

**Conserving a Salamander Unique to Georgia**  
***The Amphibian Foundation partners with Georgia Department of Natural Resources to Protect the Pigeon Mountain Salamander, which Faces Increasing Threats***

**For immediate release**

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ATLANTA, GA Friday, November 13, 2020 - The Amphibian Foundation issued the following statement from Mark Mandica, Executive Director:

The Amphibian Foundation's (AF) Conservation Research Bridge Program developed a new conservation program focused on the Pigeon Mountain Salamander (*Plethodon petraeus*), a salamander endemic to Georgia. The Pigeon Mountain Salamander lives in one location—on one side of Pigeon Mountain in northwest Georgia. This extremely small range is the only place on the planet to encounter this species, making them vulnerable to increasing threats. AF is taking proactive steps to safeguard this unique species.

In partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR), AF scientists will focus on three main program components. This includes a reproductive biology study to develop the capacity to propagate the species in captivity, which has never successfully been accomplished. Additional program components include monitoring the population of wild salamanders to detect and rapidly respond to potential declines of the species and emerging infectious diseases if identified in northwest Georgia.

Amphibians are facing unprecedented threats globally, and, according to the IUCN, 43% of the world's amphibians are experiencing catastrophic declines or are already extinct. There are many documented causes for these declines, one of the deadliest being emerging infectious diseases that humans have inadvertently moved from an area where amphibians are naturally resistant to another area, exposing amphibians with no natural resistance to these diseases.

These infectious diseases can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi and are having devastating effects on amphibians, even in pristine environments where there are no other documented threats like habitat loss, pollution, or invasive species.

For example, in 2013 a new and lethal fungus was discovered in Europe that is particularly deadly to salamanders, called *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (*Bsal*). *Bsal* is of Asian origin, and, through the pet trade, was moved to northern Europe where it can kill up to 100% of the wild salamanders it infects. Although *Bsal* has not yet been detected in the United States, another related Asian fungi, *B. dendrobatidis* (*Bd*), has been detected in many areas of the country. It is wiping out certain species while others are seemingly unaffected.

These fungi are collectively known as chytrids (KIH-trids) and are particularly lethal to amphibians. If a chytrid found its way to Pigeon Mountain, it could be devastating to the amphibian community and, for a species which only occurs in a small range like the Pigeon Mountain Salamander, it could potentially cause its rapid extinction. The AF Conservation Research Bridge Program will be regularly testing for these diseases on Pigeon Mountain.

The Pigeon Mountain Salamander Project officially started this week, when AF researchers, Bridge Program students, and GA DNR State Herpetologist Daniel Sollenberger surveyed Pigeon Mountain and collected salamanders for the captive propagation program.

The Amphibian Foundation is a nonprofit organization devoted to conservation, education, and outreach. The Conservation Research Bridge Program offers educational experiences for adults exploring conservation careers while working to preserve imperiled amphibians with other passionate biologists.

Visit AF's website for more information: <http://bridge.amphibianfoundation.org/>  
Call Mark Mandica at 562-774-2248 or email [Mark@amphibianfoundation.org](mailto:Mark@amphibianfoundation.org)

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[High resolution photos can be accessed and downloaded here.](#)

Photo Captions:

Photo 1: A Pigeon Mountain Salamander, *Plethodon petraeus*, in northwest Georgia. This is a species listed by the state as **Rare** and it only occurs on one side of Pigeon Mountain, a spur off of Lookout Mountain.

Photo 2: State Herpetologist for Georgia DNR, Daniel Sollenberger (right) discussing the developing project with (from left to right) Bill Hughes (TN Aquarium), Tristan Clark (AF Bridge Program Conservation Scholar, and Tobias Landberg, AF Director of Research). Pettyjohn Cave, Pigeon Mountain.

