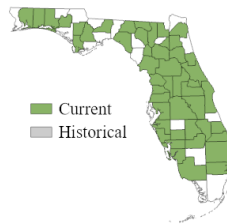


## GOPHER FROG

*Lithobates capito*

**Order:** Anura  
**Family:** Ranidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G2G3/S3  
**U.S. Status:** none  
**FL Status:** none



**Description:** A medium-sized, boldly spotted frog with a chunky appearance: body short and plump, head large with somewhat rounded snout, legs relatively short. Back with somewhat warty skin and prominent, often bronze-colored longitudinal ridge on each side behind eye. Dorsal pattern of irregularly shaped dark spots on background that may be cream, gray, or brown. Chin and throat spotted, belly usually unmarked posteriorly. Adults 2.5 - 4 in. (63 - 102 mm) (excluding legs). Call resembles a deep snore. Tadpole large, to 3.5 in. (89 mm), globose, olive green, with large black spots on sides of tail.

**Similar Species:** Leopard frog (*Lithobates sphenoccephala*), which may share breeding ponds with gopher frog, has large, dark brown spots on a green to brown background; however, body is more slender, snout very pointed, and throat and chin plain white. Tadpoles of the two species are very similar. Southern toad (*Bufo terrestris*) has dry, very warty skin, no raised ridges along edges of back, a pair of large raised glands behind eyes, and blunt snout. Spadefoot toad (*Scaphiopus holbrookii*) has vertical black pupils in golden eyes, dry skin, and a pair of hourglass-like lines rather than spots on back. All treefrogs have enlarged pads on toes.

**Habitat:** Dry, sandy uplands, chiefly sandhill and scrub, that include isolated wetlands or large ponds within about 1 mi. (1.7 km). Occasional in dry pine flatwoods, xeric hammock, and disturbed examples of above. Breeds chiefly in seasonally flooded, temporary ponds, but also in some permanent waters. Nocturnal, normally spending daytime in stump holes, tunnels, or burrows, especially those of gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*).

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Migrates to ponds for breeding from October through April, though may also breed during summer in central and southern Florida.

**Florida Distribution:** Based on general maps (e.g., Jensen and Richter 2005, Jensen et al. 2008), Florida appears to represent slightly less than half of the gopher frog's total range. The species occurs nearly statewide in appropriate upland habitat, although distribution is now patchy because of habitat loss and other factors that have made former breeding sites unsuitable. The range formerly extended southward along coastal ridges to northwestern Collier County on the Gulf Coast, and to Broward County on the Atlantic Coast, but excludes the greater Everglades region as well as the Florida Keys.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Eastern Gulf Coastal Plain and southern Atlantic Coastal Plain, from North Carolina to eastern Louisiana.

**Conservation Status:** Many protected conservation lands in Florida support gopher frogs, although attention to managing and protecting breeding habitat and migratory pathways is often insufficient.

**Protection and Management:** Maintain the natural ecological integrity of xeric uplands and included isolated wetlands on sites, especially conservation lands (including military bases), where the species occurs. In the absence of sufficient wildfire, use regular prescribed burns to prevent hardwood encroachment in such habitats; fire should be allowed to burn into pond basins when dry. Prohibit off-road vehicle use within isolated wetland basins. Manage lands to maintain robust populations of gopher tortoises. Prevent excess water withdrawal for human use, and work to slow or reverse human-induced climate change that can lead to altered hydrology of breeding ponds.

**References:** Ashton and Ashton 1988a, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Franz 1986, Franz and Smith 1999, Godley 1992, Mount 1975, Powell et al. 2016



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