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News Release

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Endangered Frogs Get Helping Hands on Road to Recovery

Another hop forward in the quest to recover the endangered mountain yellow-legged frog (*Rana muscosa*) took place on June 12, 2013, with the release of 100 juvenile frogs to Indian Creek at the James Reserve, part of the University of California Natural Reserve System.

Watched over by a team of Federal, State, and private scientists, the mountain yellow-legged frog continues to maintain a perilous toehold in the mountains of southern California. Mountain yellow-legged frogs in southern California live in perennial streams in portions of the San Gabriel, San Bernardino, and San Jacinto Mountains. The upper elevation stream segments inhabited by the frogs are generally 1,214 to 7,546 feet above sea level.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the mountain yellow-legged frog in southern California as endangered in 2002. Reduced to fewer than 200 individuals by 2003, efforts to boost the species' population have included captive breeding, reintroducing captive offspring to historic habitat, and conducting scientific research into the causes of the species' decline.

The froglets set free at the James San Jacinto Mountains Reserve today were raised by the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research. In addition, a female adult frog raised by the Los Angeles Zoo and outfitted with a transmitter will also be released at the site.

"It is truly a thrill to see the mountain yellow-legged frog once again in Indian Creek where until very recently, the mid-1990s, natural populations existed," said Jennifer Gee, director of James San Jacinto Mountains Reserve.

"We are optimistic that the release of froglets will be successful and help re-establish a population within Hall Canyon," said Mike Giusti, California Department of Fish and Wildlife senior environmental scientist. "The success of this effort will be used as a model for re-establishment of frogs in other streams within the frog's historic range."

Factors that impact this species include chytrid fungus, a serious threat to the frogs in the U.S. and around the world; large wildfires that may bury the species' stream habitats in ash and debris; and recreational activities that may impact frog recovery by damaging egg sacs when people swim in or cross occupied streams.

“The mountain yellow legged frog lives completely within the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests. The Forest Service identified the need to remove tadpoles from the forest during drought conditions, which subsequently jump-started the current captive breeding population,” said Anne Poopatanamong, district biologist for San Bernardino National Forest. “We continue to administer funds to conduct recovery actions, and the Forest Service is implementing management actions, including trout removal on the North Fork San Jacinto River and Fuller Mill Creek and hazardous fuels reduction on the North Fork, to help increase suitability of habitat for this fragile amphibian.”

“We often think of endangered species as something exotic in far-away countries,” says Adam Backlin, an ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey Western Ecological Research Center who leads the field monitoring effort on the species. “But we’ve got this one right here in southern California, and what we learn from this reintroduction and monitoring effort will teach us a lot about how to help other declining amphibian species in the U.S. and around the world.”

The frog is one of three frog or toad species native to southern California that is protected under the Endangered Species Act – the other two species are the endangered arroyo toad and the threatened California red-legged frog.

Both the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research and the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens are actively rearing the mountain yellow-legged frog in captivity for release to the wild. Funding for the captivity and reintroduction program has been provided by the California Department of Transportation, as mitigation for the State Route 330 emergency project. Since 2011, the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research has reared about 300 frogs and the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens has produced 210.

“We have cared for hundreds of mountain yellow-legged frogs and watched as they metamorphosed from tiny tadpoles into juvenile frogs, and we are excited to release them into the wild,” said Frank Santana, research coordinator for San Diego Zoo’s Institute for Conservation Research. “With a dedicated post-release monitoring plan we expect to learn a great deal of information from this reintroduction as we work towards restoring this native species to southern California mountain streams.”

“The Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens is proud to participate in this program,” states curator of reptiles & amphibians, Ian Recchio. “In 2011, the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens’ reptile and amphibian staff released 160 mountain yellow-legged frog tadpoles into the San Jacinto Mountains, with the hope of significantly increasing the wild population of this species.”

In May of this year, this partnership effort to recover the mountain yellow-legged frog was recognized by the California Transportation Foundation as the Sustainable Environmental Enhancement Program/Project of the Year. The Announcement and video are available at: <http://www.transportationfoundation.org/transportation-awards/>

Efforts such as this are important to ensuring the conservation of our native amphibians which are in trouble. A nine-year effort to survey amphibians across the United States found that all species are declining, even those within wildlife refuges, national parks, and other protected areas. Researchers have not been able to identify all the potential factors causing the declines, which may include habitat loss, effects of pesticides, invasive species, and disease. A full copy of the report is available online at <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom>

Photos and video of the release can be downloaded at from the San Diego Zoo Global website at <https://sandiegozoo.box.com>

Additional photos of the frogs are available online at [USGS Photo Gallery](#)

About the agencies:

The **U.S. Geological Survey** provides science for a changing world. For more information, visit www.usgs.gov.

The San Bernardino National Forest: "Caring for the Land and Serving People." The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. **For more information: www.fs.fed.us**

The Mission of the **California Department of Fish and Wildlife** is to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public. For more information: www.dfg.ca.gov

The mission of the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information: www.fws.gov

The **California Department of Transportation, District 8**, encompasses Riverside and San Bernardino counties and is the largest geographically of the 12 statewide Caltrans districts. With more than 1,300 employees and an operating budget of over \$203 million, Caltrans Region 8's goal is to provide mobility through design, construction, operation and maintenance of the state highway system in the Inland Empire region and provide a safe and reliable highway network for the traveling public.

The **James San Jacinto Mountains Reserve** is one of 38 University of California run reserves throughout the state protecting over 750,000 acres. The Natural Reserve System was established in 1965 to protect and make available natural lands for research, university-level instruction and public outreach. The system of reserves broadly represents California's rich ecological diversity, provides protected locations for long-term study and opportunities for outdoor education. The NRS is the largest university operated system of natural reserves in the world. For more information on the James San Jacinto Mountains Reserve at <http://www.jamesreserve.edu/> or the Natural Reserve System <http://nrs.ucop.edu/>

The **San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research** is dedicated to generating, sharing and applying scientific knowledge vital to the conservation of animals, plants and habitats worldwide. The work of the Institute includes onsite research efforts at the San Diego Zoo and the San Diego Zoo Safari Park (historically referred to as Wild Animal Park), laboratory work at the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Center for Conservation Research, and international field programs involving more than 235 researchers working in 35 countries. For more visit <http://www.sandiegozoo.org/conservation/>

The **Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens** serves the community by creating an environment for recreation and discovery; inspire an appreciation of wildlife through exhibitry and education; ensure the highest level of animal welfare; and support programs that preserve biodiversity and conserve natural habitat. The Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens is located in Griffith Park, where it hosts over 1.6 million visitors each year. The Zoo is home to a diverse collection of 1100 animals, many of which are rare or endangered. For information, call (323) 644-4200 or visit the L. A. Zoo website at www.lazoo.org.