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September 9, 2015

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Recovery Plan for Endangered Frog Available

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing the availability of the final recovery plan for the dusky gopher frog, federally listed as endangered.

The dusky gopher frog, a stocky frog with a loud, guttural call, is heard less often now in the longleaf pine forests of Mississippi. Once also found in Louisiana and Alabama, now it is only found in four locations in Harrison and Jackson counties in southern Mississippi.

“The dusky gopher frog is considered to be one of the 100 most endangered species in the world and this final recovery plan provides direction the Service and its partners can take to recover this rare species,” said Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “We are working closely with the states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana, U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, private landowners, universities and conservation institutes like the Memphis Zoo, on several recovery efforts to benefit this frog.”

The final recovery plan lays out a strategy to help recover this endangered frog by ensuring sustainable and healthy populations and reducing threats to the species. It describes actions necessary for the frog’s recovery, establishes criteria for downlisting it to threatened status, and estimates the time and cost for implementing the needed recovery actions.

Specific recovery actions in the recovery plan include developing a strategy to manage and enhance existing dusky gopher frog populations and their habitat; identifying and securing additional populations and habitat; and establishing new populations through translocations or reintroductions. Conducting research to guide land management and to provide further information on dusky gopher frog life history and ecology is also a task outlined in the plan.

One example of an ongoing dusky gopher frog recovery effort specified in the recovery plan is a frog rearing project at the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. In March and April of this year, 1,596 tadpoles were stocked in the refuge’s 50 rearing tanks. To date, 1,226 juvenile frogs have been released into Sawdust Pond. The goal of the project is to have a self-sustaining, breeding population of dusky gopher frogs. Partnering with the Service in this project are Western Carolina University, the U.S. Forest Service, De Soto National Forest, U.S. Forest Service’s Southern Research Station Harrison Experimental Forest, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, and The Nature Conservancy.

In the recovery plan, the Service outlines a path to downlist the dusky gopher frog to threatened status by reducing the threats to the species and preventing its extinction. Downlisting to threatened will be considered when there are six genetically viable populations, each with at least

two breeding ponds no more than a mile apart and not separated by any major barriers, such as highways or developed areas, which would disrupt movement of frogs between ponds. Also, 10 years of monitoring must demonstrate that these populations are stable; at least two successful breeding events must be documented over a three-year period. In addition, the frog's breeding and upland habitat areas must occur in sufficient quantity and quality to support growing populations and be protected long-term through management agreements, public ownership or other means.

As presented in the recovery plan, the six genetically viable populations across its historic range could include one population in Louisiana within portions of St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, and Washington Parishes; two populations in south-central Mississippi within Forrest County and portions of George, Greene, Jones, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River, Perry, Stone, and Wayne Counties; two populations in south Mississippi within Hancock and Harrison Counties and portions of Jackson, George, Pearl River, and Stone Counties; and one population either in eastern Mississippi within portions of George, Greene, Jackson, Perry, and Wayne Counties or in Alabama within Mobile and Washington Counties and a portion of Choctaw County.

The dusky gopher frog's disappearance from much of its historical range was primarily due to habitat destruction and alteration of the frog's longleaf pine upland and breeding habitats. Continuing threats to the species' habitat include fire suppression and habitat modification due to land uses, such as urbanization, forestry and agriculture. Additionally, small population sizes and vulnerability to catastrophic events, such as droughts, threaten the frog.

To view the recovery plan on the web, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/angered/species/recovery-plans.html>. Request a paper copy of the plan by contacting the Service's Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office at 601-321-1126.

More information concerning the dusky gopher frog can be found at the Mississippi Field Office website: <http://www.fws.gov/mississippiES/>

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