

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605
Sacramento, CA 95825
<http://sacramento.fws.gov>

News Release



For Release on June 14, 2004
Contact: Jim Nickles, (916) 414-6572

Comment Period Extended on Proposed Critical Habitat for California Red-legged Frog

Written comments can be submitted until 5 p.m. July 14

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today extended the public-comment period on a proposal to designate 4.1 million acres in 28 California counties as critical habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog. The comment period, which was scheduled to end today, will remain open until 5 p.m. July 14, 2004.

This proposed critical-habitat designation was published in the Federal Register on April 13. The 31 proposed critical-habitat units are in Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, Marin, Mariposa, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Plumas, Riverside, San Benito, San Diego, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tehama, Tuolumne and Ventura counties.

The Service is seeking comment and information on several issues, including why areas should or should not be determined to be critical habitat; specific information on the distribution of the California red-legged frog and its habitat, and whether the two recently discovered populations of California red-legged frogs in Calaveras and Nevada counties should be included in designated critical habitat.

For more information on the proposal, visit the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office's Web page at <http://sacramento.fws.gov/>

"The Service encourages public review and comment to ensure that the designation is as accurate and scientifically valid as possible," said Steve Thompson, manager of the Service's California/Nevada Operations Office.

"This extended comment period gives interested California residents, landowners, agencies and Tribes an additional opportunity to submit written comments on our proposal," Thompson said. "We welcome those comments."

Comments previously submitted for this proposal need not be resubmitted as they have already been incorporated into the public record and will be fully considered in any final decision.

The California red-legged frog, the largest native frog in the western United States, is widely believed to have inspired Mark Twain's fabled short story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." Federally protected under the Endangered Species Act since 1996, the California red-legged frog is imperiled by habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation, as well as non-native predators, degraded water quality and other threats.

The Service originally established critical habitat for the California red-legged frog on March 13, 2001. A lawsuit challenging the designation was filed in the Northern District Court of California on June 8, 2001. Plaintiffs included the Home Builders Association of Northern California, California Chamber of Commerce, California Building Industry Association, California Alliance for Jobs, and the Building Industry Legal Defense.

Most of the 2001 designation was vacated by the District Court on Nov. 6, 2002. The court cited deficiencies in both the final rule establishing the critical habitat designation, and the economic analysis done in anticipation of the rule. It ordered the Service to conduct a new economic analysis and publish a new critical habitat proposal by March 2004, and a final revised rule by November 2005.

Due to budget and time constraints, this proposal reflects the critical habitat designation made by the Service in 2001. However, this proposal may be revised based on comments received during the comment period, the economic analysis that will be prepared on the proposal, and the review of other information available to the Service.

A complete set of maps and legal descriptions for the proposed critical habitat designation can be found in the 2001 critical habitat rule, which was published on March 13, 2001 (66 FR 14626.)

Those who wish to submit written comments may do so by any one of several methods:

- By mail to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office,
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W. 2605,
Sacramento, California 95825
- By personal delivery to the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, at the above address
- By fax to (916) 414-6712 or
- By e-mail to fw1crlf@r1.fws.gov

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.