

CONSERVING ALBERTA'S AMPHIBIANS

(ANNA HARGREAVES CENTRE FOR CONSERVATION RESEARCH, CALGARY ZOO)

Introducing Western Canada's amphibians

Of the 45 amphibian species found in Canada, Alberta is home to 11, BC to 22, Saskatchewan to 7 and Manitoba to 15. Western Canada's amphibian communities are distinct from those in eastern Canada; only the wood frog and leopard frog occur both east of Manitoba and west of Saskatchewan.

Unfortunately, many of our western amphibian species have undergone significant, sometimes dramatic declines in the last 50 years. The causes of the declines vary, but one of the main reasons is usually the loss, fragmentation and degradation of habitat.

Loss of wetland habitat

[Canada contains 25% of the world's wetlands](#)

Habitat loss is the greatest global threat to amphibian species. Amphibians require appropriate terrestrial as well as aquatic habitat, but wetlands are by far the most threatened piece of their habitat mosaic.

Since the 1800's, more than two thirds of Alberta's wetlands have been drained or infilled, primarily for agriculture but increasingly for human settlement. By 1966, roughly 75% of wetlands around Calgary and Edmonton had been lost, and the City of Calgary now estimates that has risen to 90%.

Wetland loss is also accelerating in British Columbia. BC Ministry of Environment estimates that 50% to 70% of the original wetland habitat has disappeared from the Fraser Lowland and parts of Vancouver Island, and 85% have been lost in the South Okanagan.

Wetlands Conservation

An essential component of protecting amphibians is stopping the loss and degradation of their habitat, and restoring it where possible.

To facilitate local wetland conservation, the Calgary Zoo is joining forces with the Toronto Zoo to promote the national **Wetland Guardians Registry**. The Registry is an online database designed to connect community groups that want to preserve or restore their local wetlands. Anyone can register any wetland, and search the database for conservation strategies other communities have used, including petitions, surveys, education and litigation. Community-based efforts like the registry are increasingly important as Alberta's rapid urban expansion swallows natural areas in its way.

Amphibian species of the western provinces: Y = native, I= introduced, colour code gives their conservation status in Alberta and British Columbia.

Species		BC	AB	SA	MA
Frogs and toads					
<i>Bufo boreas</i>	Western toad	Y			
<i>Bufo cognatus</i>	Great Plains Toad		Y	Y	Y
<i>Bufo hemiophrys</i>	Canadian Toad		Y	Y	Y
<i>Anaxyrus americanus</i>	American Toad				Y
<i>Ascaphus montanus</i>	Rocky Mountain Tailed Frog	Y			
<i>Ascaphus truei</i>	Coastal Tailed Frog	Y			
<i>Hyla chrysoscelis</i>	Cope's Gray Treefrog				Y
<i>Hyla versicolor</i>	Gray Treefrog				Y
<i>Pseudacris crucifer</i>	Spring Peeper				Y
<i>Pseudacris maculata</i>	Boreal chorus frog	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Pseudacris regilla</i>	Pacific Chorus Frog	Y			
<i>Rana aurora</i>	Red-legged Frog	Y			
<i>Rana catesbeiana</i>	Bullfrog	I			
<i>Rana clamitans</i>	Green Frog	I			Y
<i>Rana luteiventris</i>	Columbia Spotted Frog	Y	Y		
<i>Rana pipiens</i>	Northern Leopard Frog	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Rana pretiosa</i>	Oregon Spotted Frog	Y	Y		
<i>Rana septentrionalis</i>	Mink Frog				Y
<i>Rana sylvatica</i>	Wood Frog	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Spea bombifrons</i>	Plains Spadefoot		Y	Y	Y
<i>Spea intermontana</i>	Great Basin Spadefoot	Y			
Salamanders and Newts					
<i>Ambystoma gracile</i>	Northwestern Salamander	Y			
<i>Ambystoma laterale</i>	Blue-spotted Salamander				Y
<i>Ambystoma macrodactylum</i>	Long-toed Salamander	Y	Y		
<i>Ambystoma tigrinum</i>	Tiger Salamander	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Aneides vagrans</i>	Wandering Salamander	Y			
<i>Dicamptodon tenebrosus</i>	Pacific Giant Salamander	Y			
<i>Ensatina eschscholtzii</i>	Ensatina	Y			
<i>Necturus maculosus</i>	Mudpuppy				Y
<i>Plethodon idahoensis</i>	Coeur D'Alene Salamander	Y			
<i>Plethodon vehiculum</i>	Western Redback Salamander	Y			
<i>Taricha granulosa</i>	Roughskin Newt	Y			

Conservation status: Red= extirpated, endangered or threatened in the province,
 Blue=special concern (BC) or vulnerable (AB)
 Yellow = not currently at risk but sensitive
 Green = secure