

Feds announce plan to boost desert frog

Chiricahua leopard species threatened by drought, growth

[B. POOLE](#)

Tucson Citizen

A frog species native to Pima County could be scratched from the federal threatened species list within about 30 years under a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service plan announced Tuesday.

The Chiricahua leopard frog, whose habitat spans southwest New Mexico, southeast Arizona and northern Mexico, was listed in 2002 as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The 430-page recovery plan would rely on cooperation among governments, property owners and public land managers to help stave off the decline of the frogs, which are threatened by drought, disease and cattle ranching.

Noah Greenwald, the Center for Biological Diversity conservation biologist who wrote the petition to have the frog listed, called the plan a good start.

"I think this is one part of a larger plan that is needed to protect all of the species that rely on the rivers and streams of the Southwest," Greenwald said.

The plan calls on ranchers and property owners to make sure the frogs can survive in backyard ponds and livestock tanks that have replaced natural habitat.

That helps, but the real issue is destruction of natural habitat that has led to declines among other species, as well, Greenwald said.

The Mexican garter snake, declining because it relies on the Chiricahua leopard frog for food, is an example, he said.

The plan calls for starting the delisting process after securing three populations of frogs in each of eight areas across Arizona and New Mexico by 2025-30.

Greenwald thinks such "museum populations" fall short of real recovery in an area where many species are at risk.

"We're in the midst of an extinction crisis" in the Southwest, he said.

The plan calls for cooperation among U.S., tribal and Mexican governments to identify and restore habitat that has not been claimed by urbanization or other human impact.

The first five years of the recovery process are expected to cost \$3.3 million, and costs beyond that would be determined later, the plan says.