

Conserving Aquatic Species through Education and Habitat Protection

Imperiled Southeastern Freshwater Mussels

The freshwater mussel fauna of North America is the richest in the world and historically numbered over 300 species. The southeastern United States contains more species than any other region of North America, boasting approximately 80% of the mussel fauna. Within the eastern Gulf of Mexico, the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) basin contains the greatest number of mussels and snails, in terms of total numbers and endemics. The ACF basin is one of the largest basins in the eastern Gulf of Mexico and drains portions of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Within the ACF basin, seven mussel species are federally-listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Freshwater Mussel Identification and Education Promotes Recovery

Georgia Ecological Services developed the first ever ACF freshwater mussel workshop in Georgia in May of 2005. The FO partnered with Columbus State University and the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center to host the workshop.



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A second workshop was held in August of 2006 and a third is scheduled for August of 2007 due to continuing demand for this rare type of training. Participants included environmental consultants, students, ecologists, and state and federal agency personnel. Participants learn about species characteristics, fish host species, and historic range and distribution of the system's mussels, seven of which are considered endangered or threatened. The workshop



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Spring Creek

includes classroom instruction, hands-on exercises, and a field day component overseen by qualified ACF mussel species experts.

The FO partnered with The Nature Conservancy, Georgia Power, Federal Highways Administration, and Columbus State University to develop and produce an ACF freshwater mussel poster. The poster has been distributed to environmental organizations, consultants, schools, and nature centers to promote the value and importance of freshwater mussels within the ACF basin. The FO is developing an ACF freshwater mussel field guide for Georgia. The guide will be available to the public in electronic form on the internet and will include key field characteristics to aid in mussel identification as well as the most up-to-date distributional information on ACF mussel species.

Protection of Aquatic Habitat

Within the ACF basin is Sawhatchee Creek, one of the last tributaries to the Chattahoochee River that harbors three federally-listed mussel species. Georgia ES and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources are working

cooperatively to contact adjacent timber companies and eventually private landowners to discuss protecting the riparian zone of the creek to conserve these mussel species. Plum Creek and Georgia Pacific, the first two timber companies to be contacted, are now aware that federally-listed species occur in the creek and have agreed to maintain and/or increase their riparian buffer widths to protect water quality.

In 2003, the Spring Creek Watershed Partnership (SCWP) was established to include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Golden Triangle Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc., Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District, FWS; and Clay, Early, Calhoun, Miller, Decatur, and Seminole Counties. The partnership was developed to facilitate conservation action and environmental outreach for natural environments surrounding areas of Spring Creek, a tributary within the ACF basin in southwest Georgia.



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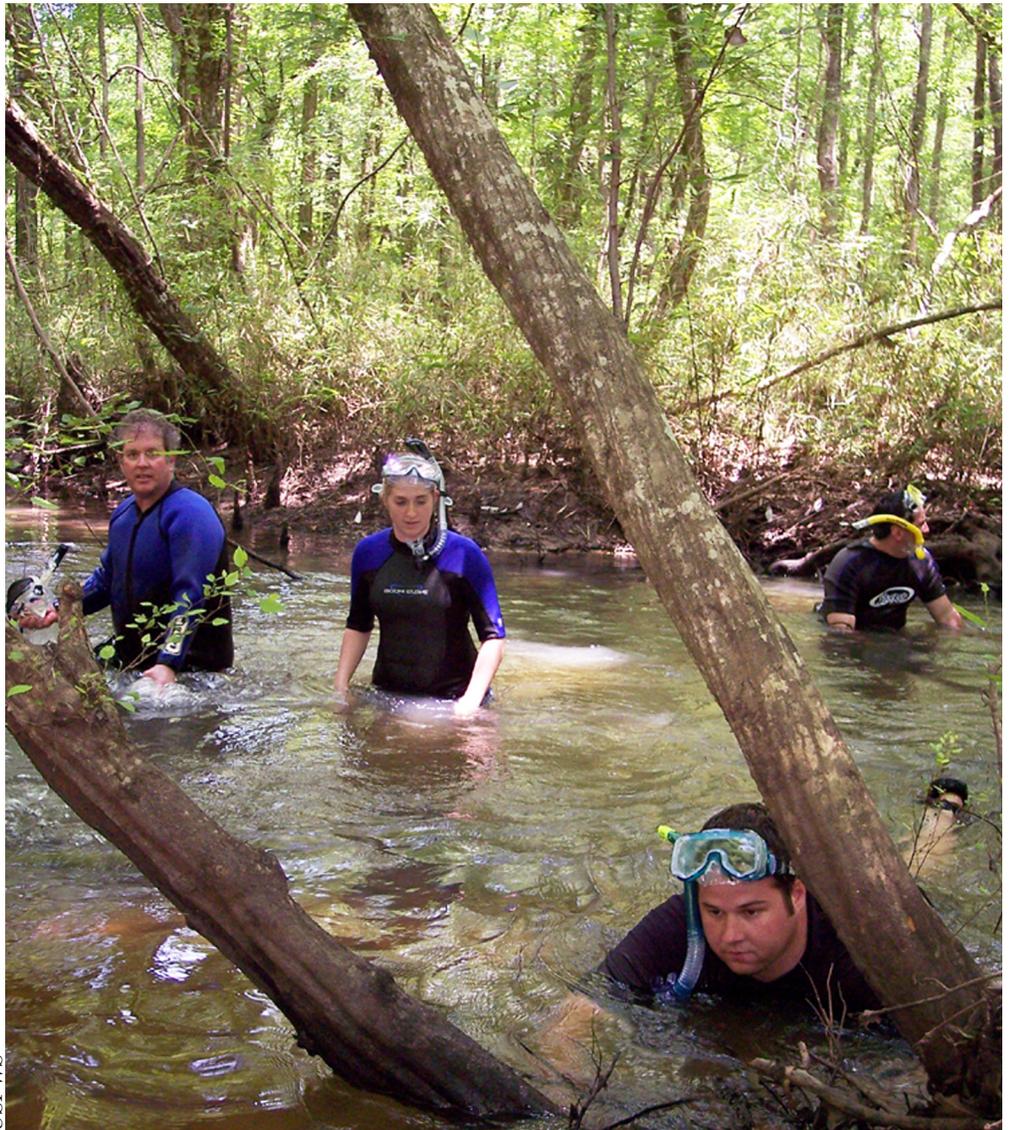
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The partnership has resulted in nearly \$500,000 in state and federal grants coming into the watershed. Miller County received \$5,000 for improvements to the sediment pit adjacent to Laura Bush Springs. Funding was also provided for water quality monitoring kits for local Adopt-A-Stream groups. The FWS' Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has contributed \$65,000 used to enhance natural springs and implement two streambank restoration projects. PFW will continue to provide funding and technical assistance to help meet restoration/ enhancement needs in this valuable, diverse watershed.

The FWS also provides coordination for the SCWP, including assistance with the development of a management plan, securing funding opportunities, collaborating with landowners, and conducting site-specific scientific data collection. Through this partnership all entities involved hope to improve the overall water quality of the Spring Creek Watershed which will in turn protect the rich and unique aquatic fauna that occurs in this system.

Contact Information

Georgia Ecological Services
Field Office: 706/613 9493



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Workshop participants in Sawhatchee Creek