

CENTER for BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Sierra Nevada Frogs and Toads Proposed Critical Habitat

On April 24, 2013 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed Endangered Species Act protection for the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, the northern distinct population segment (DPS) of the mountain yellow-legged frog, and the Yosemite toad. The Service also proposed more than 2 million acres of critical habitat across the Sierra Nevada mountains. This is great news for these native amphibians of the

high Sierra Nevada, which have suffered massive declines in recent decades and disappeared from most of the places where they once lived.

What is Critical Habitat?

One of the Endangered Species Act's greatest components, a critical habitat designation is a specific geographic area that is essential for the conservation of a threatened or endan-

gered species and requires special management and protection. Critical habitat may include areas that are not currently occupied by the species but that are needed for its recovery.

As Congress recognized when it passed the Endangered Species Act, the decline of most species can be directly traced to the destruction of habitat. Protection and restoration of ecosystems that support endangered species is thus fundamental to species conservation. In fact, scientific studies have shown that populations of endangered species with protected critical habitat are more than twice as likely to be moving toward recovery as species without it.

Critical habitat can afford listed species more substantial protection than that which is available through endangered status alone. But a critical habitat designation has no effect on actions on private land where a federal agency is not involved.

Protection of the Sierra Nevada Frog and Toad

Not too long ago, yellow-legged frogs and Yosemite toads were a common and popular sight in the high

Sierras. Their declines are a warning of the failing health of the high Sierra ecosystems. These amphibians are experiencing sharp population declines due to introduced fish, toxic pesticides, killer diseases and habitat loss.

More than half of the Yosemite toad's populations are now gone. The situation is even worse for the yellow-legged frogs, whose populations have declined by about 90 percent. Endangered Species Act protection is the best way to reverse these declines and put these rare amphibians on the path to recovery.

Protecting these amphibians will ensure their long term survival and help protect riparian areas and wet meadows that provide fresh, clean water for many Californians and habitat for other wildlife.

Defending Protections for Sierra Nevada Amphibians

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will soon decide whether to provide Endangered Species Act protections to these imperiled California amphibians. Yet anti-environmental politicians, Tea Party groups and others who oppose state and federal regulations are denouncing the Service's proposed protections and spreading misinformation about how protections are implemented to protect the riparian areas and wet meadows the frogs and toads need to survive.

Opponents claim the designating of critical habitat will cost jobs and restrict access to public land. This is simply untrue. Designating critical habitat ensures federal agencies don't take actions that degrade or destroy necessary habitat. It benefits us humans as well by protecting the water sources and ecosystem health upon which we, and our economy, ultimately depend. That is something to embrace and be thankful for, not fear.

The Center is working to ensure that the Service goes forward with the proposed protections based on the scientific evidence – rather than bow to political pressure from anti-environmental forces.



Yosemite toad by Lucas Wilkinson / U.S. Forest Service



Mountain yellow-legged frog by Adam Backlin / USGS