweed, Canada thistle, and musk thistle were then the most widespread noxious weed species present along the I-25 corridor and throughout El Paso County. These weeds were located primarily along the shoulder of the I-25 pavement and were present in moderate densities dispersed throughout the 26-mile study area.

The current Colorado Noxious Weed List maintained by the Colorado Department of Agriculture does not list top-ten priorities, but instead includes noxious weed species on one of three lists, A, B or C. Weeds on the A-list are designated by the Agricultural Commissioner for eradication. List B weed species are species for which the Commissioner, in consultation with the state noxious weed advisory committee, local governments, and other interested parties, develops and implements state noxious weed management plans designed to stop the continued spread of these species. List C weed species are already widespread, but the State provides education, research and biological control resources to assist local governments that choose to require their management.

### **Changes to the Project that Would Affect the Resource Differently**

CDOT has not proposed to change the project in any way that would affect wildlife differently from what was described in the EA. Currently, the proposed I-25 improvements remain at the Conceptual Design stage. CDOT is likely to select a design-build contractor to construct the project. CDOT will continue to consider opportunities to reduce adverse impacts to wildlife and habitat to the extent practicable, compared to the impacts that were described in the EA.

### **Changes in Resources, Analysis Data, Analysis Methods or Applicable Regulations**

Regarding wildlife, in February 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Gunnison's prairie dog (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) as a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. Populations of this species occurring in El Paso County are covered under this designation. Two colonies of the Gunnison's Prairie Dog occur within the EA study area, at the I-25 Northgate interchange, and at Teachout Creek west of I-25. Please see a further, more detailed discussion of the Gunnison's prairie dog issue in a separate EA re-evaluation technical memo on the topic of Threatened and Endangered Species.

Raptors (birds of prey) commonly occurring in the I-25 EA re-evaluation area include the Red-Tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), and Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*). In 2008, the Colorado Division of Wildlife revised its "Recommended Buffer Zones and Seasonal Restrictions for Colorado Raptors." These recommendations cover ten species of raptors. All CDOT projects require a raptor nest survey be conducted prior to project construction to identify raptor nests and nesting activity in the vicinity of the project. If an active raptor nest is found on site, CDOT identifies and implements the recommended buffers and seasonal restrictions recommended by CPW. This mitigation is developed and coordinated with CPW and USFWS prior to the start of construction.

In February 2012, Mr. Robert Belford, biologist with Wilson & Company, conducted a field survey for raptor nests within the I-25 EA re-evaluation area. A limitation of the survey was that it was done from CDOT right-of-way and visibility onto adjacent private lands was in some case obscured by trees. This limited the ability to see up to the half-mile radius that CPW stipulates for some nesting raptors such as Ferruginous Hawks.

There appear to be three raptor nests in the re-evaluation area, all believed to be used by Red-Tailed Hawks, and all believed to be in good condition, suitable for raptor use in the spring of 2012. These are:

- Near I-25 Exit 150, west of I-25, observed in 2012 and also documented in USAFA's 2010 Environmental Assessment for its solar panel array.

- Between I-25 Exits 151 and 153, west of I-25, near the north end of a USAFA runway, also documented in a USAFA 2010 EA.
- Near I-25 Exit 158, west of I-25, observed to be in active use by Red-Tailed Hawks, February 2012.

The CPW recommendations for Red-Tailed Hawks call for no new surface occupancy within 1/3 mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restrictions to human encroachment are no encroachment within 1/3 mile radius of active nests from February 15 through July 15. CPW defines surface occupancy as follows: “Any physical object that is intended to remain on the landscape permanently or for a significant amount of time. Examples include houses, oil and gas wells, tanks, wind turbines, roads, tracks, etc.”

The February 2012 survey did not include reconnaissance for other types of bird nests. In February 2011, CDOT updated Section 240 of its Standard Specifications, “Protection of Migratory Birds”. These specifications will be followed to prevent injury and death to birds and their nests that are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Some of the mitigation measures included in the updated CDOT specifications are:

- Tree trimming and/or removal activities will be completed before birds begin to nest or after the young have fledged. In Colorado, most nesting and rearing activities occur between April 1 and August 31. However, since some birds nest as early as February, a nesting bird survey will be conducted by a biologist before any tree trimming or removal activities begin.
- Bridge or culvert work that may disturb nesting birds will be completed before birds begin to nest or after the young have fledged. No bridge or culvert work will take place between April 1 and August 31 if nesting birds are present in these structures. If nests are present in these structures, nests can be removed before they are occupied.
- Clearing and grubbing of vegetation that may disturb ground nesting birds will be completed before birds begin to nest or after the young have fledged. If work activities are planned between April 1 and August 31, vegetation will be removed and/or trimmed to a height of six inches or less prior to April 1.

