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1,200+ Salamanders Released in Restored Panhandle Wetlands to Help Prevent Extinction

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy Leading Captive Rearing and Habitat Restoration Efforts for One of North America's Most At-Risk Amphibians

FLORIDA PANHANDLE, April 30, 2025 - Last week, biologists released their 1,204th federally-listed Threatened [frosted flatwoods salamander](#) larva (like a tadpole) into a restored Florida Panhandle wetland to help fend off the species' extinction. The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a national nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, is leading the efforts for this salamander, one of the most endangered amphibians in North America. With only a handful of wild populations remaining, ARC has recently begun supplementing habitat restoration work already underway with a method called headstarting, a very hands-on yet effective way to help stop and reverse this imperiled species' decline.

ARC Executive Director JJ Apodaca explained: "Along with our incredible partners here, we're carrying out a multi-faceted strategy for frosted flatwoods salamanders. We're not only releasing more salamanders onto the land; we're building better habitats and making sure the ecosystem contains what these amphibians need, all to give them a fighting chance against the big threats they face."

The latest effort, headstarting, involves collecting eggs from the wild, hatching them, raising them in protected environments, and then releasing them once they're larger and have a better chance of survival. Since there are so few of these salamanders remaining in the wild, increasing their odds provides hope for the future of their species, which faces multiple challenges, including habitat destruction and fragmentation, invasive species, and extreme weather events.

As an additional safeguard for frosted flatwoods salamanders, ARC is in the process of establishing a captive breeding program in which they'll be bred and raised in large, in-ground, outdoor enclosures. In future years, the resulting offspring will be released into the wild, further boosting their populations.

"This is a species persisting in the face of a lot of adversity, and there's a committed team of people mirroring that persistence by working hard to help them in many ways," said ARC Project Coordinator Nicole Dahrouge. The headstarting and captive breeding program is just one component of a larger, year-

round strategy that includes population monitoring, habitat restoration, and collaboration with key partners.

ARC works closely with private landowners like Westervelt Ecological Services (WES) and government agencies to help conduct prescribed burns, mechanically thin overgrown forests, and remove invasive plants. This work restores critical wetland habitats by encouraging the growth of the native plants the salamanders need for egg laying, such as pipewort and bog button, and it connects these areas so that their genes can flow. These efforts are paired with surveys that help track population trends and identify new habitats.

“We’re really fortunate to work with people like WES, Florida Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, several other partners, and a number of volunteers on these projects,” Dahrouge said. “Their dedication to protecting and improving the land is critical, and it’s inspiring to see so many partners and individuals come together. It’s one of the reasons I’m hopeful about this species.”

The challenges, however, remain. With populations scattered across fragmented habitats and facing worsening sea level rise, the frosted flatwoods salamander’s future is uncertain. “The looming climate threats are pretty worrisome; with storm surges and flooding, the coastal populations are increasingly at risk,” stated Dahrouge.

Despite these worries, Dahrouge finds hope in the perseverance of the salamanders themselves. “They’ve been around for millennia, adapting to changing landscapes,” she said. “Each headstart released, wetland restored, or new site detected is a step closer to a tangible future for them.”

For ARC, protecting the frosted flatwoods salamander not only prevents its extinction but also conserves the natural heritage this salamander represents. “These animals matter, even if most people never see them or might not even notice their absence if they were lost,” Dahrouge explained. “They’re part of a system that’s been in place long before we arrived, and the tragedy of their loss would be an avoidable one.”

Dahrouge’s passion for the work is clear. “I feel lucky to be able to do this,” she reflected. “It feels like I get to basically play outside for a living, and I’m working with a dedicated team to make an actual difference. It’s rare to be able to say that. But with the frosted flatwoods salamander, I can see we’re making positive changes.”

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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