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Northern Leopard Frog

Western Boreal Populations

Scientific Name: *Lithobates pipiens*
 Taxonomy: Amphibian
 Range: Northwest Territories, Manitoba
 Saskatchewan, Alberta
 Last COSEWIC Assessment: April 2009,
 Special Concern Status
 SARA Status: Special Concern
 Government of Alberta Status:
 Threatened

Fact Sheet

Information adapted from:

Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/speciesDetails_e.cfm?sid=552)

Appearance

The Northern Leopard Frog is green, brown or a mixture of the two. It gets its name from the dark spots surrounded by light borders on its back and sides, which resemble leopard spots. Light-coloured ridges line its back, one on each side, from behind the eyes to the lower back. The underside is whitish and prominent.

Adults are 6 to 11 cm long. Females are generally larger than males. The eggs are small (1.5 mm in diameter) and velvety black on top with white undersides. Newly hatched tadpoles are slender and black, and measure only 8 mm.

Distribution

The western boreal distribution of the Northern Leopard Frog occurs in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

Prior to the large-scale declines observed in the early 1970s, the Northern Leopard Frog was widespread throughout its range. In much of Alberta, the species has steadily declined in abundance and remaining populations are small and isolated.

Threats

Northern Leopard Frog declines observed in many areas of Western Canada are associated with habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation. The species' diversified habitat requirements make it particularly vulnerable to such changes. The species is also threatened by emerging diseases.

The introduction of non-native species, including invasive plants as well as fish species that prey on tadpoles and adults, is another major threat to the Northern Leopard Frog.

Grazing cattle and other livestock can damage Northern Leopard Frog breeding, foraging and overwintering habitat on the prairies.

Pesticides have caused reduced growth rates, paralysis and mortality in tadpoles. In addition, frogs exposed to contaminants are more susceptible to pathogens.

Collection of individuals may also contribute to their decline. Embryo mortality may be attributed to ultraviolet radiation.

Habitat



The Northern Leopard Frog uses separate sites for overwintering, breeding and foraging. Contiguity between these habitats is necessary for the species' survival.

Overwintering sites are well-oxygenated bodies of water that do not freeze to the bottom. These include streams, creeks, rivers, spillways below dams, deep lakes and ponds.

Breeding and tadpoles occur in pools, ponds, marshes and lakes, and occasionally occur in slow-moving streams and creeks with abundant vegetation and no fish.

In the summer, the frogs are found in a wide variety of habitats, particularly moist upland meadows and native prairie.