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Media Contact:
Stephanie Haan-Amato
Communications Director
(575) 652-6957 | shaanamato@ARCProtects.org

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Mississippians to Benefit from Unique New Wildlife Habitat Protection Program

US-Wide Nonprofit Working on the Ground in the State to Protect Imperiled Amphibians and Reptiles

MISSISSIPPI, July 25, 2024 - Mississippians will benefit from a landmark program to protect and restore critical wildlife habitats across the state. The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a US-wide nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, is working on the ground in Mississippi to help safeguard its natural resources.

"We recognize and appreciate the natural beauty and immense biological richness of Mississippi and want to help protect it for today and tomorrow's residents, of both the human and the wildlife varieties," explained ARC Executive Director JJ Apodaca.

To do so, the organization recently identified five new Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas (PARCAs) across the state (map). Named Tishomingo, Gulf Coast, South Delta, Mann's Land, and Upper Pearl, these PARCAs represent crucial habitats for the conservation of Mississippi's diverse amphibians and reptiles. Plus, of course, when areas are protected for these species, all of the biodiversity there benefits.

Nationwide, ARC has identified 322 PARCAs, and the five in Mississippi are the newest of them. They're the first PARCAs in the state and signal the organization's commitment to protecting its environmental health and imperiled wildlife.

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. In PARCAs, ARC carries out a targeted combination of conservation actions tailored to the place and species, from habitat restoration to the captive rearing and release of imperiled species.

Apodaca said, "We're eager to continue the work we've been doing in Mississippi and expand our efforts into these new PARCAs, and we're especially excited to work with our many local partners to do what's needed for the wildlife and people here."

To strategically choose PARCAs that encompass Mississippi's three main ecosystem types—the East Gulf Coastal Plain, Mississippi River Alluvial Plain, and Upper East Gulf Coastal Plain, the nonprofit conducted a rigorous assessment, along with local experts from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks; Mississippi Natural Heritage Program; Millsaps College; and US Fish and Wildlife Service. The team identified these PARCAs:

- Tishomingo PARCA: Located in northeastern Mississippi, Tishomingo PARCA is characterized by its unique geologic features and diverse forest types. It includes critical habitat for imperiled species like the eastern hellbender.
- Gulf Coast PARCA: Stretching across the southern portion of the state, Gulf Coast PARCA encompasses a mosaic of ecosystems including Coastal Flatwoods, Upland Longleaf Pine, and the Pascagoula Drainage. These habitats support a wide range of species such as the Mississippi diamondback terrapin and dusky gopher frog.
- South Delta PARCA: Nestled between the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers, South Delta PARCA features agricultural landscapes interspersed with bottomland hardwood forests and cypress-tupelo swamps. These wetlands provide crucial habitats for species like the western chicken turtle, amidst ongoing agricultural conversions.
- Mann's Land PARCA: Located in east central Mississippi within the Black Prairie region, Mann's Land PARCA showcases a unique blend of prairie and forest habitats shaped by diverse soil types. This area supports species such as the crawfish frog.
- Upper Pearl PARCA: Along the Pearl River and its tributaries, Upper Pearl PARCA is renowned for its aquatic ecosystems and riparian habitats. It hosts diverse freshwater turtle species and plays a vital role in regional biodiversity and water management.

By safeguarding natural places in PARCAs throughout The Magnolia State, the program not only ensures the conservation of diverse species but enriches the lives of local citizens. That's because amphibians and reptiles play a key role in maintaining ecological balance, contributing to pest control, and indicating the health of local ecosystems.

Protecting and restoring the habitats of these species means that Mississippians will have cleaner water and air and enhanced recreational opportunities like nature watching, hiking, and kayaking. Plus, as Apodaca said, "Each PARCA represents a vital piece of Mississippi's heritage, and for the sake of future generations, we're dedicated to preserving the legacy of these stunning landscapes and the species they hold."

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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