

IDENTIFICATION: The Red Hills salamander (*Phaeognathus hubrichti*) has few easily recognized distinguishing characteristics. It is best found by recognizing potential habitat and searching for burrows rather than salamanders. It is a relatively large, lungless salamander, growing up to 10 inches with a dark brown tail and body. It spends almost all its time in its burrow on shady steep bluff sites, coming to the mouth on warm, humid nights to feed on invertebrate prey. Shady, moist conditions on the bluffs where the salamander lives are critical to its survival. Loss of shade and cover leads to drying by sunlight and wind, and negatively impacts both the salamander and its food.



It was designated as a threatened species on January 3, 1977 and was designated as the “Official Alabama State Amphibian” in 2000 after a campaign led by the third graders at Fairhope Elementary School. Primary threats include a restricted range, loss of habitat, a low reproductive rate, and a limited capability to disperse. Alabama’s Forever Wild Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy have purchased some of the habitat occupied by the Red Hills salamander as a means of protecting populations.

FORESTRY CONSIDERATIONS: Mechanical damage from logging and other operations that lead to either erosion, damage to the site, or loss of canopy is harmful to the salamander. Removal of too many trees in the canopy on and immediately above the slopes on which these animals occur expose the site to excessive drying. Removal of trees just above the slope can lead to windthrow on the slope, creating gaps in the canopy that lead to drying of the site. Knowledgeable biologists should investigate areas known or suspected to contain red hills salamanders before forestry operations begin.

If Red Hills salamanders are found on a site, limited logging or other forestry activity is still possible, but consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may be necessary to guide future management. Habitat conservation plans have been formulated for some private lands in Alabama that permit some operations while affording protection for the salamander.

DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTY: The Red Hills salamander is found only in a narrow belt of Alabama associated with two siltstone formations called the Tallahatta and the Hatchetigbee. The salamander’s range is bounded on the east by the Conecuh River and on the west by the Alabama River. There are estimated to be less than 55,000 acres of red hills salamander habitat left in the world, all in Alabama. Portions of Butler, Crenshaw, Conecuh, Covington, Monroe and Wilcox counties contain this entire 55,000 acres.

Photo Credit: U. S. Geological Survey

Text Credit: Threatened and Endangered Species of Alabama: A Guide to Assist with Forestry Activities, Second Edition, USFWS



This information is provided by the Alabama Forestry Commission

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