

BOREAL TOAD

Bufo boreas boreas (Endangered Colorado)

THE BOREAL TOAD IS THE only one of Colorado's 17 species of native amphibians that is adapted to live almost exclusively at elevations above 8,000 feet, and can be found at elevations up to at least 12,000 feet. Boreal toads in the southern Rocky Mountains can be recognized by their dark, brown-black, "warty" skin, and they usually have a white- or cream-colored stripe down their backs. Adult boreal toads grow to a maximum length of 3.5 to 4 inches. They live in forested areas, and require relatively shallow standing water for breeding – such as can be found in and around beaver ponds.

As is the case with many amphibian populations around the world, the boreal toad has experienced dramatic declines in numbers over the past 20-25 years. Possible reasons for this decline have not been clearly identified, but recent find-

ings indicate that a fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatitis*) is the primary cause of the die-offs. Relatively little is known about this newly discovered pathogen, and work is underway to better understand its biology and develop ways to combat it.

The boreal toad is state listed as endangered (since 1993), and federally classified as a candidate species which is "warranted but precluded" for listing under the Endangered Species Act. As of late 2004, there were approximately 30 known breeding populations of boreal toads in the southern Rocky Mountains, with all but one being in Colorado. Most of these populations are relatively small, and their ability to survive and sustain themselves over a long period is questionable.

An interagency recovery team, led by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, has developed and is implementing a recovery and conservation plan for the boreal toad.

© LAUREN J. LIVO & STEVE WILCOX

Biologists believe a fungus has caused boreal toad populations to decline.

