



How to do a Wood Frog Survey

ALASKA WOOD FROG MONITORING PROGRAM



INTRODUCTION

Roadside, Backyard, and Incidental Surveys all complement one another and provide valuable information on wood frogs and other amphibians to the **ALASKA WOOD FROG MONITORING PROGRAM**. For the **Roadside** Survey, volunteers drive on a road of their choice and mark the locations of suitable frog habitat - The first three to ten spots become the survey stops on the route. Volunteers then re-survey their route every few days (or even once a week) during the calling season (this lasts two to three weeks). **Backyard** Surveys monitor one convenient site daily during the calling season (or as close to daily as you can manage). The surveys gather information on the dates frogs begin to call, the duration of the breeding season, patterns of calling throughout the day and the breeding season, and changes in the population over time. To supplement our Roadside and Backyard Surveys we would like any **Incidental** observations of amphibians wherever and whenever you happen upon them. Every sighting adds a piece to the puzzle and it would be appreciated if you take the time to record the details of your chance amphibian encounters as well.

ROADSIDE SURVEY ROUTE SELECTION

Volunteers should select a route with at least three sites (up to ten) of potential frog habitat in their survey area. Only routes with 10 sites can be included in the international dataset for the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program. *Virtually anywhere that has standing water for at least part of the summer qualifies as potential frog habitat!* This includes ponds, bogs, marshes, temporary pools, or roadside ditches. Frogs can potentially breed anywhere there is standing water, so do not reject potential breeding sites because they do not fit the image of an ideal frog pond. Furthermore, sites should not be selected based on whether frogs are present or not. Where frogs are **not found** is as useful to us as where frogs **are found**. Sites must be at least ½ mile apart. This ensures that you do not hear overlapping calls from two listening posts. Sites should be easily accessible at night – roadside sites are encouraged. Avoid sites that require trespass on private lands or are difficult or time consuming to access.

At each stop along the route decide on the exact spot you will be listening from – we ask that you listen from the same listening posts each day you run the survey. Marking your listening posts with sticks, stones, or survey tape may be helpful. Fill out one *Site Description Form* for each site on your survey route, but you only have to do this on your first visit to each site. Then, after your initial survey, re-survey your route every few days (or even once a week) during the calling season (this lasts two to three weeks), and fill out an *Observation Data Sheet* each time you run your survey.

Surveying the Route

Choose a name for your route that includes the name or number of the road you're surveying if possible. Otherwise include the name of a nearby local landmark. Name the individual sites along your route using your three initials followed by a consecutive three-digit number (i.e. dft001, dft002, dft003, etc.). The sites must always be referred to by the number you originally assign to them on the *Site Description Form*, regardless of the order in which you survey them. In the space provided, describe the location of the site and the listening post in enough detail so that anyone else would be able to find it again by reading your directions. Many of these routes will be surveyed every year to detect changes over time, even if the original observer no longer

wishes to participate. Thus, the importance of adequately describing the location of your sites and listening posts cannot be stressed enough. If you have access to a GPS, we strongly encourage you to document the latitude, longitude, and elevation of the site. If your site is in the vicinity of a well-known landmark (i.e. the Kasilof River bridge on the Seward Highway), we ask that you include the approximate distance from the landmark. The bottom half of the *Site Description Form* is a multiple-choice habitat description: Simply circle one item in each box unless directed otherwise.

BACKYARD SURVEY SITE SELECTION

Volunteers should select a site that they know frogs inhabit – preferably in or near your own backyard. The site should be easily accessible—backyard and roadside sites are encouraged. Avoid sites that require trespass on private lands or are difficult or time consuming to access. Decide on the exact spot at the site you will be listening from – we ask that you listen from the same listening post each day you run the survey. Marking your listening post with sticks, stones, or survey tape may be helpful. Fill out one *Site Description Form* for each site you survey, but you only have to do this on the first visit. In the space provided, describe the location of the site and the listening post in enough detail so that anyone else would be able to find it again by reading your directions. If you have access to a GPS, we strongly encourage you to document the latitude, longitude, and elevation of the site. The bottom half of the form is a multiple-choice form for describing the habitat: Simply mark one item in each box unless directed otherwise.

SURVEYING THE SITE

You may choose to survey and monitor one site only, or you may select a number of sites and combine them into a monitoring route. The choice is yours, but if you elect to monitor a route, try to visit all sites on along the route on the same day.

