

**IDENTIFICATION:** The dusky gopher frog (*Rana sevosa*) is a medium sized, stocky, frog with a total body length up to 3-4". Its back is covered with warts and dark spots and ranges in coloration from black to brown or gray. A thick ridge of skin extends down the back behind each eye. Undersides are typically white in color with some yellowing of the inside of the legs and adjacent belly area. The male emits a distinctive "snoring" sound that may be heard up to 0.3 miles. A unique defense mechanism includes inflating its body and excreting a bitter, milky fluid from warty glands located on its back.



Dusky gopher frogs are only known to occur in a few locations in southeast Mississippi but were historically found in Mobile County, Alabama. This species hasn't been documented in Mobile County in more than 80 years. Research is currently being conducted to investigate their absence or presence. They are highly terrestrial and primarily occur in well managed longleaf pine habitat. They spend their days in tortoise burrows, stump holes and other underground refugia and emerge at night to feed on insects and other small animals. Breeding typically occurs in February and March in isolated, fishless, ephemeral ponds. Reproduction is very limited in years when ephemeral breeding ponds dry before metamorphosis.

The dusky gopher frog was listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001. Management efforts focusing on maintenance of an open canopy with a well-developed herbaceous layer of native grasses and vegetation is critical. Prescribed fire, especially growing season burns, is a highly effective tool to provide good habitat.

**FORESTRY CONSIDERATIONS:** Maintenance of open longleaf pine uplands along with ephemeral, fishless ponds through prescribed burning is the most cost-effective form of management. Gopher tortoises also respond well to this form of management and their burrows are highly utilized by gopher frogs as refugia. Excluding heavy equipment from a 12-foot buffer zone around tortoise burrows minimizes the risk of collapsing and destroying the underground refugia. Mechanical site preparation, as well as stump removal, should be avoided in forestry operations.

**DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTY:** Historically found in Mobile County but may be present in Choctaw and Washington counties.

Photo Credit: U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service



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