

# ENDANGERED SPECIES Florida Bog Frog

By Libby Hopkins



The Florida Bog Frog or *Lithobates okaloosae*, as it's known by its scientific name, is a rare species of frog found only in Western Florida. The Florida Bog Frog is a small and rare amphibian that can reach a snout-to-vent length of 1.9 inches.

This species was unknown to science until 1982, when it was discovered by State of Florida herpetologist Paul Moler while conducting surveys for the Pine Barrens Tree Frog.

This species has a yellowish-brown upper body, a yellow belly, brown eardrum, yellow throat, a narrow ridge that runs laterally down the back, and smaller webbed feet with larger toes.

The diet of the Florida bog frog primarily consists of small insects.

There is limited information available about the reproduction of the Florida bog frog. Florida bog frogs breed between the months of April and August. During the breeding season, bog frogs will let out loud "chucks" to attract a mate. Their calls consist of three to 21 guttural sounds developed in the back of the oral cavity with calls continuously done at five notes per second. Females lay a few hundred eggs at a time on the surface of the water. Bog Frog tadpoles turn into frogs during the spring months.

The Florida bog frog inhabits a total area of less than seven and a half miles. It is found in shallow ponds or creeks along tributaries of the East Bay, Shoal and Yellow Rivers in Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton Counties in Florida.

Bog Frogs occupy sluggish backwaters and seepages associated with clear, sand-bottomed streams. They prefer relatively open mucky areas that are thickly vegetated with low-lying herbaceous plant species and are especially fond of areas dominated by sphagnum.

The main threat to the Florida bog frog is the degradation of its habitat. Bog frogs thrive best in early succession vegetation.

Suppression of fire will cause woody plants to invade their bog habitat causing increased evapotranspiration, which reduces seepage from the soil.

Invasive vegetation also degrades its habitat; with Chinese tallow trees being the main invasive threat. Invasive vegetation degrades habitats by out-competing endemic species for resources needed for survival.

Feral hogs also threaten the Florida Bog Frog's habitat by digging around in seepage areas which causes destruction to the habitat. Road construction can increase silt and pollution in streams, and can also cause habitat fragmentation.

Increased predation on Florida Bog Frogs is also a threat because their habitat is shared by the southern water snake, cottonmouth and wading birds. Other threats include pathogens and parasites and the effects of global warming such as increased sea level, drought and intense storms.

The Florida bog frog is protected as a state-Threatened species by Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule. Due to its restricted range, the Florida Bog Frog will always meet the criterion. Therefore, the goal of this plan is to address and mitigate the threats to bog frogs and their habitat, which in turn should prevent further population declines, or enhance populations where practical and enhance the size and quality of bog frog habitat.

To achieve this goal, this plan identifies the following objectives: maintain or improve existing or potential habitat for the bog frog; monitor and survey for populations of bog frogs at documented and undocumented sites; protect bog frogs against unauthorized possession or take; and promote education, outreach, and collaboration among stakeholder groups.

