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Seven Endangered Jemez Mountains Salamanders Collected for First Captive Population

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy and Partners Launch Effort to Recover the Species

JEMEZ SPRINGS, NEW MEXICO, October 1, 2026 – After years of documenting dramatic declines in the wild, conservation partners have collected seven Endangered [Jemez Mountains salamanders](#) from northern New Mexico, taking the first step toward establishing the first captive population of the species. The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a national nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, is partnering with Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, New Mexico Department of Wildlife, and the Santa Fe National Forest in this effort.

The [salamanders](#) were transported to Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium in Nebraska, on September 24, where they will become the first members of a captive population that could eventually include up to 25 individuals.

To get the [salamanders](#) there, the team developed life-support systems that ARC National Conservation Strategy Director Nancy Karraker described as “blinged-out portable electric coolers.” They’re designed to keep the salamanders at their optimal temperature of about 55 degrees Fahrenheit and constantly moist.

Their collection was the result of intensive [surveying](#) in the Jemez Mountains led by ARC and a team of federal, state, and zoo partners. The team spent about 159 person-hours searching for the salamanders, finding approximately one salamander for every 23 person-hours of effort.

“If that doesn’t define rarity, I don’t know what does,” said Karraker.

Populations of the species have apparently been declining for decades. With a trained crew searching full-time during the monsoon season each year from 2018 through 2024, researchers found only about 150 individual Jemez Mountains salamanders. By contrast, in 1962, two biologists documented 110 salamanders beneath and within a single 20- to 30-foot log in a single search.

“We no longer completely dismantle decaying logs, as was done in the past, to find salamanders, but we believe the declines are real as historic logging and grazing, contemporary wildfire, and climate change appear to be taking a toll,” noted Karraker.

Karraker and her collaborators have studied this species for nine years and have noticed that the summer monsoon seems to be arriving later. In recent years, the forest floor often hasn’t become wet enough for salamander surveys until August, instead of July as in the past.

“For a species as rare as the Jemez Mountains salamander, the first step is to ensure that we don’t lose it entirely as the climate changes,” said JJ Apodaca, ARC Executive Director.

But a captive population is only a single piece of the puzzle. It cannot replace the forests these salamanders depend on.

“The recovery of the species will take time. We need to protect the animals that remain while restoring the forests they need,” explained Apodaca. “This captive population gives us a safety net while we work with our partners to give wild populations a chance to recover.”

In areas where Jemez Mountains salamanders still persist, large downed logs are becoming increasingly scarce. Mature trees were harvested from these forests decades ago, and without those mature trees, the forest is no longer producing the large pieces of downed wood that provide essential shelter for salamanders. ARC and partners have been developing habitat restoration guidance for the species with plans to restore remaining occupied habitats.

“We can try to make more salamanders but we need to also restore the habitats on which wild populations rely,” said Karraker. “Combining these two new initiatives — captive breeding and habitat restoration — gives me hope that we can recover the species.”

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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