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California Frog Granted Protection From Pesticides

SAN FRANCISCO, California, October 20, 2006 (ENS) - The Center for Biological Diversity has reached a settlement agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that will protect the threatened California red-legged frog from 66 pesticides.

The agreement, signed this week and expected to be approved by a U.S. District Court, prohibits use of these pesticides in and adjacent to core red-legged frog habitats throughout California until the EPA completes formal consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure the chemicals are not jeopardizing or contributing to the decline of the species.

"This agreement will keep toxic chemicals out of essential habitats for the vanishing red-legged frog," said Peter Galvin, conservation director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

Historically abundant throughout California, red-legged frogs have declined in numbers over 90 percent and have disappeared from 70 percent of their former range.

The species was listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act in 1996.

Suburban sprawl, water diversion and agriculture are responsible for much of the decline, but studies have also implicated pesticide drift from the farms in California's Central Valley in disproportional declines of several native frog species in the Sierra Nevada, including red-legged frogs.

The agreement is a result of a lawsuit filed by CBD against the EPA in 2002. In September 2005, the court ruled that EPA had violated the Endangered Species Act by registering pesticides for use without considering how they might impact the continued existence of the red-legged frog.

The agreement requires the EPA formally consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on the impacts of the 66 pesticides on the species within three years. In addition, it prohibits interim use of the pesticides within and adjacent to red-legged frog habitats, specifically designated critical habitat areas, aquatic features and upland habitats occupied by the frogs, and mandates mandate pesticide-free buffer zones adjoining frog habitats.

"There is overwhelming evidence that numerous pesticides have potentially serious impacts on red-legged frogs and other declining amphibians in California, and the EPA must now assess those impacts," said CBD spokesman Jeff Miller. "The pesticide restrictions will stay in effect until consultations are complete. Informed consultations with the Fish and Wildlife Service should result in permanent restrictions on many of the proven harmful contaminants such as atrazine."