

LISTENING TO NATURE

Frog survey will keep volunteers a-hoppin'

BY IREN ABRAMCZYK
STAFF WRITER
labramczyk@home.comcast.net

During these wintry days of single-digit temperatures, it's hard to imagine that spring will arrive in just a few short weeks. But organizers of a frog and toad survey want western Wayne County residents to "think spring" and hope they volunteer to listen to the amphibians croak, a chorus that is a true harbinger of spring and a sign of males ready for breeding.

From the short, subtle chuckle of the wood frog to the loud, high-pitched peep of the spring peeper, volunteers are needed to listen to amphibian calls for a few minutes each week in the city of Novi and the townships of Canton, Northville, Plymouth, Salem, Superior and Van Buren.

Depending on the species, volunteer monitors could be listening as early as March or as late as July.

"We really have very little information on locations of frog and toad species, particularly in urbanizing areas," said Lara Spears, an ecologist with Applied Science & Technology Inc. of Brighton.

ASTI was awarded a contract in 1997 with Friends of the Rouge to design and begin a survey as part of a long-term monitoring program using the volunteers to assess habitat and water quality, along with examining the wildlife populations within the Rouge River ecosystem in Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties.

Analyzing results

The survey will help track the health of the watershed, once a few surveys are completed and results can be analyzed over time.

The survey is funded through a \$25,000 federal grant from the Rouge Program Office, which is matched by the Friends of the Rouge through other grants and volunteers.

Spears and Richard Wolinski, a senior ecologist, completed the frog and toad survey last year with about 140 volunteers trained to listen for the sounds of four species over 52 square miles in the communities of Novi, Northville, Plymouth and Salem townships.

Canton, Superior and Van Buren surveys will begin this spring for the wood frog, western chorus frog, spring peeper and American toad. Novi, Northville, Plymouth and Salem vol-

unteers will listen for those species for a second consecutive year and the gray tree frog, northern leopard frog, green frog and bullfrog.

Monitors only need to listen to different calls in about a 1/4-quarter square mile area and do not necessarily need to identify the frog or toad, according to John Bingham, director of public involvement projects for the Friends of the Rouge.

"The smaller area you do, the better," Bingham said about the individual survey blocks.

This year's survey area represents the watershed that lies west of Hagerly Road. Last year's survey revealed a direct correlation between impervious surfaces — such as parking lots, streets and rooftops that empty directly into rivers and streams instead of infiltrating directly into the ground — and water quality. This year's study will examine the correlation between the amount of impervious surface and number of species.

The spring peeper was the most frequently observed frog in 172 of approximately 200 quarter mile survey blocks.

Room to improve

"In general, the area surveyed provides good habitat quality, with 117 survey blocks having three or more species," Spears said. "That almost 30 square miles. However, at least 50 survey blocks had one or fewer species, which indicates that there is plenty of room for habitat improvement."

The state Department of Natural Resources conducts frog surveys, but Spears said volunteers for this year's survey will be covering a "much broader area." "It will identify habitats nobody knows about," Spears said.

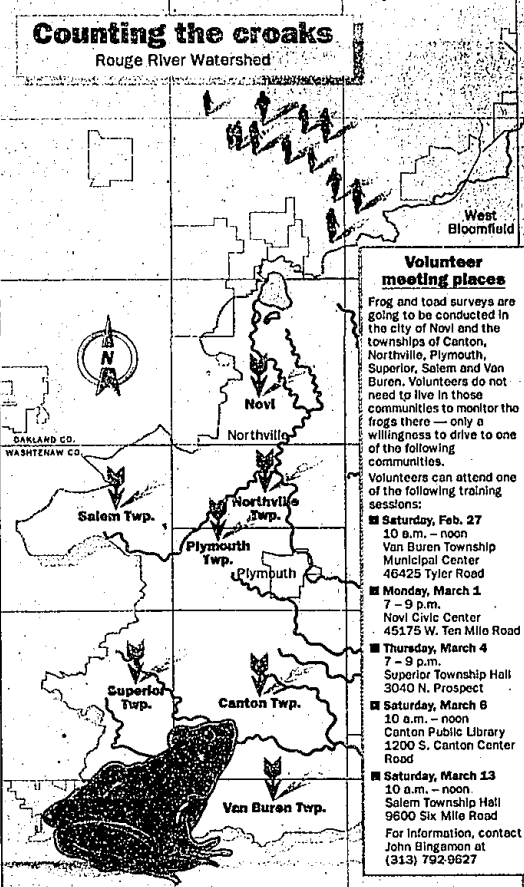
"There are a lot of places where there is intermittent wetlands," Bingham said. "It may be an area that is wet in the spring for a few weeks."

