



# News Release

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Arizona Ecological Services Field Office <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>

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## **CHIRICAHUA LEOPARD FROG RECOVERY PLAN ANNOUNCED**

A team of technical specialists and an extensive group of stakeholders have completed a plan to recover the threatened Chiricahua leopard frog. Once found in over 400 aquatic sites in the Southwest, the fist-sized frog is now limited to fewer than a fifth of its former locations. The Chiricahua leopard frog was listed under the Endangered Species Act as a threatened species in 2002 with a unique special rule encouraging cattlemen to continue their regular management of livestock tanks that are harboring leopard frog populations.

The recovery plan identifies threats to the Chiricahua leopard frog, then lays out actions that reduce or eliminate threats, and sets goals by which recovery can be measured. Stakeholders, rural residents and land managers that share space and water with the leopard frog were deeply involved in planning recovery tasks grounded in the logistical realities of on-the-ground species recovery – some are already performing recovery activities.

"Chiricahua leopard frog recovery momentum is increasing, and many of our partners have started to secure existing frog populations or establish new ones," said Jim Rorabaugh, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supervisory wildlife biologist who oversaw the recovery planning process. "Captive rearing is happening at zoos and other facilities, such as Arizona Game and Fish Department hatcheries and backyard ponds. Several reintroductions have been completed, and a statewide Arizona Safe Harbor Agreement to encourage private landowner assistance is now in place. However, much work remains to be done."

"The recovery plan provides a realistic road map to restore frog populations, recover habitat and secure the survival of this Southwest native," said Mike Sredl, Arizona Game and Fish Department frog biologist. "The key to a speedy recovery will be support of strong partnerships and novel partners like cattle ranchers, backyard pond owners, private landowners and local natural resource groups."

If recovery actions are promptly and successfully implemented, the recovery goal of securing three frog-populated drainages in each of eight recovery units in Arizona and New Mexico could be reached by 2025-2030. At that point the species could be considered for removal from the federal list of threatened species. The initial five years of recovery costs are estimated at \$3.26 million.

The Chiricahua leopard frog is a medium-to-large sized frog from 2.1 to 5.4 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, extreme southwestern New Mexico and adjacent portions of Sonora and Chihuahua, Mexico. The Chiricahua leopard frog has been extirpated from more than 80 percent of its historical sites in Arizona and New Mexico. The status of populations in Mexico is less well known.

The Chiricahua leopard frog is threatened by nonnative predators, particularly fish, bullfrogs, and crayfish; habitat loss and fragmentation; disease; collection; environmental contamination; and natural events such as floods and drought. It is recognized as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act because it is at risk of becoming an endangered species in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Biologists believe control of nonnative 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, is contributing to the decline of Chiricahua leopard frog populations and the draft plan identifies a strategy to address the disease.

The recovery plan is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona> or by contacting the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Ste. 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021 (602-242-0210). Individuals and groups interested in participating in leopard frog conservation and recovery are encouraged to contact Jim Rorabaugh at the above address.

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 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 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 Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Photos of the Chiricahua leopard frog and other supporting information are available at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/CLF.htm> or by contacting Jeff Humphrey at (602) 242-0210.