Regarding riparian areas, SB40 requirements remain in place. Many of the riparian areas identified in the 2004 EA are located in northern El Paso County, where 2012 widening activities will take place. CDOT and its contractor(s) will abide by SB 40 requirements with regard to these areas. Mr. Robert Belford, biologist with Wilson & Company, examined the drainages along I-25 in northern El Paso County and concluded that all of them would meet the SB 40 criteria.

Regarding noxious weeds, El Paso County adopted its Noxious Weed Management Plan in March 2009, it adopted the Colorado (statewide) Noxious Weed List, thus replacing the County’s own previous, shorter list. The current Colorado list includes 18 List A species, 39 List B species, and 14 List C species. These species do not all occur in El Paso County, but would be subject to the noxious weed management requirements if encountered. Extensive efforts to identify and monitor noxious weeds in northern El Paso County have been underway for the past decade, and are summarized below. The results of these efforts were not known at the time that the I-25 EA was completed in 2004.

Noxious weed monitoring on the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) began in 2002, in cooperation with the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) at Colorado State University. Subsequently, an integrated noxious weed management plan for USAFA was developed in 2004. An annual monitoring program at USAFA has been underway since then whereby three monitoring sites were established for each of ten noxious weed species (out of 13 species that were originally found). Different weed control methods have been tried at the sites, including biological control (e.g., releasing beetles to control the weeds), to assess the relative effectiveness of the alternative control methods. Year 6 results from the Monitoring Program were published in April 2011.

Many of USAFA's noxious weed problems are found along Monument Creek, but some also were found near I-25. Tamarisk was found in Pine Creek and was eradicated, and later was found in Kettle Creek and eradicated there. Long-term monitoring sites near I-25 were established for tamarisk, common St. Johnswort, yellow toadflax, and musk thistle.

CDOT undertook a major noxious weed mapping project during 2000 to 2004 in conjunction with the Colorado Nature Heritage Program. This established a GIS database of known weed infestations, helping to focus CDOT's control efforts. It also provided training in noxious weed recognition and management for CDOT maintenance crews. The most recent CDOT GIS data for I-25 in northern El Paso County is from 2010. Figure 3 shows the location of noxious weed infestations by eight species that were reported at that time. These eight species are listed in the figure.

In 2008, the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments began including noxious weed maps in the "Regional Setting" chapter of its regional Long-Range Transportation Plan. The map from the latest plan (adopted January 2012) suggests that northern El Paso County is among the most infested portions of the region. The figure from the PPACG plan is reproduced in this memorandum as Figure 4. The data suggest that noxious weed density in the I-25 EA re-evaluation data may be up to 30 times worse than in the rest of the county. As a possible, partial explanation for this phenomenon, north I-25 carries more traffic into El Paso County than any other roadway. Vehicle traffic on Interstate highways can help transport seeds long distances.

