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After 17 Years, a Threatened Salamander Is Rediscovered at Fort Stewart, and Its Recovery Is Underway

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy Leading Frosted Flatwoods Salamander Recovery Efforts

FORT STEWART, GEORGIA, February 19, 2026 - A federally listed Threatened amphibian that hadn't been seen in Georgia in its adult form for nearly two decades has reemerged on an unlikely landscape: Fort Stewart, the largest US Army installation east of the Mississippi River. The last adult frosted flatwoods salamander was seen in the state in 2006, but in 2023, biologists from the Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a national nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, documented an adult again. Since then, 11 adults were detected the following season and 20 this season so far.

Now, ARC, in partnership with Fort Stewart biologists and other agencies, is working to recover this critically imperiled species. The frosted flatwoods salamander is one of the most endangered amphibians in the US, hanging on in only a handful of populations in Georgia and Florida. ARC and Fort Stewart personnel are on the front lines, boosting populations and restoring wetlands and forests to help safeguard these rare salamanders.

While adult salamanders went undocumented for nearly two decades, larvae (like tadpoles) were spotted on the base periodically. From 2001 to 2022, larvae were detected at only one pond despite annual surveys. In early 2023, Fort Stewart biologists found larvae at a second historically occupied site.

When ARC joined the effort in late 2023, they discovered five additional occupied ponds, including four previously unknown sites.

Rob Tiffin, ARC Project Coordinator, described finding yet another new site occupied by salamanders in 2025: "I was amazed when, after searching the area for two hours, a tiny larva was spotted. It was nearly impossible to see. That moment underscored the resilience of this species and the importance of persistent surveys."

Eggs had never been documented at Fort Stewart until 2023, when ARC field teams, alongside local biologists, observed them for the first time.

These eggs are crucial to bolstering this fragile population. ARC employs a technique called headstarting in which eggs are collected from seasonal wetlands and hatched, and then larvae are raised in protected mesocosms (outdoor tanks) until they reach a size that improves their odds of survival. Headstarted larvae are later released back into wetlands on the base.

"When populations are this small, you can't leave recruitment to chance," said ARC Executive Director JJ Apodaca. "Headstarting is essential to building their populations back up, giving these salamanders more of a buffer against storms and other unpredictable events."

Headstarting is just one part of a broader strategy. To ensure salamanders have the wetlands they need for breeding, ARC teams are restoring seasonal ponds by removing overgrown shrubs and invasive plants. And Fort Stewart personnel are managing prescribed burns to restore historic fire regimes, integral to longleaf pine forest health, after decades of suppression.

The rediscovery highlights the unexpected importance of Fort Stewart for species conservation. The base contains some of Georgia's most intact longleaf pine forests, and coordination between military training and habitat management is making recovery possible.

As Apodaca explained, "This site is critical, and it shows that even working landscapes can harbor species thought nearly gone. Partnerships with the US Army and other agencies are key to recovery."

Recovery will also require collaboration beyond military lands. Currently, the species is not known on private properties in Georgia, but ARC is working with landowners and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to expand potential habitat for reintroduction.

"These salamanders survived nearly two decades without being seen," said Apodaca. "Now that we know they're still here, we have a responsibility to ensure they remain part of Georgia's landscape for generations to come."

Through headstarting, habitat restoration, and strategic partnerships, ARC is working to ensure this striking, at-risk amphibian has its best chance of persisting at Fort Stewart and beyond.

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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