

# Study: Urbanization appears to have impact on amphibians in county

By **ERIK ROBINSON**  
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**A red-  
legged  
frog**

An ever-expanding human population appears to be squeezing Clark County's population of amphibians, according to a two-year baseline study undertaken by volunteers.

More than 100 volunteers waded through ponds and bogs across the county in the late winter and spring of 2008 and 2009. Peter Ritson, a chemistry instructor at Clark College, worked with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to organize the study.

Volunteers noted a dearth

of red-legged frogs and northwestern salamanders, which require deeper water connected to upland forests.

"These data do suggest that levels of urbanization around a breeding site may affect the presence and abundance of amphibian species with stricter habitat requirements," the

report concluded.

The goal was to establish a county database for native amphibians. Target species included the western toad, northern red-legged frog, northwestern salamanders, long-toed salamanders and Pa-

*AMPHIBIANS, back page*



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# Amphibians:

From Page A1

cific chorus frog.

Volunteers set out to examine 53 sites throughout the county, many of them on private land.

Ritson said many landowners agreed to participate in the project because they care about the environment, yet they would have been wary of allowing state biologists onto their property.

"They're interested in maintaining the natural qualities of their land," he said.

Others, such as Hazel Dell volunteer Elizabeth Koch, thought it would be a good opportunity to learn about the environment by studying it directly. Koch and her 16-year-old son conducted surveys of a wetland area in Jorgenson Park,

near their house.

"I've been sort of protective of the wetland with my kids," she said.

Koch, who's lived near the park for 12 years, said she saw the amphibian survey as an opportunity to raise public awareness about how interconnected wetlands are to the subdivisions surrounding them. The data suggest it could be important to conserve not only the wetlands themselves, but also conserve forested upland areas where amphibians such as red-legged frogs spend much of their adult life.

Even though the number of amphibians seemed to decline near urban areas, Ritson said he was heartened to see at least a few amphibians discovered virtually everywhere.

For example, volunteers discovered egg masses of red-legged frogs in the wetland mitigation area sprawling around



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**The long-toed salamander is among the species targeted in a recent study by volunteers.**

the intersection of Andresen Road and state Highway 500. Ritson said the same could not be said in similar sites surveyed in some other Portland suburbs, including Hillsboro and Gresham.

Ritson makes it clear that the survey is not comprehensive and merely represents a snapshot in time. But it's a start.

"I don't really have an agenda," Ritson said. "My agenda is to get the information out there."