FIGURE 3. Noxious Weed Infestations along I-25 in Northern El Paso County, 2010

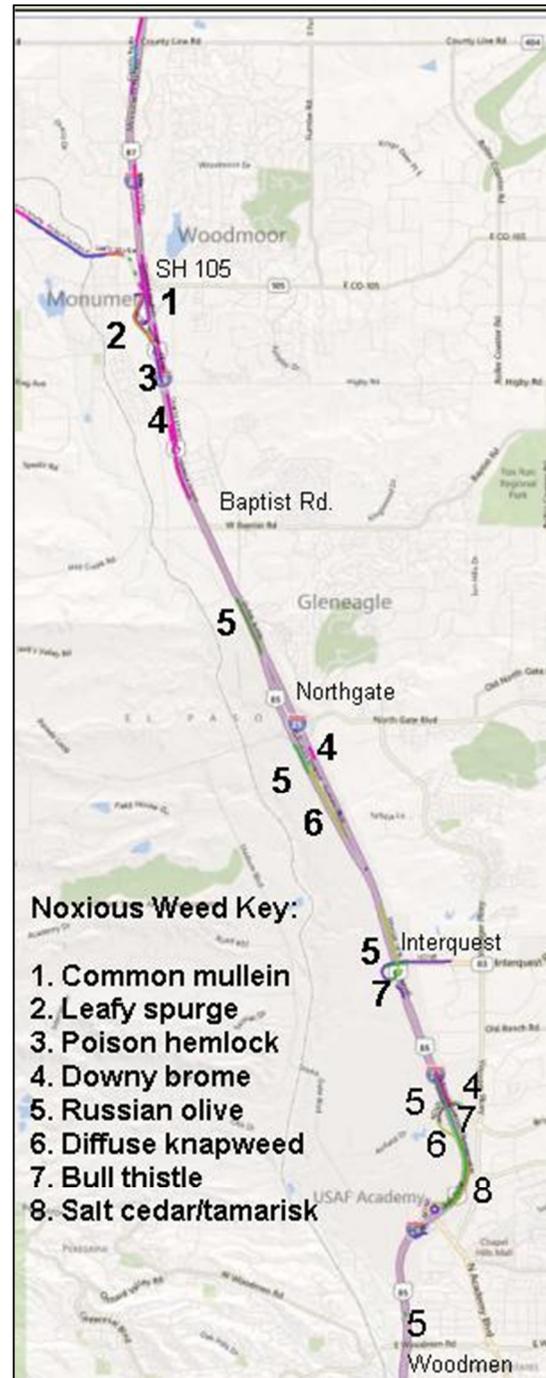
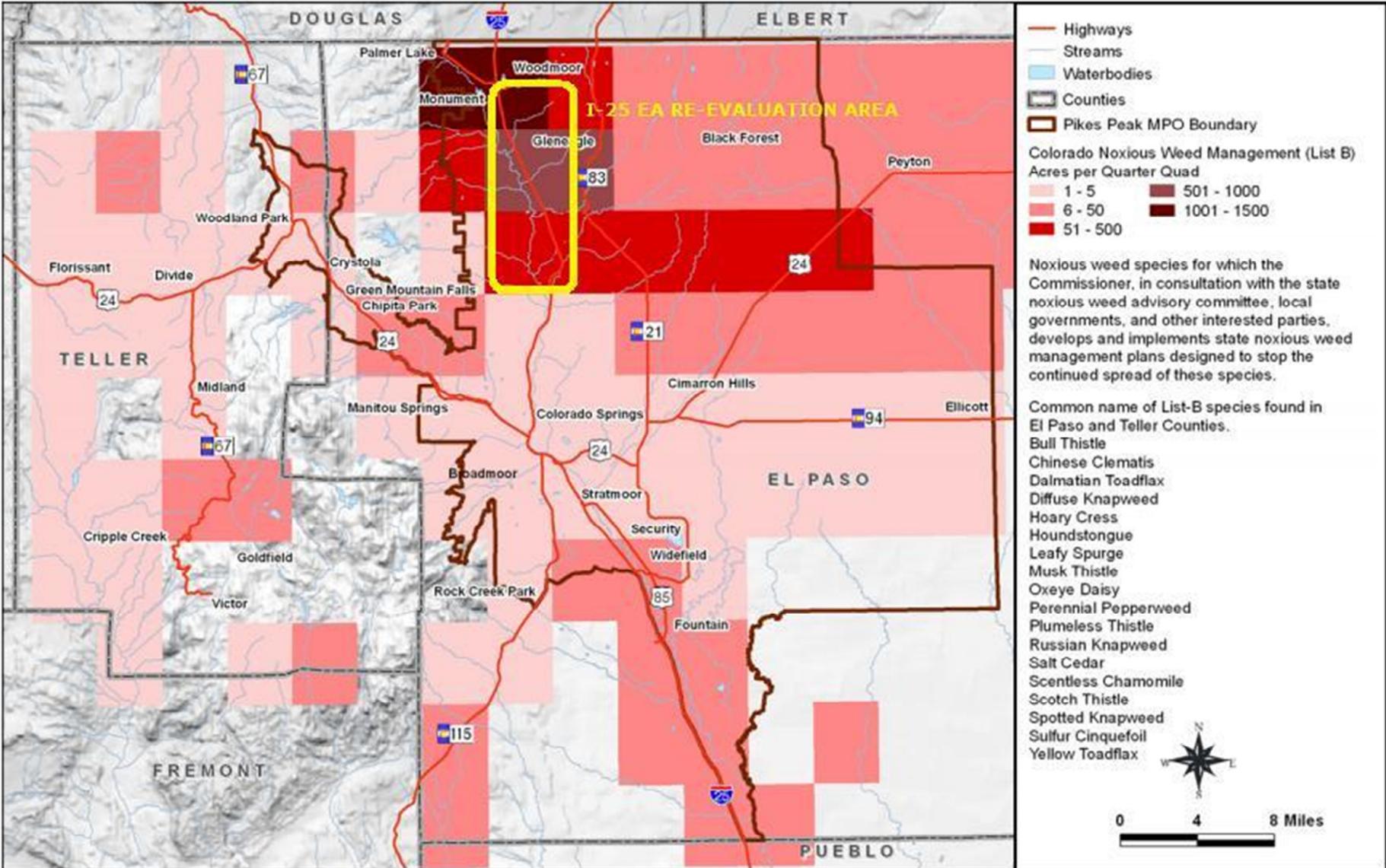


