

Salamander project draws *Endangered Species* Sept. 28, 1977 contingent of state bigwigs

LA SELVA BEACH — State Sen. Jerry Smith (D-Saratoga) came out Elicott Pond near here Tuesday to see how 20 young members of the California Conservation Corps (CCC) are working to save the endangered Santa Cruz long-toed salamander.

Smith was author of legislation which led to the establishment of the CCC. He was accompanied to the Salamander breeding ground Tuesday by LeRoy Chatfield, director of the CCC, and Eldon Vestal, fisheries management supervisor for the State Department of Fish and Game.

The CCC project includes making signs, building fences, controlling erosion, mulching, reseeding, and setting up trap lines for research projects.

Vestal said the CCC also will help with the salamander project at Valencia Lagoon near Rob Roy Junction. There, a "contractor" will work with the Department of Fish and Game and the CCC to develop information on the endangered species of salamander.

The department has scheduled a meeting next month to talk with residents of the area around Valencia Lagoon, so they'll know what is going on when they see people working on the study project.

Vestal said the study to be undertaken will try to get answers to a number of questions: Where are the salamanders? What paths do they follow to and from their breeding pond? How many are there now? Can people and salamanders coexist in the area? What habitat is essential for the animals in summer?

He said Tuesday that the report will deal primarily with the size of the salamander population, the range of the amphibious animal and the primary routes and corridors in use by it on developed and undeveloped parcels in the area.

He said since the salamanders migrate to the breeding pond during warm, rainy nights in fall and winter, "We will be making road counts with safari lights in the area on those nights, usually from about dark to midnight. On several nights we will extend the road counts to daybreak."

He said the department plans to utilize small traps

to intercept the migration paths to and from the Valencia breeding pond.

He said that householders in the area "would be extremely helpful if they would permit our researchers, upon request and with proper identification, to set small traps on private property to check for presence of the animal and the direction of the migration."

He also said if householders can help the project by watching for the salamanders in moist places around houses and gardens and by leaving ground mulch, bark, fallen limbs, rocks and natural cover undisturbed.

He also warned people not to touch, handle or take the animal "into possession" since because of its rare and endangered status, it is fully protected by law.

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander is one of 19 species declared endangered by the Fish and Game Commission. It takes refuge in wooded areas in summer and breeds in temporary ponds in winter, where the larvae develop for several months before they become salamanders and migrate to the oak and willow thickets nearby.

The salamanders are relatively small, with the adults reaching about five inches in length. This particular species of salamander is black with metallic yellow-gold spots on it.

Most of the salamander's life is spent underground in wooded areas where it lives in mammal burrows, beneath fallen logs and rocks and along the root system of plants.

When the first warm rains of late winter arrive, usually between mid-December and mid-February, the salamanders migrate back to the temporary ponds where they were born.

The adult salamanders don't remain long in the pond areas. They court, breed, lay their eggs and then return to their hillside retreats.

The eggs, and later the larvae, are left to fend for themselves in the ponds.

Vestal said studies have shown that the principal habitat of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander is at Elicott Pond, with Valencia Lagoon being a close second. However, some have been discovered in northern Monterey County near the Elkhorn Slough area.