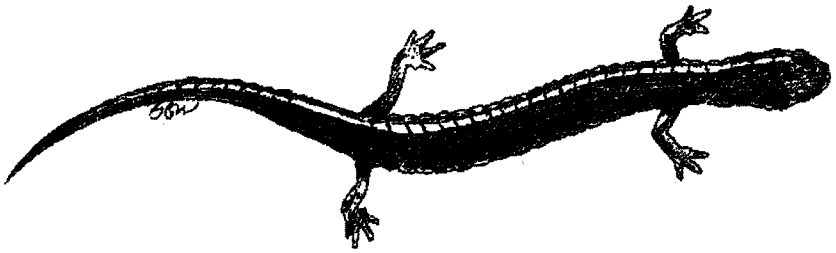
Jemez Mountains Salamander

Plethodon neomexicanus
Family Plethodontidae

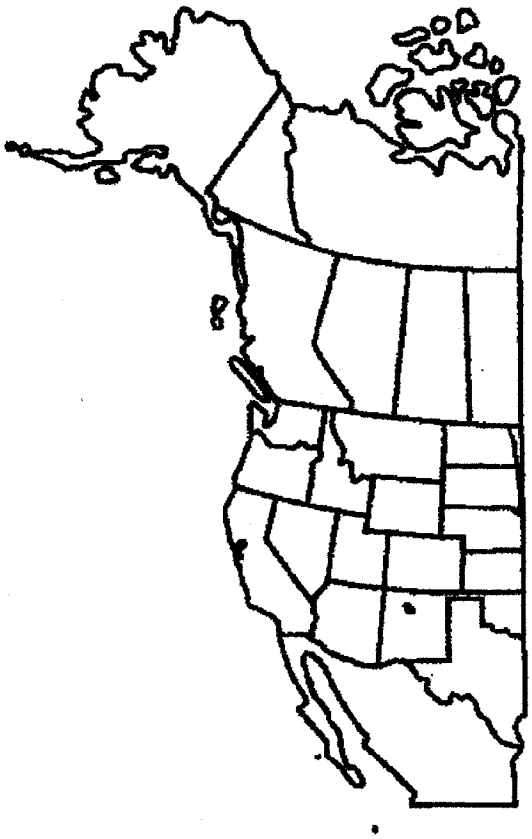


Global Rank: G2
State Rank: S2 (NM)

Distribution: The species is endemic to northcentral New Mexico where it is found only in the Jemez Mountains in portions of Los Alamos, Sandoval, and Rio Arriba Counties. Elevations are usually above 7,000 ft. (2,130 m.).

Description: Adults average about 3 in. (7.6 cm.) in total length. The body form is slender and elongate, with 18 to 20 coastal grooves. There are about eight coastal folds between the toes of the adpressed limbs. The legs are short and the fifth toe is much reduced, projecting only slightly beyond the foot web. Coloration above is uniformly dark brown with occasional fine gold stippling dorsally. Below, coloration is sooty gray, being lighter on the chin and on the underside of the tail. The head is slightly wider than the body, especially in sexually mature males. Young have a faint gray or brassy dorsal stripe.

Reproduction: Females are larger than males with sexual maturity reached at three to four years in females and three years in males. Egg



Current range of the Jemez Mountains salamander

deposition probably occurs in the spring, but may take place between August and the following spring. Eggs are laid beneath the soil surface in interstitial spaces between fractured rocks, in rotted root channels, or in the burrows of rodents or large invertebrates. Egg clutches are brooded by the females and probably average seven eggs. Juvenile salamanders have been found active on the surface as early as mid- to late-July.

Food: Prey includes mainly ants with lesser amounts of beetles and their larva, flies, termites, annelid worms, mites, snails, spiders, centipedes, and crickets. The variety of prey appears to increase later in the summer as more types become available.

Habits: The salamanders are generally found on loose rocky soils, in or under rotting coniferous logs or under rocks on both flat and steep slopes. Preferred habitat may be moss-covered rockslides, especially on north-facing slopes, in and near mixed forests of fir, spruce, aspen, and maple. It is a subterranean salamander that spends little time on the surface except during periods of summer rains.

Management Implications: The salamanders are highly restricted in range and vulnerable to some forest management practices. They should be protected from unregulated collecting and destruction of potential and occupied habitat. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish lists the Jemez Mountains salamander as endangered and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has done a status review on the species.

Important References: Stebbins, R.C. 1985. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians. The Peterson Field Guide Series, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY; Degenhardt, W.G. 1996. Amphibians and reptiles of New Mexico. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, NM.