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Amargosa toad efforts lead to accolades for rancher

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By Mark Waite -

LAS VEGAS — David Spicer, a rancher in Oasis Valley north of Beatty, received a service citizen's award from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wednesday at the Red Rock Visitors Center for his work on the Amargosa toad.

Spicer founded a non-profit organization, STORM-OV Saving Toads through Off-Road Racing, Ranching and Mining in the Oasis Valley and implemented conservation actions throughout the range of the Amargosa toad, according to a letter from Dan Ashe, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"You initiated and completed 12 habitat conservation projects, which has restored or enhanced 57 acres of wetland, including one mile of the Amargosa River and 11 springs. You took the initiative to design and construct spring outflows to maintain functional toad habitat through Nevada's dry, hot summers," Ashe's letter reads.

"Your passion for conservation of the Amargosa toad and community leadership has brought together a wide range of organizations and interests, including those not usually associated with species conservation. Your efforts have improved Amargosa toad habitat, increased the service's knowledge of the species and reduced the threats to the toad," he said.

In September 2009 The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it would conduct an in-depth status review of the Amargosa toad to determine if it warrants federal protection as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. That came after a February 2008 petition from the Center for Biological Diversity, which claimed the toad's existence was threatened by wild burros grazing in the marshes, off-road vehicles and tapping groundwater upstream.

The Amargosa Toad Working Group was formed, which brought together federal and state wildlife agencies, private groups and local landowners.

The historical range of the Amargosa toad is a 10-mile stretch of the Amargosa River and nearby spring systems, 8,440 acres of public and private land between Springdale and Beatty.

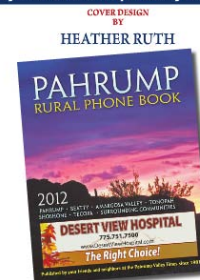
In July 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found the Amargosa toad doesn't warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act. Bob Williams, former state supervisor for the state Fish and Wildlife Service office, said at the time that action was a testament to the hard work of people dedicated to conserving the species.

"It's a good deal all the way around. It's nice to get recognized by these agencies," Spicer told the Pahrump Valley Times. "It was the great culmination of a lot of effort by a lot of people and getting a meaningful relationship with the government that is in service to us."

Spicer said the first petition to list the Amargosa toad was back in 1993. A lifelong resident, whose father worked at the Nevada Test Site, Spicer said he saw the impacts to people's lifestyles and opportunities when the pup fish was put on the endangered species list.

"You first look at the stuff with disbelief and dismay," Spicer said. "First of all you get armed and dangerous, you start to lock and load, we don't want this, you get ready to battle everybody."






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Then you realize those of us in business have a higher intellect, we deal with different bureaucracies and there's a way and a method to do business. We decided to bring these guys in and demonstrate it was indeed not an endangered situation."

It took modeling of springs, re-establishing habitat on some properties and getting neighbors to work with his group, he said.

"It's a matter of protecting your land, protecting your rights to be here," Spicer said. "Industry is not the enemy of the environment. We have to change the idea in our relationship with all the species of the environment, that we are victims and violators. That's what the Endangered Species Act has become."

The Fish and Wildlife Service also honored Ed Ringle, owner of the Stagecoach Casino who donated land on the Amargosa River behind the casino to the Nature Conservancy; Shirley Harlan, founder of the Beatty Habitat Committee; the Nature Conservancy, the town of Beatty, Nye County, the Amargosa Conservancy; Nevada Natural Heritage Program; U.S. Bureau of Land Management Tonopah Field Office and Natural Resources Conservation Service Las Vegas Center.



Special to the Pahrump Valley Times – David Spicer, second from left, receives a service citizen's award from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during ceremonies at the Red Rock Visitor Center Wednesday. Pictured from left is Kenneth E. Mayer, Nevada Division of Wildlife director, David Spicer, Edward Koch, state supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ren Lohofenar, regional director of the Pacific Southwest region of the USFWS.

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