



# News Release

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[www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/)

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## Service Proposes Designation of Critical Habitat for the Chiricahua Leopard Frog

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today a proposal to designate critical habitat for the Chiricahua leopard frog (*Lithobates chiricahuensis*) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In total, the Service is proposing to designate 11,136 acres (4,510 hectares) as critical habitat for the Chiricahua leopard frog. The proposed critical habitat is located in Apache, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Pima, Santa Cruz, and Yavapai counties, Arizona; and Catron, Hidalgo, Grant, Sierra, and Socorro counties, New Mexico.

Additionally, the Service is reassessing the status of and threats to the Chiricahua leopard frog and proposing to continue its protection as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The Service first listed the Chiricahua leopard frog under the Endangered Species Act as a threatened species on June 13, 2002. The listing included a special rule to encourage owners of occupied ponds to routinely maintain their ponds.

When the Service listed the Chiricahua leopard frog in 2002, the Ramsey Canyon leopard frog, found on the eastern slopes of the Huachuca Mountains in Cochise County, was thought to be a unique species. Scientists have since determined that the Ramsey Canyon leopard frog is taxonomically the Chiricahua leopard frog. As a result, the Service must reassess the status of and threats to the currently described Chiricahua leopard frog, including the population previously described as Ramsey Canyon leopard frog. Today's proposal retains the special rule for livestock pond maintenance.

Therefore, this proposed rule consists of: (1) A proposed rule to list the Chiricahua leopard frog as threatened (retaining the special rule for livestock pond maintenance); and (2) a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the Chiricahua leopard frog. Upon tomorrow's publication of this notice in the Federal Register an initial 60 day comment period will begin.

A draft economic analysis and draft environmental assessment for this action will be prepared at a later date and made available to the public for review. At that time, we will reopen the comment period on this proposed rule and concurrently solicit comments on the draft economic analysis and draft environmental assessment. In the final rule, the Service will consider excluding areas from critical habitat designation that are associated with a safe harbor agreement or other land management tool.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Critical habitat designation provides for the conservation of threatened

and endangered species in several ways. Specifying the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species helps federal agencies identify where to utilize their authorities to benefit the species as required by the ESA. Designating critical habitat also helps focus the conservation efforts of other conservation partners, such as State and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. An extensive group of conservation partners completed and began implementing a [recovery plan](#) for the Chiricahua leopard frog in 2007.

In addition to serving as a notification tool, the designation of critical habitat also provides significant regulatory protection for threatened and endangered species – the requirement that federal agencies consult with the Service to ensure actions they fund, authorize or carry out are not likely to destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. Protection afforded to listed species by the ESA also conveys significant protection to the habitat they occupy, regardless of whether that habitat has been formally designated as critical habitat. However, a critical habitat designation prohibits destruction and adverse modification of habitat that is currently unoccupied by listed species but is needed for their recovery, as well as to occupied habitat.

Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge or preserve. In general, a critical habitat designation has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

The health of threatened and endangered species, especially amphibians, is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains these species – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods. By taking action to protect imperiled native fish, wildlife and plants, we can ensure a healthy future for our community.

For further information on how to comment see the Federal Register notice on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/> or contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021; telephone: 602/242-0210; facsimile: 602/242-2513. If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works cooperatively with the American public to continue the conservation legacy of America's great outdoors. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit **[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)**.

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Note to editors: Photographs and maps are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey at 602-242-0210 x222 (jeff\_humphrey@fws.gov) or visiting <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Amphibians.htm> and <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/CLF.htm>.