

# U.S. agency to protect habitat for Twain's famed jumping frog

Published: Wednesday, Mar. 17, 2010 - 12:00 am | Page 4A

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced Tuesday that it will designate 1.6 million acres in California as critical habitat for the endangered red-legged frog.

The frog, featured by author Mark Twain in his famous story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," was listed as threatened under federal law in 1996. Its numbers have plunged due to land development, pollution and competition from invasive species.

Designating critical habitat is part of the Endangered Species Act process, but it has the potential to restrict further development and agricultural activities. As a result, the designation has been the subject of legal battles for a decade.

The lands designated Tuesday cover 50 areas in 27 counties across the state, but mostly in Central California. Yet this represents only 40 percent of the critical habitat first declared for the species in 2001, and about 10 percent less than a draft designation released in 2008.

An economic analysis by the service found potential costs to landowners of between \$159 million and \$500 million through 2030 due to the designation. Spokesman Al Donner said much of this cost is attributed to potential delays in complying with the new designation, not necessarily because development is prevented.

The designation also exempts many rural lands that remain in livestock ranching, which is often compatible with frogs.

"We recognize that as natural habitat has disappeared, frogs have found haven in ranch stock ponds in many areas, and they survive and thrive there," Donner said.

The announcement will be published in the Federal Register today and becomes final in 30 days. For more information, visit [www.fws.gov/sacramento](http://www.fws.gov/sacramento).

– Matt Weiser

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