INCIDENTAL SURVEY

To supplement our Roadside and Backyard Surveys we want your reports of amphibians wherever and whenever you happen upon them. Although roads in Alaska are minimal, airplanes, boats, hiking trips and trail bike rides allow access into areas with no roads. Any reports of amphibians are of value, whether in your backyard or in the foothills of the Brooks Range. Every sighting adds a piece to the puzzle and it would be appreciated if you would take the time to record the details of your chance amphibian encounters on the attached survey forms. Chances are you will most likely be encountering wood frogs – however, if you do happen upon other amphibian species we would love to know about it!

COLLECT THE FOLLOWING DATA FOR YOUR SURVEY

DATES: They are expected to emerge from hibernation sometime in late April or early May, depending on temperature and snow cover. More southerly areas may start hearing frogs around the last week in April; Sites further north, such as Talkeetna, will probably not hear frogs calling until mid-May. But you never know!!! For best results, start visiting your site(s) daily before you hear the first frog calls and continue until the frogs are no longer calling. It is estimated that this will be a two to three week period. Don't worry if you miss a few nights - Collect information for as many nights as you can.

TIME: You may conduct your surveys anytime between Noon and two hours after dusk, but please try to do your surveys at the same time every day. Whenever you survey, be sure to document the time you surveyed on the datasheet. This is very important! We must know what time of day the surveys were run in order to detect differences in calling rates throughout the day. National standards dictate that surveys should start 30 minutes after dusk, because in most parts

of the country, the majority of frogs call during the post-dusk hours. However, here in Alaska dusk surveys may not be possible because the sun sets fairly late in the evening during spring.

SURVEY METHOD: Once you arrive on the site, wait to begin your survey for two to three minutes, and remain quiet and still during that time. When you're ready to begin the survey, make note of the time and simply listen for a three-minute period. You will estimate the approximate number of frogs using the *Wisconsin Call Index*.

The **Wisconsin Calling Index** values are:

- 0 – No calling amphibians
- 1 – Individuals can be counted. There is space between calls.
- 2 – Calls of individuals can be distinguished but there is some overlapping of calls.
- 3 – Full chorus. Calls are constant, continuous, and overlapping.

Record your start and stop times, the *Wisconsin Call Index* value, and estimate the number of frogs you hear calling whenever possible. Be sure to fill in the date, time, observers' names, site and route numbers, and weather information for every survey.

PLEASE FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS WHEN FROG WATCHING:

1. Make sure that you have the necessary equipment before arriving at your route:
 - Appropriate data sheets
 - Pencil
 - (Optional) Thermometer and GPS
2. Remember to keep your distance from the actual site where frogs are calling:
This will ensure that the breeding area is left undisturbed and that your presence won't frighten the frogs and silence them.
3. ***SITE DESCRIPTION FORM:***
If this is your first visit to the site, fill out the *Site Description Form*.
4. ***OBSERVATION DATA SHEET:***
Roadside, backyard, and incidental surveys use the same data form: Be sure to circle at the top of the datasheet the type of survey you are performing.

Record the observers' names, the date, and route # (if applicable).

Record the requested weather information by simply circling the appropriate choices.
 - Air Temperature (present and past 24 hours)
 - Wind Speed (using the Beaufort Wind Scale)
 - Precipitation (present and past 48 hours)
5. ***GET QUIET AND COMFORTABLE.*** Stay quiet for three minutes before starting to listen for frogs – your arrival may have stopped the frogs from calling. Remain as still and quiet as possible during this time so you don't disturb the frogs – they may stop singing if you make too much noise.
6. ***LISTEN FOR FROGS.*** When you are ready, cup your hands around your ears and listen for precisely 3 minutes.

7. **RECORD YOUR DATA**

After three minutes, record:

- The time you started listening
- The time you stopped
- The different species you heard (this will most likely only be wood frogs)
- The calling intensity (using the **Wisconsin Calling Index**)
- Whenever possible, estimate the number of frogs you hear calling

You can start over if you are disturbed – for example, an airplane flies overhead or a car drives past you. Just remember to change the time you started on the data sheet.

8. If relevant, especially during **Incidental Sightings** please include a description of the encounter and of the amphibian in the comments section of the data form

RETURNING YOUR DATA SHEETS - COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Please return all of your completed forms to the Project Coordinator by July 15th of this year. You may submit them electronically via email, by fax, or through the mail. We will send you a self addressed, stamped envelope for this purpose upon request. Please direct comments or questions to:

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THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING FOR THE ALASKA WOOD FROG MONITORING PROGRAM!