



CALIFORNIA RED-LEGGED FROG

BACKFROMTHEBRINK.ORG

The Legendary "Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"

The largest native frog in the western United States, the California red-legged frog is widely believed to have inspired Mark Twain's story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." Once found throughout the Golden State from coastal streams to the Sierra Nevada foothills, it has disappeared from 70% of its historic range. The frog is still found in many coastal counties but exists only in isolated pockets elsewhere.

At-Risk Story

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the California red-legged frog was heavily harvested for food, with some 80,000 a year made into frog-leg meals. As their numbers dwindled, bullfrogs from Maryland and Florida were introduced to help satisfy the culinary demand. Unfortunately the considerably larger amphibian soon began preying on the smaller native—a threat that continues today. During the first half of the 20th century, the many farms, ranches and cities that sprang up in the red-legged frog's habitat further decimated populations. By 1939, most of its wetland homes had been eliminated, and by 1960 the frog had completely disappeared from the Central Valley. On top of all this, California's ongoing struggle over water continues to play a part in the frog's precipitous decline.

Characteristics

Size ranges from 1.5-5 inches long (3.8-12.8 cm). As its name suggests, the frog's underside and hind legs are usually red or salmon pink; its back is a mix of small black flecks and larger dark blotches on a brown, gray, olive or reddish brown background. Its toes are not fully webbed. The California red-legged frog was the first species to be listed after a Congressional moratorium on endangered species listing ended in April 1996.

Habitat and Range

The California red-legged frog occupies a wide range of aquatic habitats, including small streams, ponds and marshy areas. Adults prefer dense, shrubby vegetation near deep-water pools fringed by cattails and willows. Although they require wetlands for breeding, frogs will sometimes venture into other nearby habitats during the fall and winter rainy seasons. The frog once ranged as far north as Marin County (along the coast) and Redding (inland), and south as far as Mexico's Baja California.

ESA Listing

In May 1996, the frog was listed as *threatened* under the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Pacific Region (Region 1) is the lead region for this entity.



The Situation Today

Once found throughout California's Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada foothills, the California red-legged frog has disappeared from 70% of its range. Our largest native western frog, it is still found in more than 240 streams and stream basins in 22 counties and is most abundant in the central coastal region. Once harvested because of its tasty legs, this frog faces newer threats from habitat destruction and competition with and predation by non-native bullfrogs and crayfish.

Our 10-Year Vision

Our goal is to work together with private landowners and other partners to create new breeding habitat, improve foraging habitat and reduce the impacts of non-native species at a minimum of 50 privately owned sites throughout the frog's range. Safe Harbor agreements, like the one we developed with the Robert Mondavi company for one of its vineyards in San Luis Obispo County, can help secure the cooperation of farmers, ranchers and other landowners.

Restoration Needed

- Creation of suitable ponds to serve as breeding sites
- Restoration riparian and nearby upland habitat near breeding sites
- Management of ponds to keep non-native bullfrogs and fish from eliminating the red-legged frogs
- Introduction of red-legged frogs into suitable habitats within their former range
- Targeting existing incentive programs to encourage private landowners to participate

Acres Needed

1,000 acres and 50 landowners

Cost of Recovery

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimates that the complete recovery of the California red-legged frog will cost at least \$10 million. Environmental Defense believes significant progress toward recovery can be made with a modest amount of money if it is targeted to specific areas and activities. Over the next 10 years, Environmental Defense will work to direct more than \$1 million to on-the-ground restoration projects that will help bring the California red-legged frog Back from the Brink.

Every Dollar Counts

\$75 will purchase 25 willow saplings for planting in riparian areas.

\$500 will pay for fencing to protect sensitive breeding pond habitat.

\$1,500 will cover the cost of earth moving associated with creating a small breeding pond.

\$4,000 will cover the cost of creating new breeding-pond habitat.