

# Southern Leopard Frogs and the Department of Defense

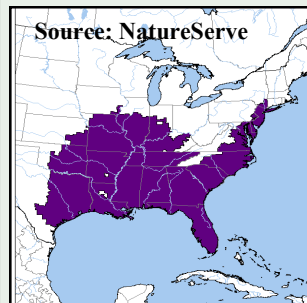


Picture by Mundy Hackett

The Southern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates sphenoccephalus*) is a boldly patterned semi-aquatic frog that is widely distributed across eastern North America. It is among the most common frog species confirmed present on military properties. It gets its name from its leopard-like spots.

**Description:** Southern Leopard Frogs are mid-sized frogs measuring 2 - 3.5 inches (5.1 - 8.9 cm) in snout-vent length. They are gray, brownish, or green in ground color, with large dark green to brown spots on the back, sides, and legs. The hind foot is extensively webbed, the tips of the digits (= toes) are not expanded, and a pair of dorsolateral folds is present. The similar-looking Pickerel Frog (*L. palustris*) has square spots that are generally arranged in rows and there is bright orange or yellow coloration on the inside of the legs.

**Range:** This species ranges from southern New York to the Florida Keys, throughout the Southeast, and west to eastern Kansas and eastern Texas.



Source: NatureServe

**Habitat:** Southern Leopard Frogs are found in and around virtually any shallow freshwater habitat, particularly wetlands that do not have fish. They exhibit some tolerance for slightly brackish water habitats.

**Behavior:** Adults may wander widely under warm, humid conditions and occasionally are found some distance from water. The breeding call is a series of guttural croaks and clucks that can be roughly simulated by rubbing a thumb across an inflated balloon. Most breeding occurs from December through March in the southern part of the range, and later farther north. Breeding associates are often Spring Peepers and other frogs of the genus *Pseudacris*. Eggs are laid in shallow water in masses of a few hundred to several thousand per mass. Adults are predatory, primarily consuming insects and other invertebrates, but can eat small vertebrates. Tadpoles eat periphyton and phytoplankton that are scraped from aquatic vegetation.

**Military Interactions:** One of the most common frog species present on DoD properties, Southern Leopard Frogs may be encountered both in military training and housing areas.

**Conservation Status:** The Southern Leopard Frog has no federal conservation status. It is a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in four states at the periphery of its range. It has a NatureServe Raking of G5-Secure, and is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN Red list.

**Threats/Planning Considerations:** Threats to this species include chytrid fungal disease, and mass mortality of tadpoles and juveniles in association with high prevalence of ranavirus is known. A habitat management practice to benefit this species is to protect wetlands from herbicides, insecticides, metals, and fertilizers.

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## Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 111 military properties (23 Air Force; 46 Army; 7 Marine Corps; and 35 Navy).	Up to an additional 50 military properties (12 Air Force; 13 Army; 2 Marine Corps and 23 Navy).