FIGURE 4. PPACG Compilation of Noxious Weed Density Data for the Pikes Peak Region



Mr. Robert Belford, a biologist with Wilson & Company, made a field visit to the corridor in February 2012 to assess current conditions with regard to noxious weeds. The timing for this visit was suboptimal not only because vegetation is largely dormant, but also because the season has been so dry that the plants are much more desiccated than normal, further reducing readily visible differences among plant types. Various species of noxious weeds were clearly in evidence, but conditions were not conducive to making any quantification or even meaningful qualitative assessments based on this field review. Mr. Belford was able to confirm that increased erosion in northern El Paso County drainages is degrading natural habitat and increasing the potential for infestation by noxious weeds.

Nevertheless, the wealth of mapping efforts conducted since completion of the I-25 EA make it very clear that noxious weeds remain a substantial problem along the I-25 corridor and will need to be managed in accordance with the basic approach that was discussed in the I-25 EA.

Without using the words “Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan” (term not widely used at the time), the 2004 I-25 EA committed to implement its components, including:

- mapping of all weed species within a project area
- long-term maintenance to control weed propagation
- re-establishment of native vegetation
- weed eradication methods sensitive to local conditions and needs

Another commitment, listed in the EA under wildlife mitigation, is a basic principle of preventing the spread of invasive weeds:

- minimize construction disturbance to the greatest extent feasible by implementing site-specific construction best management practices.

### **Changes in Proposed Mitigation**

No change to the mitigation proposed in the 2004 EA is anticipated. However, the following considerations are provided to further define and clarify the approach previously outlined.

For the 2012 widening project, CDOT or its contractor will prepare an Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan (INWMP) during project design. The INWMP will address the control methods (chemical, biological, preventative, etc.) that will be put in place to stop the continued spread of List B species and to eliminate the occurrences of any List A species.

This plan must specifically consider and address any potential impacts to the Threatened Preble’s meadow jumping mouse and its Designated Critical Habitat along the corridor. For example, herbicides may need to be applied by technicians with backpack equipment, or possibly ATVS, rather than by larger trucks that might be used in non-habitat areas. Also, herbicides may need to be applied to individual plants, rather than broadcast widely in an area spraying operation.

CDOT’s efforts will be closely coordinated with USAFA officials in order to take advantage of any species-specific control effectiveness information that has been determined through the past six years of noxious weed management and control testing by USAFA and the CNHP.

Based on the presence of three Red-Tailed Hawk nests along the corridor, CDOT and its contractors will follow seasonal construction restrictions in accordance with the updated 2008 CPW raptor nest buffer recommendations. Specifically, these recommendations call for no new surface occupancy within 1/3 mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restrictions to human encroachment are no encroachment within 1/3 mile radius of active nests from February 15 through July 15. Figure 5 provides a general depiction of these construction buffer zones.

Any seasonal restrictions regarding raptors will need to be coordinated with previous seasonal restriction commitments pertaining to the Prebles meadow jumping mouse, as required by the approved USFWS Programmatic Biological Opinion. The BO states that “Highway construction in habitat areas will be scheduled during Preble’s hibernation season (November 1 to April 30)” [EA Section 8, page 9].

