



# INFORMATION FOR LANDOWNERS Interested in Red-Legged Frogs

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM  
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Surveys conducted locally show that red-legged frogs live in your area. This flyer provides some general information about managing your land for this species. We can provide additional information or assistance specific to your lands if you let us know of your interest.

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## **Private Landowners are the Key to Helping the Red-Legged Frog**

The red-legged frog is the largest native frog of the Willamette Valley. These frogs are declining in numbers because of habitat loss and displacement by the introduced bullfrogs, either due to predation or competition. However, red-legged frogs can be saved with the help of private landowners. Most of the best red-legged frog breeding habitat in the Willamette Valley is on private property. Created and natural wetlands have been shown to be good breeding sites for red-legged frogs. If you have wetland habitat on your property, your habitat management and improvement efforts can be a major part of preserving the red-legged frog in Oregon.

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## **Life History of the Red-Legged Frog**

Red-legged frogs require both aquatic (wetland) and terrestrial (upland) habitats. Most of the year, red-legged frogs live in moist upland habitats, but they require water to breed. In the Willamette Valley, red-legged frogs breed during the winter, when water is plentiful. Red-legged frogs will lay eggs in a variety of permanent and seasonal wetland habitats as long as the water is still or very slow moving, water is present through June and there is aquatic vegetation for egg attachment. Some known red-legged frog breeding sites include marshes, ponds, sloughs and springs. Wetlands created by beavers and humans are frequently used.

You usually won't hear red-legged frogs sing or croak like other frog species because they call from beneath the water's surface. The female frogs lay eggs from mid-January to mid-March. The eggs are in a single gelatinous mass about the size of a grapefruit. The egg mass may contain 750-1300 eggs and is attached to stems of aquatic vegetation. As the eggs mature, the gelatinous egg cover deteriorates and floats to the surface. The tadpoles hatch after approximately 4 weeks. The tadpoles grow and continue to develop for the next 4-5 months and metamorphose into small (3/4") frogs in May-July. It takes 3-4 years before the frogs reach sexual maturity and are able to breed.

## How to Identify a Red-Legged Frog

The most distinctive feature on red-legged frogs is the red coloring on the bottom side of their hind legs and lower abdomen. Red-legged frogs always have cream and black blotches on their sides near their hind legs (the groin area). The upper surface of the frogs is brown to reddish-brown and usually has markings of small black spots and flecks. Adult frogs range from 2 3/4 to 4 inches in length.

The most common large frog in our area is the bullfrog, which was introduced from the eastern United States. It is a major predator on red-legged frogs, as well as other frog species, young western pond turtles, salamanders and ducklings. Bullfrogs grow larger than red-legged frogs, up to 7 3/4 inches, and are pale green to dark olive-green with brownish spots and patches. Adult bullfrogs lack the reddish coloring of the red-legged frog, but young bullfrogs can have reddish tints on their legs. Bullfrogs never have cream and black blotches in the groin area.

## How You Can Provide Habitat for the Red-legged Frog

Upland sites used by red-legged frogs are variable. The frogs prefer moist forested areas, especially hardwood forests close to water. However, other moist sheltered areas may be used. They have been observed in muddy culverts and under bridges where there was enough moisture.

Breeding sites are bodies of water that have most or all of the following characteristics:

- \*is deeper than 5" (preferably deeper than 1')
- \*remains wet through June
- \*has slow or no water flow
- \*has some shallow areas with aquatic vegetation for egg mass attachment (examples of wetland plants that may be used for attachment include cattail, bulrush, sedges and rushes)
- \*lacks dramatic fluctuations in water levels
- \*has an upland site (see above) within 300 yards of the breeding site.

We are still learning about what red-legged frogs need for breeding sites. The following characteristics may also be important:

- \*a portion of the pond that is unshaded by trees
- \*aquatic vegetation on the southern shore.

Some management activities you may choose to implement at breeding sites include:

- \*plant native aquatic vegetation for egg mass attachment
- \*control non-native plants that might choke the wetland, such as reed canary grass
- \*eliminate or minimize chemical contaminants (herbicides or pesticides) within 300 yards of breeding sites
- \*remove non-native predators, such as the bullfrog.

*Human-created wetlands appear to be beneficial for red-legged frogs. Providing habitat for frogs can be a side benefit if you are improving or creating wetland habitats for other purposes.*

**ODFW can provide additional advice on how you can help red-legged frogs.  
If you have frogs or frog habitat on your property, please contact a Wildlife Biologist:  
Springfield (541) 726-3515   Corvallis (541) 757-4186   Salem (503) 378-6925**