

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

To: Cathy Corliss, Angelo Planning Group
From: C. Mirth Walker, PWS, Senior Wetland Scientist
Date: July 29, 2015
Project: Painted Turtle and Red-legged Frog Status in Oregon for the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan Update

INTRODUCTION AND SPECIES STATUS

SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA) documented the status of western painted turtles (*Chrysemys pica bellii*) and northern red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora aurora*) for the benefit of the Air, Land, Water, Wildlife and Hazard Subcommittee. This memo briefly describes their identification and habitats.

Oregon has two native (non-marine) species of turtles: the western painted turtle and the western pond turtle. Both are highlighted in the Oregon Conservation Strategy as species in need of help—that is, they have low or declining populations. However, neither one is listed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) or by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Fish and Wildlife Species in Oregon list (ODFW 2014, USFWS 2015a). There are four sea turtles on the list.

The northern red-legged frog was listed as “near threatened” in 2004, but is now listed as “least concern” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN), in view of the wide distribution, numerous subpopulations, ability to use altered habitats, presumed large population, and because it is unlikely to be declining fast enough to qualify for listing in a more threatened category (ICUN 2015). It is not on the endangered species list maintained by ODFW and USFWS. Only the Oregon spotted frog (*R. pretiosa*) and the Columbia spotted frog (*R. luteiventris*) are currently listed as a threatened or candidate species, respectively. The California red-legged frog (*R. draytonii*), which does not occur in Oregon, was listed as threatened in 1996 (USFWS 2015b).

WESTERN PAINTED TURTLE (ODFW 2015a; USFWS 2015c)

The western painted turtle is native to the Pacific Northwest. Preferring sluggish waters, western painted turtles sun themselves on rocks, logs, muddy banks, and floating vegetation in freshwater ponds, sloughs, and wetlands. This turtle needs marshy ponds, small lakes, slow-moving streams, and quiet off-channel portions of rivers. It prefers waters with muddy bottoms with aquatic vegetation. Western painted turtles are primarily plant eaters, but will also consume insects, crayfish, earthworms, frogs, small fish, amphibian larvae, and carrion. Western painted turtles are easy to identify with their yellow striped head and feet, and red-rimmed shell. It is the only turtle which has a red pattern on the plastron (bottom shell). The color of the carapace (top shell) varies from olive to black. Males are smaller and have longer front claws than females. A female digs a nest hole in a sunny location away from the water where she deposits 1–20 eggs. The eggs incubate for 3–4 months. Eggs and hatchlings sometimes overwinter in the nest.

Hatchlings are 1 inch (3 cm) long, about the size of a quarter. Individuals can live 20 years or more. Open ground for nesting and logs for basking help keep this species healthy.

NORTHERN RED-LEGGED FROG (ODFW 2015b, USFWS 2015d, NatureServe Explorer 2015)

Red-legged frogs have smooth, moist skin that is brown or reddish-brown in color with black flecks on their backs, sides, and legs. They may also have a dark-colored mask. Adults have red under-legs, hence their name. Females, growing to 4 inches in length, are almost twice the size of males.

Adult red-legged frogs like forested wetlands and cool damp coniferous or deciduous forests. Their habitat includes the vicinity of permanent waters of stream pools, marshes, ponds, and other quiet bodies of water. This frog is regularly present in damp woods and meadows some distance from water, especially during wet weather. Individuals (especially juveniles) seasonally can be found in and near ephemeral pools. Breeding sites most often are in permanent water; eggs are attached to stiff submerged stems at the surface of the water. During the non-breeding season, adult frogs spend most of their time on land in woodlands along streams, in moist sedge or brush, along shaded pond edges, or under logs and other forest debris. Damp weather permits them to venture away from their primary water source into areas that would normally be too dry. Estivation (when animals slow their activity for the hot, dry summer months) sites include small mammal burrows and moist leaf litter in dense riparian vegetation some distance from water.

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