### **Conclusion**

Wildlife, riparian and noxious weeds conditions in the I-25 re-evaluation area have not changed substantially since the 2004 EA was approved, although stream damage due to erosion appears to have accelerated.

The identification of raptor nests along the corridor is not unexpected but is a new development that could complicate construction scheduling in some areas. Note that *in areas that are located in both mouse habitat and raptor buffer areas, construction could effectively be limited to the winter, November 1 to February 15, when bad weather can hamper progress.*

Table 2 summarizes the impacts and mitigation described in the EA and what has changed that affects the Proposed Action within the re-evaluation area.

FIGURE 5. Potential Construction Buffer Zones around Raptor Nests in the Re-evaluation Area

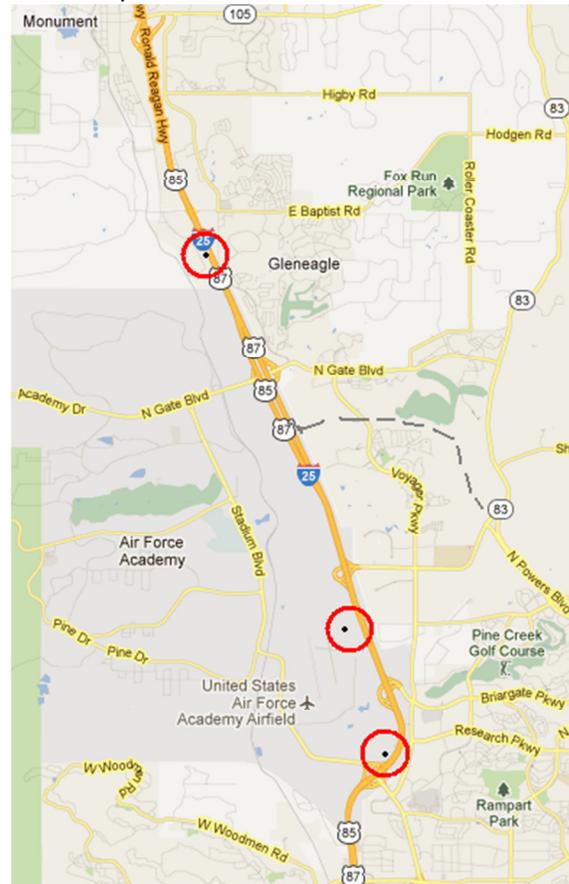


TABLE 3. Summary of Previously and Currently Identified Impacts and Mitigation for Wildlife, Riparian Areas and Noxious Weeds

EA 2004 – No-Action Alternative	EA 2004 – Impacts of Proposed Action	EA 2004 – Mitigation	2012 – What Has Changed	Re-evaluation 2012 – No Action	Re-evaluation 2012 – Impacts of Proposed Action	Re-evaluation 2012 - Mitigation
<p><u>Wildlife</u></p> <p>With increased traffic on the existing roadway, I-25 noise would continue to displace wildlife and I-25 would become a stronger barrier to the east/west movement of wildlife.</p>	<p>With increased traffic and a widened roadway, I-25 noise would continue to displace wildlife and I-25 would become a stronger barrier to the east/west movement of wildlife.</p> <p>The length of culverts would increase. Wildlife movement corridors would be temporarily disrupted during construction, and mature vegetation would be lost.</p>	<p>CDOT will design hydraulic structures to improve corridor east/west movement, and will re-vegetate disturbed areas to replicate or enhance habitats.</p>	<p>The population of the Pikes Peak Region has continued to grow, as expected, and traffic on I-25 has continued to grow, as expected, making I-25 a stronger barrier to wildlife movement, as expected.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the mitigation identified in the EA.</p>
<p>The No Action Alternative would result in no new disturbance to adjacent lands.</p>	<p>The Proposed Action would disturb undeveloped grassland and riparian crossings, including some that are on Air Force Academy property.</p>	<p>CDOT will re-vegetate disturbed areas using species native to the area. On USAFA property, this will be done in a manner that is consistent with the Academy’s wildlife management objectives.</p>	<p>The Air Force Academy built a solar array on its land next to I-25 Exit 150, North Academy Blvd, consuming 30 acres of undisturbed grassland. Additional grassland consumption is occurring on private lands adjacent to I-25.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the mitigation identified in the EA.</p>
<p>The No Action Alternative would result in no new disturbance to the nests of migratory birds.</p>	<p>Although no migratory bird nesting sites were identified at the time of field surveys, the Proposed Action has the potential to affect future nesting sites.</p>	<p>CDOT will conduct field surveys to look for migratory birds that are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act before removing large trees. Obtain necessary permits if required.</p>	<p>In February 2011, CDOT has updated Section 240 of its Standard Specifications, “Protection of Migratory Birds”.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA. However, mitigation will be done in accordance with the new, updated CDOT Specifications rather than those which were previously in effect.</p>
<p>The No Action Alternative would not result in any new disturbance to riparian areas.</p>	<p>Approximately 13 acres of riparian corridor would be directly impacted. This would result in the permanent displacement of wildlife species.</p>	<p>CDOT’s preservation of 50 acres for Preble’s mouse habitat will also benefit other wildlife that use riparian areas.</p>	<p>Since the 2004 EA, CDOT has acquired more than 30 of the required 50 acres for Preble’s mouse habitat.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>

