



## Forest Service News Release

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### U.S. Forest Service and Partners Construct Unprecedented Eighteen New Wetlands for Threatened California Red-Legged Frog

**Michigan Bluff, Calif. May 26, 2021** —The U.S. Forest Service, working in partnership with Nevada and Placer County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Sheltoween Environmental Education Coalition, recently completed construction of eighteen wetlands to expand threatened California red-legged frog habitat.

The new wetlands were part of the California Red-Legged Frog Habitat Expansion Project first envisioned and designed in 2016. The wetlands themselves were constructed utilizing heavy equipment and over 100 volunteers from six different states as well as employees from three National Forests, Yosemite National Park, and organizations such as Save the Frogs, Trout Unlimited, and the South Yuba River Citizens League amongst others.

The wetlands, which will fill naturally with rain over the next several years, are pond-shaped and lined with natural, onsite clay or aquatic safe liners.

The Frog Habitat Expansion Project covers five acres near the community of Michigan Bluff, fifteen miles northeast of Auburn, Calif. This site was chosen due to the proximity to Big Gun Diggins –a former mine location –which contains similar habitat currently occupied by red-legged frogs.

“It is a rare opportunity for a biologist to create new habitat for a listed species. It is projects like these that help species recover,” said Dan Teater a Tahoe National Forest Fisheries Biologist.

“The most exciting portion of the Habitat Expansion Project hasn’t even happened yet. Once the wetlands begin to fill with water and naturalize, we’re optimistic that California red-legged frogs will disperse from the adjacent private property where they are known to occur. That will be a significant event. This project is one of the largest efforts to date in the Sierra Nevada for California red-legged frog conservation.”

“The Frog Habitat Expansion Project also exemplifies the power of collaborative project design and implementation,” said Mary Grim, American River District Ranger. “By combining resources and sharing stewardship, federal agencies working with state and local partners can successfully plan, design, and implement large-scale habitat improvement or expansion projects

to sustain threatened species like the red-legged frog, California's state amphibian. What Mr. Teater and others have accomplished is quite extraordinary."

Key to the California Red-Legged Frog Habitat Expansion Project's design and implementation were Tom Biebighauser and Don Smith with Sheltoween Environmental Education Coalition. Biebighauser has designed and built over 2,600 wetlands many of which involved Smith operating the heavy equipment. Biebighauser provided onsite expertise for habitat construction while also instructing participants how to initiate and design habitat improvement projects of their own.

"It was one of my career highlights to work with Tom Biebighauser, a renowned expert in constructing wetlands for listed species," continued Dan Teater. "The same goes for our equipment operator Don Smith. There is no way we could have accomplished the project goals without their unique talents. Nor without the commitment of our amazing volunteers and their contribution to habitat improvement on the Tahoe National Forest."

The California red-legged frog is the largest native frog in the western United States. It was listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act in 1996. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California red-legged frogs are currently threatened by loss of habitat from the growth of cities and suburbs, mining, overgrazing by cattle, invasion of nonnative plants, impoundments, water diversions, degraded water quality, and introduced predators, such as bullfrogs.

The Frog Habitat Expansion Project was funded by Nevada and Placer Counties Resource Advisory Committee, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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