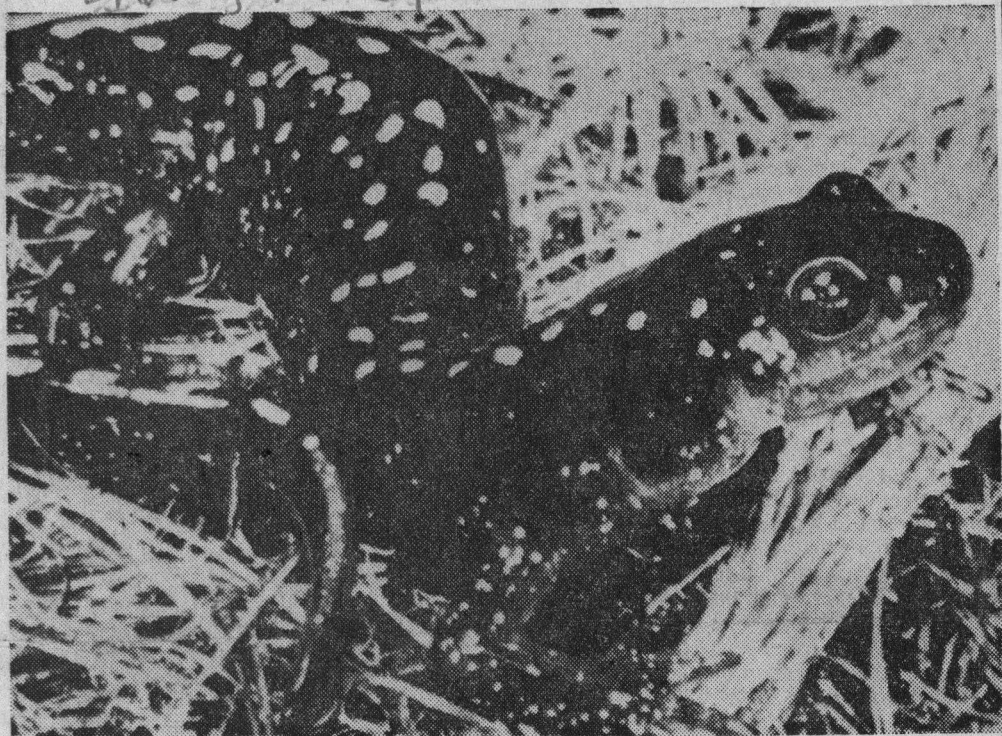


Endangered Species



The long-toed Salamander.

Highway Crews Spare Rare Aptos Salamanders

By DON RIGHETTI
Sentinel Staff Writer

Efforts by a rural Watsonville man and a Berkeley professor to save the few remaining members of one of the earth's oldest life species are paying off.

State Division of Highways crews have installed retaining walls to preserve Valencia Lagoon. The big pond on the ocean side of Highway 1 freeway between the Rob Roy and Rio del Mar interchanges is one of only two remaining breeding

places of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander.

Only some 400 of the tiny ice-age throwbacks are left on earth, and the lagoon, their principal breeding ground, was doomed until the walls were installed to preserve it.

Charles Marinovich of Watsonville brought the salamanders' plight to public attention last February in a Sentinel news story.

A bookish man who calls himself a "gentleman scholar," Marinovich began studying the

amphibians in 1966 after he learned they were on the list of North American life forms in danger of extinction.

He became an expert on the little creatures, and when widening of Highway 1 threatened one of their last two known breeding grounds — the other is a small pond near San Andreas Road in La Selva Beach — Marinovich joined forces with Prof. Robert Stebbins of UC Berkeley in launching a campaign to save Valencia Lagoon.

They met with success when highways division crews installed the walls to keep a constant water level of 18 inches in the lagoon.

"They listened and responded," Stebbins said of highway officials after Stebbins explained the salamanders were here "a long time before we were."

He said the amphibians crawl down into the lagoon each September and January to mate before returning to the dense vegetation on the hillside across Bonita Road from the pond.

They live in oak leaf mold and decayed trees, but apparently must breed in water. Highway division spokesman Robert Halliday said his agency was glad to oblige in providing the \$3,000 project to save the lagoon which had been doomed by the freeway's drainage system.

Stebbins said Thursday that fossils found in rock formations confirm that the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander truly is one of the earth's oldest creatures.

At one time the species ranged over a wide area of the west coast.

Stebbins added that its territory shrank during the 1900s to the Aptos vicinity.

No one knows how it got here in the first place.

Marinovich pointed out the local variety is similar to a Salamander which exists in the Sierra. He thinks that in a prehistoric era when ice capped the mountains, the climate and flora of the inland valleys were and cool and lush as those of the coast are now.

As the climate warmed, Marinovich theorizes, the cold-blooded amphibians migrated toward the coast. Some, from what is now the Santa Clara Valley, found their way to the Pajaro River and followed it here.

Marinovich thinks the local variety is the original one, unchanged due to its isolation, for two million years.

"They're not only a remnant,"

Judge Refuses To Halt Nerve Gas Dumping

WASHINGTON (AP)—A federal district judge refused today to forbid the sea-bottom burial of 2,675 tons of deadly nerve gas 282 miles off the Florida coast.

But Judge June L. Green coupled her denial of a temporary restraining order with an "urgent request" that the Defense Department designate a different site for the dumping.

She said she had "serious misgivings" about the selected site. Sinking of the ship hulk at a depth of 16,000 feet, she said, posed the danger of a sudden and simultaneous crushing of all of the concrete-encased gas containers.

Judge Green also noted testimony and affidavits submitted to her that this is the first time the Army has planned to dispose of gas at such a great depth.

She also noted that two years ago the Army disposed of gas in 7,000 feet of water off the New Jersey coast and that later checks by Navy scientists had revealed no detectable harm to marine life or anything.

The judge's action came on a complaint by the Environmental Defense Fund, a New York-based citizens' group, and joined by Gov. Claude Kirk of Florida.

The weather, meantime, posed a further challenge to the army's plans to dump the gas in the Atlantic off Cape Kennedy, Fla.

The Weather Bureau in Miami reported a dangerous tropical depression with winds of 60 miles an hour approaching the Bahamas and Florida.

Although there were no present forecasts of a possible hurricane in the area, Dr. Robert H. Simpson, head of the National Hurricane Center in Miami, said it was possible a hurricane "could come with great suddenness."

Attorneys for the fund said they would appeal Judge Green's decision immediately to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

There was no immediate indication, moreover, about the reaction of the Defense Department and the Army to the judge's "request" that they seek another disposal site "at a reasonable distance" from Sunny Point, N.C., the port of embarkation.

At Sunny Point, where the loading of the 418 steel and concrete encased nerve gas rockets was proceeding, Navy Capt. A.G. Hamilton, commander of the sea phase of the operation, said that he was watching the tropical depression carefully and would not move out of port if it became a threat to the burial area.

Hamilton said the tugs would not begin pulling the ship to sea until they had a 96-hour forecast of good weather. He said the operation would remain in port until such a forecast was made.

If the weather is favorable, Hamilton said he hopes to get the operation under way late Saturday. However, the loading of the caskets was running slightly behind schedule and might not be completed until Sunday, he said. The sinking of the Liberty ship is scheduled for Tuesday.

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