



Questions and Answers: 12-month Finding on Petition to List Northern Leopard Frog in the West

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

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For Release: October 3, 2011

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Q: What is the northern leopard frog?

A: The northern leopard frog is a smooth-skinned green, brown, or sometimes yellow-green frog covered with large, oval dark spots, each of which is surrounded by a lighter halo. Adult body lengths range from 2 to 4.5 inches.

Q: What habitat does the northern leopard frog occupy?

A: The northern leopard frog requires a mosaic of habitats to meet the requirements of all of its life stages. It breeds in a variety of aquatic habitats that include slow-moving or still water along streams and rivers, wetlands, permanent or temporary pools, beaver ponds, and human-constructed habitats such as earthen stock tanks and borrow pits. Subadult northern leopard frogs typically migrate to feeding sites along the borders of larger, more permanent bodies of water and recently metamorphosed frogs will move up and down drainages and across land in an effort to locate new breeding areas.

Q: What has the Service been petitioned to do?

A: In June 2006, the Center for Native Ecosystems and seven other environmental organizations sent a petition to add the western population of the northern leopard as a distinct population segment (DPS) to the list of species protected under the Endangered Species Act. Under the Endangered Species Act, animal populations that are discrete, significant and threatened can be considered for protection as a (DPS).

Q: Once petitioned to list a species as endangered or threatened, how does the Service arrive at a listing determination?

A: First, the Service evaluates the petition to determine whether it presents substantial scientific information indicating that listing under the Endangered Species Act (Act) may be warranted (commonly known as a 90-day finding). The petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to give the leopard frog federal protection under the Act. Rather, this finding is the first step in a long process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available.

If a petition presents substantial information – as is the case for the petition to list the western population of the northern leopard frog – we initiate a 12-month status review of the species to determine whether to propose adding the species to the federal lists of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants.

Based on the status review, we will make one of three possible “12-month” determinations:

- 1) Listing is not warranted, in which case no further action will be taken.
- 2) Listing as threatened or endangered is warranted. In this case, the Service will publish a proposal to list, solicit independent scientific peer review of the proposal, seek input from the public, and consider the input before a final decision about listing the species is made. In general, there is a one-year period between the time a species listing is proposed and the final decision.
- 3) Listing is warranted but precluded by other, higher priority activities. This means the species is added to the federal list of candidate species, and the proposal to list is deferred while the Service works on listing proposals for other species that are at greater risk of extinction. A warranted but precluded finding requires subsequent annual reviews of the finding until such time as either a listing proposal is published, or a not warranted finding is made based on new information.

Q: What is the Service’s 12-month finding on the petition to list the western population of the northern leopard frog?

A: Our status review and 12-month finding concludes that listing of the western population or entire species of northern leopard frog is not warranted at this time.

The species has experienced reductions in its historical range, particularly in the western United States and western Canada; however, the species is still considered to be widespread and relatively common in the eastern United States and eastern Canada. The finding analyzed whether there is a distinct population segment (DPS) of the northern leopard frog in the western United States. Genetic data analyzed indicates that, while there are genetic differences among leopard frogs, the populations are not markedly separate. Therefore, the western U.S. populations do not qualify as a DPS.

Based on our review of the best available scientific and commercial information on the entire northern leopard frog species, we find that threats, alone or cumulatively, are not of sufficient magnitude at the species level to indicate that the northern leopard frog is in danger of extinction, or likely to become so within the foreseeable future, throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Q: What are the threats to the northern leopard frog?

A: As a species with aquatic and semi-aquatic life history phrases, the frog is vulnerable to impacts to its wetland habitats including agriculture, urbanization, oil and gas development, groundwater withdrawal and climate change effects to aquatic habitats. Additionally, the frog is vulnerable to impacts associated with disease, nonnative predators, and collection for biological trade.

Q: Where is the northern leopard frog found and what is the “western population”?

A: The northern leopard frog range includes the northern tier U.S. states, western states and the southern Canadian provinces. The petition to list the western population of the northern leopard frog sought to protect, under the Endangered Species Act, frogs in 19 western states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming). The northern leopard frog is now considered uncommon in a large portion of its range in the western United States, and declines of the species have been documented in most western states and western Canada.

Q: How do the western and eastern populations of the northern leopard frog differ?

A: Under the Endangered Species Act, animal populations that are discrete, significant and threatened can be considered for protection as a “distinct population segment” (DPS). Genetic data analyzed indicates that, while there are genetic differences among leopard frogs, the western populations are not markedly separate from other populations throughout the species’ range. Therefore, the western U.S. populations do not qualify as a DPS. However, we will continue to seek additional information to resolve questions regarding the genetic separation of northern leopard frog populations.

Q: Are there currently efforts to conserve this population?

A: Since 1999, the Service, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Forest Service and many state game and fish agencies have been monitoring the northern leopard frog, protecting and restoring aquatic habitat in some locations, translocating frogs to restore some populations, and eliminating nonnative competitors and predators in some areas. Citizen scientists (schools and local citizens), in the Midwest particularly, are monitoring northern leopard frog deformities. The northern leopard frog is designated as a “species of concern” or “sensitive species” in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico and Oregon, requiring a permit for the capture of northern leopard frogs. In 1999, the species was listed as “endangered” under state law in Washington State.

Q: Will the Service continue to collect information on the status of the northern leopard frog?

A: We are continuing to request new information concerning genetics of, threats to and conservation of the northern leopard frog. New information will help monitor the northern leopard frog and encourage its conservation. If an emergency situation develops for the northern leopard frog or any other species, the Service will act to provide immediate protection.

Q: How can northern leopard frog information be submitted?

A: We always welcome information regarding species’ status and threats, however, to be considered for this status review. Please continue to submit northern leopard frog information to your local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office and to Arizona Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Ste. 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021.