

Crawfish frogs jump out of the way of Highway 34 bypass project

By **DUNCAN H. BROWN**
Courier correspondent

FAIRFIELD — Fears that construction of the Highway 34 bypass south of Fairfield might imperil an endangered species have been laid to rest by a new report soon to be issued by the Iowa Department of Transportation.

While only 2 1/2 to 4 inches in size, the rare and secretive crawfish frog (*rana areolata*) was able to slow construction of the Highway 34 bypass south of Fairfield for a year by jumping out into the middle of the proposed path of the project and staring into oncoming headlights.

According to Jeff LeClere, Reptile and Amphibian Technician at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, crawfish frogs are on the Iowa endangered species list, and haven't been seen in Iowa since the 1940s.

They were last spotted in Van Buren, Jefferson, Davis,

Appanoose and Wayne Counties.

Kenneth Crawford, associate professor of Biology at Western Kentucky University is a herpetology expert (the study of reptiles and amphibians, including frogs).

He said the crawfish frog spends most of its life underground in pastures, prairie remnants and grasslands, often living in the burrows made by mammals or crawfish (hence its name). After heavy spring rains, they emerge from their underground hiding places and congregate in ponds, flooded fields and wet meadows in order to breed.

LeClere said, "a male breeding chorus makes a loud resonant noise that sounds like a sty full of snoring hogs. The snores carry some distance."

After breeding, the crawfish frogs retreat back to their underground homes for the rest of the year and on into the next.

While no such hog snores have been heard lately south of Fairfield (at least of the amphib-

ian variety), and no crawfish frogs have been spotted, IDOT was concerned enough about the possibility of their presence to delay construction of the Highway 34 bypass south of Fairfield for a year.

A consultant studied likely habitats where the frog might live and whether or not highway construction was about to destroy those habitats.

Now, details of the report from the consultant have been confirmed by an IDOT source: Sure enough, no hog snores were heard during mating season, no crawfish frogs appeared from their little hiding places, and Fairfield's Highway 34 bypass can now proceed full speed ahead free of frog impediments.

According to IDOT District Engineer Larry Jackson, grading on the Highway 34 bypass south of Fairfield is scheduled for 2006 and paving in 2007. The road will be open for use by the end of 2007 after connections to the existing Highway 34 are phased in.