



News Release

Southwest Region

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES LISTING CHIRICAHUA LEOPARD FROG AS A THREATENED SPECIES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed to list the Chiricahua leopard frog as threatened under the Endangered Species Act because it is imperiled by non-native predators, disease, loss of habitat, and potential natural events such as floods and drought. A species is designated as threatened when it is at risk of becoming an endangered species throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Today's proposal includes a special rule encouraging cattlemen to continue their regular management of livestock tanks that are harboring leopard frog populations.

The Chiricahua leopard frog is a medium-to-large sized frog from 2.5 to 4 inches in length. It is spotted and often greenish with a raised fold of skin running down each side of the back. The frog is found in ponds, streams, stock tanks, and other aquatic sites in the mountains of central and east-central Arizona and west-central New Mexico, and in the mountains and valleys of southeastern Arizona and extreme southwestern New Mexico. The species is also known from several sites in Chihuahua, and from single sites in Sonora and Durango, Mexico.

Causes of the species' decline are not always clear but biologists believe it faces a variety of threats including nonnative predators, particularly fish, bullfrogs, and crayfish; habitat loss and fragmentation; disease; and environmental contamination. The species apparently has disappeared from entire mountain ranges, valleys and river drainages within its historic range.

"The Chiricahua leopard frog is a unique part of the Southwest's natural heritage and it is disturbing to see its decline and even disappearance throughout much of its range," said Nancy Kaufman, the Service's Southwest Regional Director. "Many people and organizations already have invested much time and energy in the shared goal of conservation and restoration of Chiricahua leopard frog habitat and populations. A designation as a threatened species would contribute to these efforts."

A wide variety of organizations and individuals are involved in Chiricahua leopard frog conservation activities. The Nature Conservancy and New Mexico Game and Fish Department are undertaking conservation efforts on the Mimbres River. Ranchers in southeast Arizona's San Bernardino Valley are working with the University of Arizona and San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge to construct and maintain habitat for frogs. The Tonto National Forest, the Phoenix Zoo

and the Arizona Game and Fish Department have reared frogs in captivity and established or reintroduced populations in the Gentry Creek area. Students at Douglas High School and Douglas Public School District in Southeast Arizona have created award-winning outdoor classrooms for the rearing of leopard frogs. These conservation efforts could be the basis of recovery planning efforts for the species.

Biologists believe control of non-native species will be necessary for the survival of the frog. The Service also plans to work with other Federal agencies and local planning groups to restore and conserve wetlands that provide vital habitat for the species. A fungal disease, chytridiomycosis, linked to the global decline of frogs and toads has been identified in Chiricahua leopard frog populations, but biologists are uncertain about its role in the decline of the species.

The frog historically occurred at 212 sites in Arizona, 170 sites in New Mexico, and 12 or 13 sites in Mexico. Since 1995 the frog has been found at only 52 Arizona and 27 New Mexico sites. The status of populations in Mexico is unknown.

Of the 79 remaining populations of Chiricahua leopard frog, 47 occur on U.S. Forest Service lands, mostly in the Coronado National Forest. Additional populations occur in the Apache-Sitgreaves, Tonto, and Coconino National Forests in Arizona and the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. The other populations occur primarily on private lands.

Many Chiricahua leopard frog populations occupy stock tanks, or impoundments maintained by cattlemen as livestock watering holes. The special rule in the proposed listing is designed to allow operation and maintenance of stock tanks that support frogs on private or tribal land without the usually required permits authorizing "take" of a listed species, should the maintenance incidentally harass, harm, or kill a leopard frog.

Critical habitat was not proposed for the frog. The Service found such a designation is not prudent after weighing the risk of illegal collection, vandalism, and potential disease transmission resulting from the required publication of location information against any additional habitat protections afforded by a critical habitat designation.

The Service published the proposal to list the Chiricahua leopard frog as threatened in today's *Federal Register*. The Service is requesting further information on the distribution, population trends, habitat use, loss or modification of habitat, and other threats to the Chiricahua leopard frog until September 12, 2000. Requests for public hearings on the proposal must be received by July 31, 2000. To send comments or request public hearings, contact: Field Supervisor, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, Arizona. Copies of today's proposal are available on the Service's web site: <http://arizonaes.fws.gov/public1.htm> or by calling (602) 640-2720.

Photos of the Chiricahua leopard frog are available on the Service's web site: <http://arizonaes.fws.gov/amphibia.htm>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 520 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

