



News Release

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PROGRAM SEEKS LANDOWNER PARTICIPATION IN RECOVERING THREATENED FROG -Agencies Seek Comments on Arizona Agreement-

Federal and State wildlife managers are seeking to make it easier for private landowners to conserve the threatened Chiricahua leopard frog. The Arizona Game and Fish Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have developed a draft Safe Harbor Agreement that will allow landowners to maintain or create frog habitat and reestablish frog populations on non-federal land. Participating landowners will receive assurance that no additional regulatory restrictions will be imposed on their property beyond those agreed to at the time of enrollment. Comments on the agreement are being sought from the public.

“Private landowners and ranchers could be contributing greatly to our efforts to recover the Chiricahua leopard frog in Arizona,” said Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, the Service’s Acting Regional Director. “We’ve crafted a program that will increase frog populations while eliminating participants’ fear of regulatory repercussions when dealing with a threatened species.”

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has applied to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for an enhancement of survival permit. The requested 50-year permit would authorize incidental take of frogs as a result of conservation actions, including establishing new populations, enhancing aquatic habitat and maintaining existing habitat; ongoing livestock operations; recreation; land treatments; and other existing land-use activities within the historical range. Owners of properties that neighbor frog restoration projects may also enroll in the program to acquire assurances should restored frog populations expand onto their land.

“This agreement continues to build on the positive relations that wildlife managers and private citizens have had during past frog conservation projects,” says Valerie Boyarski, amphibians and reptiles conservation planner for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. “At the same time, it gives people a better understanding of the importance of this work and allows them to decide how much or how little they want to help with these efforts. This starts a new chapter for frog conservation.”

Causes of Chiricahua leopard frog population declines are not always clear, but biologists believe they face multiple threats, including nonnative predators, particularly fish, bullfrogs, and crayfish; habitat loss and fragmentation; disease; and environmental contamination. The species has disappeared from entire mountain ranges, valleys and river drainages within its historical range. The frog’s historical range in Arizona includes portions of Apache, Cochise, Coconino, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Navajo, Pima, Pinal, Santa Cruz, and Yavapai counties.

Copies of the draft Arizona Game and Fish Department Safe Harbor Agreement can be downloaded from the Arizona Ecological Services Office website (<http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes>) or requested from the Fish and Wildlife Service at (602) 242-0210. Comments on the application and Safe Harbor Agreement should be submitted to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Office, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, Arizona 85021-4951 prior to Sept. 1, 2006.