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Media Contact:

Stephanie Haan-Amato

Communications Director

(575) 652-6957 | shaanamato@ARCProtects.org

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THINKING BIGGER: AMBITIOUS, LARGE-SCALE STRATEGY FOR OFTEN OVERLOOKED WILDLIFE

National Nonprofit Launches US-Wide Program to Conserve the World's Most Threatened Vertebrates, Amphibians and Reptiles

UNITED STATES, June 28, 2023 - At a larger scale than ever tackled before, a national nonprofit is undertaking the conservation of amphibians and reptiles, a group of wildlife that's often overlooked but highly imperiled. The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC) has launched an immense effort across the US for these rapidly declining species, also known as herpetofauna.

The organization's national strategy is implemented locally in hundreds of locations throughout the US called Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas, or PARCAs. In fact, ARC has identified 317 PARCAs, from the Southern Appalachians to the Southeastern coastal plains, across the heartland prairies to the deserts of the Southwest, and up to the Pacific Northwest. These PARCAs were selected because they contain either high densities of amphibians and reptiles or large numbers of threatened and endangered herpetofauna species - or in many cases, both.

ARC Executive Director JJ Apodaca explained the need for such a large endeavor: "For us, it was time to answer the call to think bigger, be strategic, and act collectively to give wildlife species with rapidly dwindling populations their best chance before it's too late."

And it is urgent. As a group, these species are declining at an alarming rate. Amphibians are the most threatened group of vertebrates on Earth; 41% of amphibian species worldwide are in danger of extinction. Plus, more than one-fifth of the world's reptiles are facing possible extinction. In the US, amphibians are declining by roughly 4% every year, and hundreds of imperiled amphibian and reptile species are at a tipping point. Forty-five amphibian species are listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act, and 120 reptile species are listed.

These species are teetering on the edge of survival for many reasons: habitat loss, disease, invasive species, climate change, and more. “Although amphibians and reptiles are facing a variety of threats across the country, overcoming those challenges usually boils down to two factors - improving ecosystems and increasing population sizes,” said Apodaca.

That’s why ARC’s approach is focused on restoring habitats and implementing targeted actions to boost populations in the most important areas for herpetofauna species. ARC National Programs Coordinator José Garrido explained: “ARC’s conservation and habitat restoration efforts help to increase the size, connectivity, and frequency of amphibian and reptile populations across the landscape.”

These efforts are being carried out in 22 of ARC’s designated PARCAs across 11 states this year. To restore habitats in these PARCAs to a healthy state, the organization is removing invasive plant and wildlife species, reinstating historic fire regimes, thinning overgrown vegetation, fencing sensitive wetlands and waterways to exclude cattle and reduce erosion and siltation, and more.

To reverse population declines, ARC is using a variety of methods including a technique called headstarting for several threatened and endangered amphibian species, such as [gopher frogs](#), [Chiricahua leopard frogs](#), and soon, [frosted flatwoods salamanders](#). To conduct headstarting, along with their partners, the organization’s biologists collect eggs from the wild, hatch them, and raise the larvae until they metamorphose. Raising them past the most vulnerable stages of their lives increases the odds of survival for the young animals, which are released back into the wild.

Not only are these strategic, locally implemented actions making a difference for individual species, but they also have broader implications on a landscape scale. Plus, the approach can serve as a model for conserving biodiversity at large. “What makes this effort different is that it’s the most ambitious amphibian and reptile conservation effort ever undertaken in the US and that we use a targeted combination of conservation actions tailored to the place and species, from habitat creation to invasive species mitigation,” Apodaca said. “Never before has any nonprofit attempted to strategically recover imperiled herpetofauna across the country.”

About Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC)

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, or ARC, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on identifying and conserving the highest priority places for amphibians and reptiles in the United States. We protect endangered amphibians and reptiles through a strategic, scientific, and passionate approach. We believe the conservation of amphibians, reptiles, and the habitats they depend on is vitally important. To learn more, visit ARCProtects.org.

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