



News Release

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THREATENED CHIRICAHUA LEOPARD FROG RECOVERY AIDED BY RANCHER **Zoo-Reared Frogs Are Moved to Livestock Tank in Arizona's Altar Valley**

Federally protected Chiricahua leopard frogs have a new home -- a 20-foot diameter metal livestock watering tank on an Altar Valley ranch. Friday, 23 young Chiricahua leopard frogs were gathered from the rearing facility at the Phoenix Zoo and transported to a remote canyon southwest of Tucson.

"These small frogs give us a big thrill. We welcome them to our ranch, and hope they settle down and raise lots of healthy tadpoles," said Susan Lowell, who owns the ranch with husband Ross Humphreys.

When the Chiricahua leopard frog was added to the Endangered Species list in 2002, a special rule was crafted allowing livestock operators to continue to use and maintain their livestock tanks that harbor the frog. "We know that significant numbers of Chiricahua leopard frogs rely on waters maintained by ranchers," said Steve Spangle, Fish and Wildlife Service's Field Supervisor for Arizona Ecological Services. "To encourage ranchers to continue their efforts that benefit the frog, we made certain that ranchers would not be penalized for incidentally harming frogs while operating their livestock tanks. The Humphreys have taken wildlife stewardship a step further by inviting frogs onto their operation."

Phoenix Zoo biologists have reared a stock of Altar Valley-lineage frogs with the hope of returning them to their former range. Together with Service biologists, they administered a precautionary treatment against a fungal disease implicated in frog die offs worldwide, before transporting the frogs to their ancestral valley.

Dr. Kevin Wright, Phoenix Zoo Director of Conservation, Science and Sanctuary said, "Zoo volunteers raise frogs for recovery efforts. It's a great way to involve the community in conservation.

"This frog release is a significant milestone in amphibian conservation because people like Humphreys are the ones who work the land where the frogs used to live. Thoughtful progressive ranchers like them will make the Chiricahua leopard recovery program successful. If each threatened and endangered species of frog had their own champions working for them, the work of conservation would be much easier."

The 2- 5½-inch spotted and often greenish frogs are found in ponds, streams, stock tanks, and other aquatic sites in the mountains of central and east-central Arizona and west-central New Mexico, and in the mountains and valleys of southeastern Arizona and extreme southwestern New Mexico, and northern Mexico.

Causes of Chiricahua leopard frog population declines are not always clear but biologists believe they face multiple threats including nonnative predators, particularly fish, bullfrogs, and crayfish; habitat loss and fragmentation; the fungal “chytrid” disease; and environmental contamination. The species has disappeared from entire mountain ranges, valleys and river drainages within its historical range.

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.

Note to Editors:

Photographs and background information on the Chiricahua leopard frog are available at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov> or by contacting Jeff Humphrey (602-242-0210).

Chiricahua is pronounced chair-i-cah-wah.