

# Research shows Twin Lakes frog populations steady

By BRIAN O'CONNOR  
Sentinel writer

Girl Scouts, chaperones and an amphibian researcher braved mosquitos and rain to record amphibian populations in the Twin Lakes area this weekend.

Scouts and Josh Ream — Alaska Fish and Game employee, Alaska Herpetological Society (AHS) member, University of Alaska-Fairbanks member and all-around frog guy — divided the area surrounding the dual lake system into 17 areas called “transects,” then traipsed through them counting the number and species of frogs, toads, and newts they found.

The weekend trip was an educational extension of Ream’s doctoral dissertation research, which focused on frog populations in the Stikine River delta and was recently used to develop the Society’s Stikine Long-Term Amphibian Monitoring Program (SLAMP). The program tracks the populations and diversity of amphibians over time.

That research is important because amphibians — as you may or may not remember from high school biology class — have skin which allows water from the surrounding environment into their bodies, as well as any pollutants that water contains. Amphibians are thus a bell weather indicator of how ecosystems are changing in response to, for example, global warming or mining development in the Stikine River watershed.

“We’ll be comparing all of these numbers against what we’ve been finding over the past couple years,” he said. “Just looking at the data without any analysis, it appears as though the populations are relatively stable from year-to-year at this site.”

Beyond an invaluable opportunity for hands-on experience with animals in their natural environment, the scouts’ presence also may have improved the efficiency of the research, Ream said.

“This is the first time we were able to revisit the same spot in the same year, so



Herpetologist Joshua Ream, scouts Skylar Larrabee, Laura Helgeson, Forest Service Employee MiKayla Stokes, scout Sophie O'Brien, Forest Service employee Corree Delabruue, scouts Adrianna Larrabee, Jing O'Brien and Forest Service Wilderness Manager David Rak pose in front of “Camp 'Phibian,” (otherwise known as Twin Lakes FS recreation cabin) in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness during a frog survey expedition June 5 through June 8. Troop Leader Diane O'Brien isn't pictured.

this was a real benefit to AHS and to SLAMP,” he said. “But also having the Girl Scouts accompany us to the site, we were able to have many more eyes on the ground than we typically do.”

Similar research trips typically record between 10 and 30 percent of hard-to-spot amphibians in a given area, but the addition of more eyes means researchers are more likely to spot the camouflaged and hard-to-find animals.

“We may have been able to increase that percentage slightly,” he said. “We found some animals in areas where we hadn’t found them previously.”

Past trips to the area had been poorly timed to observe the transition from eggs to tadpoles, particularly for boreal toads, which inhabit the Twin Lakes area in large numbers. They also spied Columbia spotted frogs in a small pond adjacent to the lakes for the first time,

Ream said.

The partnership between the Society, the US Forest Service and the Girl Scouts of Alaska was started by a \$2,000 grant with help from the Stikine Sportsmen Association, said Troopmaster and Forest Service employee Diane O'Brien.

While the Girl Scouts often camp in cabins, this weekend’s trip allowed them the opportunity to sleep in tents for the first time, O'Brien said. They stuck it out at their campsite, nicknamed “Camp 'Phibian” despite the inability to use bug spray over concerns about environmental contamination, O'Brien said.

“We got to experience both extremes of weather,” she said. “It was extremely buggy and hot the first day-and-a-half.”

Scouts have been preparing for the trip for months, O'Brien said.

“Our focus for the last few months has been on this trip, and they got a lot of

training because of it,” she said. “It was the catalyst to learn about wilderness, wilderness ethics, the history, the laws. They learned about invasive plant species. When we got to the Twin Lakes cabin site, it was aglow with dandelions everywhere, so we picked thousands of seed heads to try and halt that a little bit for this season anyways.”

In addition to aiding with the research and choosing colorful nicknames for their campsite, the scouts also gained invaluable educational experience as participants, O'Brien said.

“They learned how to process, do scientific research,” she said. “It was just an awesome experience. We’re trying to get girls in science, and something may click with any of this experience that they take with them for the rest of their lives.”

“Even the bugs are good,” she added. “It’s good story fodder.”

# Stikine tributary Tahltan landslide effects uncertain

By BRIAN O'CONNOR  
Sentinel writer

A May 23 landslide on a Stikine River tributary in British Columbia will likely not affect salmon runs on the river there, officials with a nearby First Nations band said.

The landslide sent large rocks tumbling into the Tahltan River and could have potentially impeded returning salmon. Officials with the band at Telegraph Creek were keeping an eye on the river. In the short term, the danger to the spring salmon fishery appears to be mitigated by the effects of melting snows which, driving the river level up, should raise the level enough for smolt to get over, said Franke Ryan with the Tahltan nation.

“The only concern now is how big the river gets, and maybe if it washes out the landslide, it goes and releases a ton of water all at once, which would be a problem,” he said

The rockslide is huge, Ryan said.

“One rock is bigger than an A6 Cat,” he said.

A similar event in 1965 drove members of the local band to the

river with dip nets to, in essence, obstruction and back up to approach would use a different help returning spawners over the salmon grounds. A similar method today, according to Ryan.

“We might use a helicopter with a bucket,” he said.

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