Volunteers do not need to live in the survey community to participate. Bingham said, the monitoring is an activity that can be enjoyed by people ranging from students in a college ecology class to families and Boy and Girl Scout troops.

"We're getting a few calls from Garden City, Redford, Livonia and Farmington," Bingham said. "We're encouraging people to come on out."

Counting the croaks

Rouge River Watershed



Volunteer meeting places

Frog and toad surveys are going to be conducted in the city of Novi and the townships of Canton, Northville, Plymouth, Superior, Salem and Van Buren. Volunteers do not need to live in those communities to monitor the frogs there — only a willingness to drive to one of the following communities. Volunteers can attend one of the following training sessions:

- Saturday, Feb. 27
10 a.m. – noon
Van Buren Township Municipal Center
46425 Tyler Road
- Monday, March 1
7 – 9 p.m.
Novi Civic Center
45175 W. Ten Mile Road
- Thursday, March 4
7 – 9 p.m.
Superior Township Hall
3040 N. Prospect
- Saturday, March 6
10 a.m. – noon
Canton Public Library
1200 S. Canton Center Road
- Saturday, March 13
10 a.m. – noon
Salem Township Hall
9800 Six Mile Road

For information, contact John Bingham at (313) 792-9627

There's music in the air

The Rouge River watershed contains 12 frog and toad species. Collectively, frogs and toads are called "anurans," which means "without a tail." Volunteers in their first year of the survey in Canton, Superior and Van Buren townships will be listening for the following species during their respective breeding seasons:

- **Wood Frog:** Common throughout the basin, but can only be heard for a short time early in the spring, generally between March and May, in forested swamps. Its call — a short, subtle chuckle, like ducks quacking in the distance — is often overpowered by the calls of other species.
- **Western Chorus Frog:** This species has a short, ascending "cre-e-e," resembling a thumb drawn along a comb's teeth, repeated every couple of seconds. Its breeding season lasts between March and May.
- **Spring Peeper:** Common and widespread throughout the basin. Its call is a short, loud, high-pitched peep, repeated every second. Breeding season generally lasts between early April and late June.
- **American toad:** Also common in a variety of habitats in the Great Lakes basin. Its long, drawn-out high-pitched musical trill lasting up to 30 seconds, generally heard from mid-April to late June.

Volunteers in Novi, Northville, Plymouth and Salem townships will listen for these species for a second consecutive year, along with the gray tree frog, northern leopard frog, green frog and bullfrog.

Source: Applied Science & Technology, Inc. of Brighton

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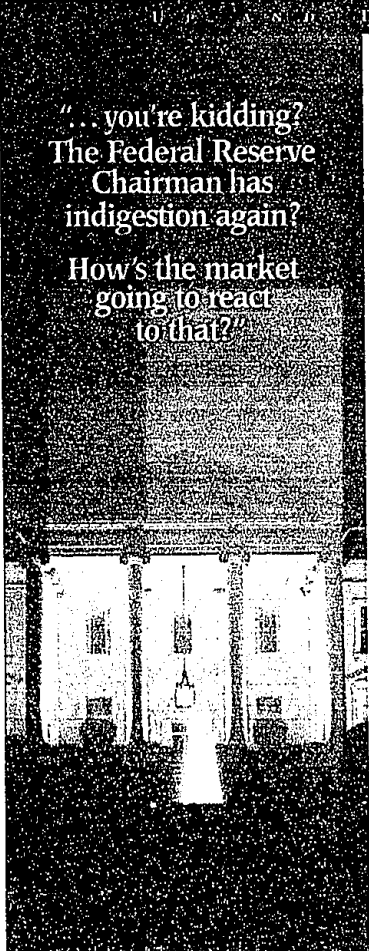
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