TABLE 3, continued. Summary of Previously and Currently Identified Impacts and Mitigation for Wildlife, Riparian Areas and Noxious Weeds

EA 2004 – No-Action Alternative	EA 2004 – Impacts of Proposed Action	EA 2004 – Mitigation	2012 – What Has Changed	Re-evaluation 2012 – No Action	Re-evaluation 2012 – Impacts of Proposed Action	Re-evaluation 2012 - Mitigation
<p><u>Vegetation</u> Degradation from high traffic volumes and roadway operations would continue to limit vegetation health and diversity.</p>	<p>Vegetation types to be affected include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disturbed grassland, 922 acres</li> <li>• Shortgrass prairie, 27 acres</li> <li>• Riparian deciduous, 25 acres</li> <li>• Wetlands, 10.2 acres</li> <li>• Forested-ponderosa pine, 4.9 acres</li> <li>• Shrubland-gamble oak, 1.5 acres</li> </ul>	<p>Construction disturbances will be limited using Best Management Practices. Disturbed areas will be re-vegetated to replicate or enhance habitats, using care however to avoid using plants that would attract wildlife to the road. Re-vegetation will occur immediately following construction activities using site-specific seed mixes and certified weed-free mulch or straw.</p>	<p>Some of the impacts described in the EA have already occurred, and been mitigated, with the COSMIX project and Baptist Road interchange reconstruction.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>About 48.9 acres of right-of-way needed for North Powers Blvd from I-25 to Voyager Parkway are now being counted as I-25 impacts. This ROW consists of grassland.</p>	<p>No change to the mitigation identified in the EA.</p>
	<p>It is estimated that 700 to 900 trees will be removed over the length of the 26-mile corridor. Removal of undesirable non-native species will be beneficial.</p>	<p>Trees will be planted in proximity to where trees are removed.</p>	<p>Some of the impacts described in the EA have already occurred, and been mitigated, with the COSMIX project and Baptist Road interchange reconstruction.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA. About 48.9 acres of right-of-way needed for North Powers Blvd from I-25 to Voyager Parkway are now being counted as I-25 impacts. This grassland contains few additional trees.</p>	<p>No change to the mitigation identified in the EA.</p>
<p><u>Noxious Weeds</u> As per existing trends, noxious weeds would continue to spread along side I-25.</p>	<p>Existing and new species of noxious weeds would have the potential to spread in newly disturbed areas and out-compete native species.</p>	<p>Using CDOT's standard protocol for weed management, develop a weed management plan to mitigate the potential adverse effects of earth disturbance. The plan will include eradication of tamarisk on CDOT right-of-way within the project area. This plan will incorporate appropriate methods such as herbicides, mechanical removal, and (potentially) biological controls. Appropriate control methods will be selected carefully, especially in sensitive areas such as wetlands, riparian and habitat corridors.</p>	<p>Extensive weed mapping efforts have taken place in northern El Paso County. A CNHP study at USAFA has experimented with alternative control methods. El Paso County has adopted the Colorado Noxious Weeds List.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the impacts identified in the EA.</p>	<p>No change to the mitigation identified in the EA. CDOT will coordinate with USAFA to identify preferred control methods on USAFA property.</p>