

The Idaho Statesman

SCIENCE

ISU scientist tries to pinpoint amphibian impact

Assistant professor investigates significance of fewer amphibians in parks.

The Associated Press

POCATELLO — Chuck Peterson is helping to determine whether fewer amphibians in Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks means trouble for the global environment.

The assistant professor at Idaho State University said scientists from throughout the world have been watching the declining numbers of amphibians for years.

To establish to what extent and why amphibian numbers are

dropping, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Species Survival, established a task force in 1991 that prompted Peterson's studies.

The apparent amphibian decline concerns scientists for many reasons, including the prospect that their sensitivity to environmental changes could indicate problems with the Yellowstone and Grand Teton ecosystems. Peterson said amphibians go through two stages of life: one in water and one on land, exposing them to a variety of environmental conditions.

"They usually develop in standing water where pollutants can readily collect," he said. "They also respire through their

skin, which must be kept moist, and which allows chemicals to easily pass through."

A year ago, Peterson joined Ted Koch and Stephen Corn of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in monitoring the four Yellowstone and Grand Teton amphibian species — tiger salamander, chorus frog, spotted frog and western toad. Because they are less disturbed than most, the Yellowstone and Teton species will be used as reference populations for comparison with other amphibians, Peterson said.

Of the four species in Yellowstone and the Tetons, the ranges of three appear to be unchanged but the western toad's ranges have declined.

"We have eight monitoring sites in the Yellowstone area, and the toad used to be found in or near five of these sites but is now found in only one," Peterson said.

Due to a lack of historical data, researchers are unsure if the apparent decline is part of the toad's normal cycle.

Yellowstone and Teton park personnel are helping collect data. Ranger Craig McClure in Yellowstone National Park is conducting weekly surveys of amphibians at Harlequin Lake.

Next year researchers plan to extend the monitoring to the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area and Targhee National Forest.

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FOOTHILLS FIRES

*Jeff Yeo
We need to publicize
extension of their work
to T.R. + Brief
at adv. committee
Can you provide me
a summary,
John*