



The California red-legged frog wins critical habitat designation on 4 million acres of the state.

The Associated Press

# State department declares 4 million acres for red-legged frog habitat

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The U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife set aside 190,000 Central Coast acres as protected turf for the threatened red-legged frog, made famous in a Mark Twain story.

**SANTA CRUZ**

On Tuesday the department declared 4 million acres statewide as critical habitat for the largest native frog in the western United States.

The designation would affect development only if it required a federal permit, usually from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to build on a wetland.

The agency could restrict a proposed development if it is potential frog habitat, even if no frogs are known to live on it.

Land protection could help bring back a species that once ranked in the millions and is now down to small pockets, with no one population greater than 350 frogs, said Peter Galvin of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Environmentalists say many of the frogs live on private property. For years they have been vulnerable for a variety of reasons, including development. Their meaty legs give them great jumping powers but once made them a great delicacy.

Galvin predicted the designations would limit large-scale development but not single-family housing statewide.

To date, a detailed map is not available showing where the critical territories begin and end locally. The exact number of Santa Cruz County's protected acres was unavailable Tuesday.

Local critical habitat areas include coastal watersheds that drain into the Pacific Ocean in the North County, and coastal drainages surrounding Aptos and Soquel, Hinckley and Bates

Creeks, along with Elkhorn Slough in Monterey County. Watersheds of the lower Pajaro River are also included in this protected zone.

Several environmental groups sued the state for the critical habitat designation. According to the lawsuit, the federal government had failed to protect the frogs' habitat while they were listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species act.

The designated land areas were scaled back from an original proposal of 5.4 million acres, but environmental groups, including the Earthjustice Legal Defense fund, were mostly pleased with the news Tuesday.

The same environmental groups were disappointed the designated areas now don't include Calaveras County, the setting for Mark Twain's story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County."

It was unclear Tuesday how this designation could affect the frogs at UC Santa Cruz.

A healthy population of the red-legged frogs is known to live near the campus Arboretum, where the staff has long protected the frogs. Talk of possible housing near the Arboretum has led to concerns about the frogs' future.

"At this point in time we are developing a master plan for that area of the campus which will consider development options there," said UCSC spokesman Jim Burns. "The main use intended is the construction of housing, primarily for faculty and staff, but we don't have a specific proposal yet."

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The Associated Press contributed to this story.