

## Feds finalize critical spotted frog habitat in NW

Area scaled back by about 3,500 acres; conservation group hails protection

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced Monday it has finalized critical habitat for the Oregon spotted frog within its known range in Washington and Oregon.

Critical habitat is defined by the Endangered Species Act as areas vital to the long-term survival of listed species, and the agency said Monday's designation reflects the latest science and information from several public comment periods.

Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge or preserve, the agency said, and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

The Oregon spotted frog spends most of its life in water and needs water at all stages of its life, as compared to many other frogs that live part of their life in water and part on land.



Oregon Zoo/Michael Durham and Melinda Holland  
Oregon spotted frog

Historically, the Oregon spotted frog ranged from the lower Fraser River in British Columbia to the Pit River drainage in northeastern California. It is now restricted to disjunct populations in British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon. The species may no longer be found in California.

“The Oregon spotted frog faces a variety of threats, from loss of habitat and invasive species to reduced water quality and availability during critical times in their life cycle,” said Eric Rickerson, the Service’s Washington State supervisor.

“The designation of critical habitat in the states of Washington and Oregon allows the Service to continue to work collaboratively to address these threats in diverse habitat types across the frog’s range.”

In Oregon, the Fish and Wildlife Service is working closely with local irrigation districts and federal and state agencies

to address challenges of water management and craft a conservation plan that provides water for fish, wildlife and irrigation purposes.

“The wetland ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest, including those of the Upper Deschutes Basin of Central Oregon, are vital to humans, the Oregon spotted frog and other wildlife,” said Paul Henson, the Service’s Oregon state supervisor.

“The Deschutes River is renowned for its clean water and recreational opportunities, while also being economically important to the local community,” he said. “It’s our goal to continue to find collaborative solutions to conserving and recovering fish and wildlife resources while supporting a strong local recreational and agricultural economy.”

On August 29, 2014, the USFWS listed the Oregon spotted frog as a threatened species under the ESA. The listing, which it said is based on the best scientific data available, cites threats to the frog from loss of wetland habitat, reduced water quality, river flow management, vegetation changes, and competition from non-native species such as bull frogs.

Critical habitat was initially proposed in August 2013 and refined in June 2014.

Monday’s final designation includes about 65,038 acres and 20.34 river miles.

There are 3,463 fewer acres of critical habitat than originally proposed. The agency said the reduction is based on new information and includes the exclusion of some private and county lands with finalized management and conservation plans that provide a conservation benefit for the species.

In the designation, there are 14 critical habitat units spread over Klickitat, Skagit, Skamania, Thurston, and Whatcom counties in Washington and Deschutes, Jackson, Klamath, Lane, and Wasco counties in Oregon.

Copies of the critical habitat rule may be obtained at <http://www.regulations.gov> in Docket No. FWS–R1–ES–2013–0088. Critical habitat maps and information on the Oregon spotted frog can be found at [www.fws.gov/wafwo/osf.html](http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/osf.html).

Word of the habitat listing was hailed by the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity, one of two groups that have sued the Bureau of Reclamation and Central Oregon irrigation districts in a bid to force changes in river management to help the frog’s habitat.

The group noted that spotted frogs, once abundant from British Columbia to California, have disappeared from 90 percent of their former range.

“This important habitat protection is good news for Oregon spotted frogs and for future generations because we can’t save endangered species without protecting their homes,” said Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the center. “Protecting this critical habitat will not only benefit the frogs but will also improve the health of wetlands and rivers that benefit millions of people and a host of other wildlife species.”

The Oregon spotted frog was put on the candidate waiting list for federal protection in 1991. The Center and allies petitioned for the frog’s protection in 2004 and entered into a settlement agreement with the Service in 2011 requiring a decision on the frog’s protection.

It was protected as a threatened species in 2014, after 23 years on the waiting list.

The center noted it will now be illegal for federal agencies to fund or permit actions that destroy or adversely modify critical habitat.

The Oregon spotted frog once occurred throughout the Willamette Valley, Puget Trough and elsewhere. Today there are fewer than 100 known sites where the frog still survives, and it is likely extirpated in California. Most remaining populations are in Oregon.

The Oregon spotted frog is 4 inches long and calls while under water. It is a highly aquatic frog and needs clean water and stable flows for egg-laying, tadpole development and adult overwintering. The species is threatened by loss of wetlands, poor river management that forces artificial flows, reduced water quality, drought, invasive species and other threats.

Worldwide, more than one-third of amphibian species are threatened with extinction.

“Amphibians have been on the planet for millions of years, and when they start dying off it’s a wake-up call that we need to take better care of our resources,” said Curry.