

Frogs monitor environment

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Thank you for your recent story ("Red-legged frog on rebound locally," Jan. 2) on local efforts to save our troubled populations of red-legged frogs.

These California natives clearly need all the help we can give them if they're going to survive.

Once common in high mountain lakes across the Sierra Nevada and Santa Monica Mountains, California red-legged frogs have now declined by more than 90 percent and are no longer found across almost three-quarters of their historic range.

In the years since red-legged frogs gained Endangered Species Act protection in 1996, we've learned much about threats to their health, none more prevalent than the 200 million pounds of pesticides applied to California crops every year.

Finally, after years of delay, federal officials are evaluating the impacts of seven of the pesticides on these highly imperiled frogs. And this is good news for all Californians: Because frogs breathe through their skin, the health of our frog populations is an important measure of the health of the environment we all share. For example, Simazine, one of the seven pesticides being evaluated, is a known endocrine disruptor, which studies suggest may interfere with natural hormone functions, damage reproductive function and offspring, and cause developmental, neurological and immune problems in wildlife and humans.

The great news for us all is that whenever we show the discipline to use the tools provided by the Endangered Species Act to protect species and their habitats, we have great success. The act, which turned 40 on Dec. 28, has prevented the extinction of 99 percent of the plants and animals it protects, while putting many on the road to recovery.

Every step we take to save our red-legged frogs is an important step in improving the long-term health of the environment we all depend on.