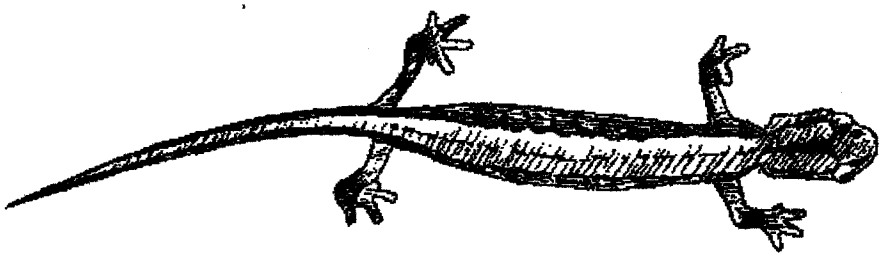
Larch Mountain Salamander

Plethodon larselli
Family Plethodontidae



Global Rank: G2
State Rank: S2 (OR, WA)

Distribution: Once thought to be restricted to the Columbia River Gorge of Oregon and Washington, small populations occur at several locations in the Cascade Mountains of Washington as far north as Snoqualmie Pass. Reaches elevations of about 3,900 ft. (1,190 m.).

Current range of the Larch Mountain salamander

Description: Adults reach to about 4 in. (10 cm.) in total length. The dorsal stripe is reddish, tan, or yellowish, tending to become obscure on the head. Stripes are edged with black or dark brown, and often speckled or heavily mottled with small dark flecks that may concentrate along the midline. Sides are black or dark brown sprinkled with white. Below, they are red to reddish orange or salmon-pink, brightest on the tail, and lightly speckled with black. Undersides of feet are usually reddish. The throats are cream or dull yellow. Toes are partly webbed and the fifth toe only has one joint. There are usually 18 or 19 costal grooves. Young have a less defined dorsal stripe, are darker, and have less red below.

Reproduction: Breeds in both spring and fall. Nests probably occur deep in talus slopes. The

average clutch size is seven.

Food: The species feeds on smaller invertebrates such as mites and springtails. Larger individuals also take snails and earthworms.

Habits: Found in talus slopes within areas of Douglas-fir forests. This talus may have a covering of moss that is kept moist by the forest overstory. In very hot or cold conditions, the salamander retreats deep into the talus.

Management Implications: Distribution and abundance of the species is poorly known. Disturbance of the talus habitat should be avoided as microclimates within the talus can be destroyed by movement of rocks. It was formerly on the federal candidate list for both Oregon and Washington.

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; Csuti, B., A.J. Kimerling, T.A. O'Neil, M.M. Shaughnessy, E.P. Gaines, and M.M. P. Huso. 1997. Atlas of Oregon wildlife. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, OR.