

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
2321 WEST ROYAL PALM ROAD, SUITE 103
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85021

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TARAHUMARA FROG
SYCAMORE AND BIG CASA BLANCA CANYONS
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, ARIZONA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for its involvement in efforts to re-establish the Tarahumara frog (*Rana tarahumarae*) into Big Casa Blanca Canyon, Santa Rita Mountains, and Sycamore Canyons, Pajarito Mountains, Santa Cruz County, Arizona.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is for the Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), the Tarahumara Frog Conservation Team (TFCT), and others, to pursue re-establishment of the Tarahumara frog in the Big Casa Blanca and Sycamore canyon areas of southern Arizona, according to the procedures and schedules detailed in AGFD's proposal to re-establish the frog at these sites. Re-establishment would be contingent upon completion of AGFD's "Procedures for Nongame Wildlife and Endangered Species Re-establishment Projects" and approval by the AGFD Director. The Tarahumara frog has been extirpated from Arizona and the United States since 1983.

Re-establishment would include the following steps: 1) obtain stock of Tarahumara frogs from Sonora, 2) re-establish populations of the frog from imported stock into Big Casa Blanca Canyon, Santa Rita Mountains, and Sycamore Canyon, Pajarito Mountains, 3) monitor the releases and adapt management as needed to ensure the re-establishment is successful, and 4) continue coordination through the TFCT to ensure all issues and concerns are addressed. Initial releases would occur at Big Casa Blanca Canyon in suitable microsites. Once established there, re-establishment would be considered at Sycamore Canyon. These two sites were the stronghold of the species before its extirpation in 1983. Habitats are still intact in these canyons, and we believe they may be the best sites for re-establishment.

The proposed action includes measures to minimize potential adverse effects to the Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), the Chiricahua leopard frog (*Rana chiricahuensis*), and Sonora chub (*Gila ditaenia*), and critical habitat designated for the chub in the Sycamore Canyon area.

Alternatives Considered

1. No Action Alternative. No action would be taken by the Fish and Wildlife Service to re-establish the Tarahumara frog in Arizona.

2. Proposed Alternative, as described above.

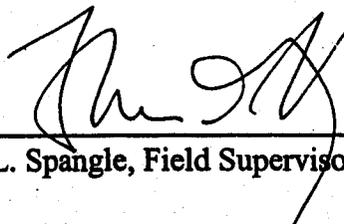
Public Comment

The draft EA was sent on September 12, 2003, to 26 persons, agencies, and government officials for review, was announced and made available for public review on our office website (<http://arizonaes@fws.gov>) on September 15, 2003, and was announced via a news release faxed on September 15, 2003, to 35 newspapers, as well as several television and radio stations and publishers of other printed materials. An article about the proposed re-establishment was published in the Arizona Daily Star, a Tucson newspaper, on September 17, 2003, which included information about how the public could comment. Articles describing the proposal were also published in AZCENTRAL, an online Arizona news outlet, on September 19, 2003; in the Provo, Utah Daily Herald on September 20, 2003; in HerpDigest, an online journal, on September 28, 2003; and in the fall issue of Sky Iskand Alliance's newsletter. The public comment period was from September 15 to October 15, 2003. We received seven letters commenting on the draft EA. We address these comment letters in the final EA, in which we have listed and responded to all issues, concerns, and questions described in the letters. The comments did not identify any significant new environmental impacts not addressed in the draft EA. The AGFD conducted a scoping process and solicited comments on their proposals to re-establish the frog, as well. A summary of comments received during that process was included in the draft EA. We considered the AGFD comments in the development of the draft and final EAs. The issues and concerns discussed in the "Affected Environment" and "Environmental Consequences" of the draft and final EAs are based, in part, on these comments.

Determination

Based upon information contained in the final EA, and supporting data in the Service's files, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that this action is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of section 102 (2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed action is not warranted.

It is my decision to proceed with re-establishment of the Tarahumara frog at Big Casa Blanca and Sycamore canyons, Arizona, as described in the proposed alternative.



For Steven L. Spangle, Field Supervisor

3/10/04
Date